

# Presidential Message

March 2020

Shalom chaverim,

It is an honor to begin my tenure as president of Temple Emanu-El, and I can only hope that I live up to even a smidgen of the kind words that Jonathan said about me in his outgoing message. Even though Jonathan is no longer our president, he will remain a mentor and sounding board for me, as well as a close friend, and I know that he has my back. He will be a tough act to follow. Roberta has also been amazingly helpful to me during this transition, and Temple operations would likely come to a grinding halt without her.

A little about me, for those who do not know me: I have been a member of Temple Emanu-El since approximately 2007, and I have a young adult son who spent his adolescent years engaged in Temple youth activities. I have worked for the Department of Children and Families (child protective services) for the past 20 years, and have been in a supervisory position for nearly 11 of those years, which has offered me many transferable skills that will benefit me as I learn the role of synagogue president. I live in Niantic with my life partner, Sanford "Sandy" Greenhouse, who is a semi-retired physician at Gales Ferry Medical Group. I bring with me a passion for Jewish life, and for Temple Emanu-El. Our Board of Directors is dedicated and supportive, and, together with our talented clergy and staff, will guide our congregation into the future.

My vision for the duration of my presidency will focus on two areas, which I believe to be intertwined: sustainability and building community.

**Sustainability:** I attended my first finance committee meeting in early February, and it was very clear to me that we need to develop an immediate plan to sustain a long term financial future. Frankly, we have tapped out some of our more generous donors and need to ensure that all are contributing in some way towards making our community the vibrant Jewish community that we all want. It has been said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. We cannot keep asking the same few people to shore up the congregation monetarily, nor can the same handful of congregants continue to serve on the board or on committees. A new fundraiser is also not the answer to sustaining our financial future. Everyone has something to contribute, whether it is increased financial contributions, chairing a committee, or simply showing up at Friday night Shabbat services on a regular basis and bringing some cookies for oneg. There will be many more discussions concerning sustainability in the upcoming months.

**Community:** An important part of building and maintaining a sense of community is communication. The board has been hosting a series of "coffee and conversation" groups in congregants' homes in order to hear from you on a variety of topics. By the time you read this, the meetings should have concluded and the committee will be compiling the data from these groups and submitting a report to the congregation.

Temple leadership is also continuing to actively explore sharing space with Congregation Beth El in the footprint of the current Temple Emanu-El building. I would like to clarify that this is separate and apart from the community campus discussions that are currently occurring between JFEC and the area congregations. We can share space with Beth El regardless of when or if a community campus comes to fruition.

One topic that I heard loud and clear from the attendees at the coffee and conversation group that I facilitated in January is that congregants want and expect transparency from the Temple board about when and how decisions are made. As such, I will be using this column each month to discuss any pertinent actions taken or considered by the board during that timeframe. I will also provide frequent updates on the progress of discussions with Beth El. It is challenging to provide information when discussions may become stale between the time I write this article and the time that the bulletin is published, so I invite congregants to contact me or any board member at any time in between. At the time of this writing, Beth El and Temple Emanu-El senior leadership have had a number of productive meetings, and Beth El was comfortable enough with the direction of this process to engage an architect to come out and explore the viability of converting 2 classrooms in the Temple Emanu-El school wing into a chapel. The first step in that process is a compliance review to explore zoning and other regulations to determine whether this is even a feasible plan to consider. Prior to this, I had reached out to other Reform congregations across the country who are sharing space with Conservative congregations. I received a great deal of helpful advice and feedback in this process. The one message that I heard repeatedly from many congregations is that despite some growing pains in the process of developing the agreement, in the end, these types of arrangements were a phenomenal success, and were of mutual benefit to both congregations. Given our focus on both sustainability and building community, I feel strongly that this arrangement will be mutually beneficial to Temple Emanu-El and Congregation Beth El as well. I know that there are still some lingering concerns expressed by a few members. In the hopes of alleviating these concerns, please refer to the separate "questions and answers" article in this bulletin. In addition, the best way to find out what happens at board meetings is to become a member of the board! Gail Weber has agreed to head up this year's nominating committee, so please contact her if you are interested in becoming more involved in Temple governance.

L'shalom,

Jo-el