

Presidential Message

January 2019

These days, the Board of Trustees talks a lot about our mission statement: “Building a vibrant community through Reform Judaism.” We also talk about our identity as a haimish, welcoming place. The struggle we face is how do we remain vibrant, haimish, and welcoming when money is tight?

Last year, I received criticism from many people that “everything is a fundraiser”. We’ve done our best to minimize the emphasis on fundraising while still fulfilling our congregants’ spiritual and social needs. We’ve had a number of popular events in the first half of the year. Our Artist-In-Residence weekend, sponsored by the Endowment Fund, was a big success. Our High Holiday services were well attended, and our First Friday Shir Shabbat evenings continue to be a monthly highlight. These are all efforts where just about all we ask of you is your presence and ruach.

We’ve done some events to generate revenue, but have tried to emphasize the fun over the fundraising. A recent bingo night proved to be a good time, and we’ll probably try to have that again. Sisterhood Mah Jong continues to be a huge success, and the Brotherhood Latke and Italian Dinners are always fun (especially if you ask Jonathan Rowe where the Brotherhood beverages are). This winter and spring we’ll have our usual cabaret night and we’ll be planning a Starry Night Auction again.

Still, I’m seeing some warning signs that we might not be reaching you where you want us to. Most visibly, our attendance on regular Friday night services has been down lately. Behind the scenes, pledge revenue is down from last year, and it is certainly lower than our budgetary expectation. It’s the Temple’s responsibility to use our resources to provide you a spiritual and social home, but it is the congregations’ responsibility to provide those resources. Still, I’m trying to learn if there’s a connection between what we’re doing and how that’s being reflected in your support.

As concerned as I am about our budget, I look back to our mission statement and our identity. As a member for the past 20 years, I’ve never been asked by the Temple to explain or defend my own contribution level, and I have always been proud of our approach. So, my appeal to you as we enter 2019 is not “how much more can you give”, but rather “how can Temple Emanu-El earn your engagement?” In this question, I’m not only asking about your generosity, but your presence. I ask for your feedback on this question.

Please let me know what you'd like to see from us. Send me an e-mail,
president@tewaterford.org, and it will be answered and presented to the board.
Please accept my best wishes for a happy, healthy, and prosperous 2019!