

# From the Rabbi's Desk

February 2020

Friends,

We are in the midst of an extremely important election season...no, not what you are thinking...keep reading. The World Zionist Congress (WZC) elections are going on NOW. You can vote. Voting will be open until March 11 (Shushan Purim). The Reform movement did extremely well in the last elections in 2015. This accomplished a great deal for the growth of Reform Judaism in Israel. It ensured \$20 million dollars over five years went to support our movement. By comparison, the Israeli government annually provides nearly 4 billion NIS (\$1.1 billion) to Orthodox and Haredi institutions in Israel. With this critical support, liberal Judaism in Israel has grown incredibly. Over the past five years the number of Reform communities has grown from 23 to 52. There are well over 100 Israeli Reform rabbis ordained from HUC-JIR in Jerusalem. Reform Jews now sit at the table for important decision making at the Jewish Agency and KKL-JNF. Because of our presence and strength, our Reform leaders are able to insist on pluralism in Israel. That means justice and fairness with regards to marriage, conversion and burial regulations, funding for our religious institutions, and appointments to important national offices. It also means that when secular Jews learn about Judaism in school, or when they are entering the Army, they now hear from Reform educators and rabbis as well as the Orthodox. Because of our presence and strength, we are building important bridges between Reform leaders and other stakeholders, even including the ultra-Orthodox. This is not about forcing our will on others, it is about guaranteeing our seat at the table when important agreements are negotiated, major issues are debated, and decisions are made. This is pluralism. An Israel that reflects our values of democracy and pluralism depends upon our vote. **WE NEED YOUR VOTE! Vote Reform!**

There is a downside to our success. Because we did so well in the 2015 elections, there are many organizations that are creating and working strategies to squeeze the Reform movement out of the 2020 WZC. Thus, we must not only equal our voting in the last election, we must surpass it. Looking at voter turnout from the last election, it seems that there were approximately 10 votes cast from our congregation. With our membership of approximately 300 adult individuals, we can easily surpass that number. Sixty votes should be easy. We must have a strong election turnout. David Stein is our WZC Election Captain. David and I will be communicating with you many times until voting ends.

Here is what you need to know about voting. Please note that there is a processing fee involved in registering to vote, \$7.50 for individuals older than 25, and \$5 for those aged 18-25. This is a fee imposed by the World Zionist Congress, not ARZA (Association of Reform Zionists of America) or Temple Emanu-El. It only pays the costs of operating the election, safeguarding the security of the election website and process, and other administrative requirements. It can be paid via credit card, PayPal, or other payments available on the voter registration website. This is a fee that Temple Emanu-El is not allowed to pay on behalf of congregants, but we hope you will agree that it is a small price to pay to make the Reform voice heard and to have an impact in what happens in Israel.

Any Jewish person over the age of 18 is eligible to vote.

Voters in the WZC elections must:

- Be 18 years of age or older (by June 30, 2020)
- Self-identify as Jewish
- Agree to the Jerusalem Program, the official platform of the WZO and the Zionist Movement
- Agree to pay the processing fee.

Go now to [azm.org/elections](http://azm.org/elections) to vote if you have not already. Send me a message at [marcekstrand@gmail.com](mailto:marcekstrand@gmail.com) to let me know you voted. Post it on social media. Then ask your friends to VOTE REFORM as well.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Marc