

From the Rabbi's Desk

July 2019

Chaverim,

Summer is here. As I write this, Polly and I are getting ready to move from our home in Mystic to a house we are purchasing in New London. God willing, by the time you receive this, we will have moved into our new home. I am very excited to be making this big commitment to further building our connections in the Greater New London area. I will miss Mystic. It feels like the Stonington Jewish population has doubled since we've been there. Stonington also has the best coffee house around, so I'll be back often.

As we are boxing up and then unboxing our lives, there is still a lot going on at the Temple. We have a wonderful crew of congregants leading services over the summer as well as a few special events including a Shabbat walk in Niantic, our summer outdoor service, and our Bluff Point bagels and brachot walk. Check the calendar for times and meeting places.

We had a large turnout for the annual meeting at the beginning of June. It was wonderful to see so many of you. I was glad to have the opportunity to share my reflections on where we have been and where we might go from here. What you should have taken away from our annual meeting is that the strength of Temple Emanu-El is growing. I offered eight big ideas for things we could do in 5780. I have heard positive comments from some of you about a few of them. Here are three big ideas about which I have already had some feedback. I'd like to hear from more of you regarding these ideas that have resonated with some.

- Writing our own Torah scroll – seems daunting? Tradition holds that the last commandment in the Torah tells us that we should write a Torah scroll in our lifetime. Moses tells Joshua, *v'atah kitvu lachem et hashira hazot v'lamdah et b'nai Yisrael* – “Now write this poem and teach it to the children of Israel.” This would be a unique opportunity to study Torah in many different ways -- not just reading and interpretation, but studying all the different facets involved in construction and writing a scroll. The project would also help raise significant funds for us to fulfill our mission of community-building.

- Building our relationship with Israel – last year we made a connection with Rabbi Or and Feliza Zohar. They will be back in November and in the spring. Our Federation has maintained our connection to Afula for decades. As the Reform movement in Israel grows, we can make new connections, perhaps with Or and Feliza in the Gallilee – trip to the Gallilee in the spring or summer? Or perhaps we explore a partnership through the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism's Domim program, which pairs North American congregations with Reform communities in Israel.

- Community Action – Helping the needy is a core imperative of Judaism. There are great needs in our community that are not being met. We can be a more powerful force uplifting people in our community. We can either renew or expand the efforts of many individuals in our congregation to support the New London Meal Center and Homeless Hospitality Center or explore new avenues to partner with social service agencies such as the TVCCA.

These are bold ideas for our congregation. I am ready to partner with you to make them a reality. We are not too small to take on any of these initiatives or others. I am committed to make them happen. All I need is you. Please send me an e-mail at marcekstrand@gmail.com. Let me know if any or none of these projects interest you. I look forward to hearing from you.

L'shalom,
Rabbi Marc
L'shalom,
MEE