

From the Rabbi's Desk

April 2020

Friends,

We are living in unprecedented times. At the time of my writing this article, we have been asked by the President to limit our public gatherings and asked us to stay home if possible. The Governor of Connecticut has closed schools, restaurants, bars and gyms. We are all trying to figure out what this means for us and how long it will go on. Our schools are issuing homework packets and distance learning instructions. They are hopeful for a return of students to classrooms but preparing for the possibility of completing the school year without our school buildings reopening. The economic impact is hard to fathom. Every sector of the economy in every country has been and will continue to be affected. Only those who were alive during World War II may remember anything remotely like what we are experiencing now.

So what do we do? First, don't panic. It is understandable to compare this public health crisis to a war. In many ways, we are being asked to pull together and take collective action much like it is wartime. However, we should realize that an enemy is not coming across our borders, no nation is singularly to blame, and no political party holds any high ground or is under attack. A pandemic requires national and international cooperation and response. Much of the response is in our own hands. It is up to each one of us to stay informed and do what is asked of us to protect ourselves and others. This is the time to trust our public health officials at the Federal, State, and local levels.

Second, stay connected. On Wednesday, March 11th, our president Jo-el Fernandez, our religious school co-directors, Armi Rowe and Jennifer Zettler and I made an early call that closing our religious school and Temple to on site activities was the right decision for the safety of our community. That same night, our Board of Trustees backed our decision and asked us to prepare to close the building to all activities. This was a very difficult decision. We also made the difficult decision to cancel our community Passover Seder and postpone other Temple events including at least one bar mitzvah. We all care very much about our Temple Emanu-El community. Closing our Temple building has been a traumatic but necessary decision.

Disconnecting by closing the Temple means we need to stay connected in other ways. As quickly as we made the decision to close, we started thinking about alternative ways to maintain our community. Armi and Jennifer have been working on plans for home and distance learning for our students. Sherry Barnes and I, with the help of Trevor Fornara and Ellanora Lerner, began planning to live stream our Shabbat Services. Our first ever live streamed service was on Friday, March 13. The response was wonderful. Even after this public health crisis ends, we will keep live streaming services. This will be one positive outcome of this experience.

Throughout this crisis, I will be reaching out personally to each family in our community. That is a lot of phone calls. You don't have to wait for me to call you. I like to hear from you. You should never hesitate to call me. I will also be working on other ways to keep us engaged and in touch with one another. In the meantime, if you or someone you know is in need, please let us know. You can call the Temple or reach out to me directly at 513-479-1962. We are here for you. It is my hope that 'social distancing' will, in the end, bring us closer together.

L'shalom,
Rabbi Marc