

Presidential Message

May 2020

Shalom chaverim,

The days are getting longer. The calendar says spring is here, although I as sit here in my wool socks, it doesn't feel that way. We made it through a Passover holiday that was unlike any that we have ever experienced. The question, "Why is this night different than all other nights?" was especially poignant this year, as we looked at friends and family through a computer screen instead of passing the charoset and hiding the afikomen with them. And yet, we are still a community. We have Zoom classes, services, meetings, living room concerts, and sadly, funeral and shiva gatherings. We still find ways to be together in joyous times, and to comfort one another in times of sorrow and loss. This is what Temple Emanu-El is and always will be about to me---community.

With regard to sustainability, the Temple completed an application and gathered supporting documents for the Payroll Protection Program loan from the SBA, to help Temple Emanu-El keep Rabbi Marc, Sherry, Roberta, Don, and our kitchen staff on the payroll during this time. Roberta did an extraordinary amount of work to gather all of the documents needed for the application and get them to me expeditiously, at a time of extraordinary personal heartache for her and her family. Unfortunately, the first batch of funding was depleted while the paperwork was still being processed by the bank. We are hopeful that we will be one of the first in line if and when new funding is made available by Congress. In the meantime, a number of our very generous members stepped up to the plate and contributed to the Temple Reserve Fund, to help us balance our budget through the end of the fiscal year during this time of unprecedented hardship to individuals, businesses, and nonprofits. While I am in the process of thanking each of these donors individually, I wish to take this opportunity to thank them here publicly as well. Without them, our sustainability would be significantly challenged.

Our in-person operations remain suspended indefinitely at this time. The state of Connecticut has determined that our doors will remain shut at least through May 20. My assumption is that it will be longer than this. When we are able to reopen, it will be with well thought-out plans in place for social distancing. To that end, the executive board has determined that the annual meeting, scheduled for June 7th, will occur via Zoom. While we will miss the camaraderie, and especially the Brotherhood breakfast, it is unsafe to consider holding an in-person congregation-wide meeting at this time. Rabbi Marc and I are working out the logistics of ensuring the integrity of the voting process via Zoom, and materials will be made available to the congregation prior to the meeting. The Temple board and the relevant committees will also be looking ahead as far as the High Holidays in order to develop contingency plans in the event that it is not safe for our congregants to be together in the sanctuary at the same time by then. While we hope for the best, we also must plan for a new reality. Other Reform congregations around the country are grappling with the same issue. I plan to participate in a Union for Reform Judaism Conference of Presidents webinar in May where this will be a featured topic.

Until we can meet in person again, stay home, stay safe, and stay connected with one another.
Rabbi Marc, I, and the rest of the board are only an e-mail or a phone call away.

B'shalom,

Jo-el Fernandez