

From the Rabbi's Desk

September 2020

Friends,

We are approaching Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, pandemic or not. Since mid-March, we have been encouraging you to stay home, stay safe, and stay healthy. Numerous incidents around the country serve as reminders that simple gatherings, even in sacred spaces, can lead to outbreaks of Covid-19. Although some churches in our area have begun to open. We are not ready. Your Temple leadership has assembled an ad-hoc committee to determine when and how we can reopen safely. This committee focuses on re-entering our sacred space in a safe manner that minimizes risk to the greatest extent possible. Preservation of life is our primary objective and supersedes all other concerns. As it has been said, whoever destroys a single life, it is as if they have destroyed the entire world. Whoever saves a single life is considered to have saved the whole world (Talmud Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 23a). We can never eliminate all risk, but we must make decisions about what is essential to do in person and what can be accomplished by other means.

I am pleased that since March, we have been able to gather in the virtual realm. Attendance at Zoom services and social gatherings has been strong. Even our community-wide programs have been well attended. But, I don't prefer to be on Zoom. I prefer to see you in person. I miss you.

I look forward to the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, partly because there are many of you whom I rarely see other than during the High Holy Days. I am pained that these High Holy Days will not be at Temple Emanu-El at 29 Dayton Road. However, Sherry Barnes and I will be with you for the Days of Awe on Zoom.

We are working hard to make sure these Yamim Nora'im are just as spiritually engaging as ever. There will be some things that we can't accomplish. I will miss the choir, gathering with you at the seashore, shaking hands, hugs, and kisses on the cheek. However, the service and programs will be very familiar to you. You will hear Jose Cordero blow shofar. April D'Amato will be returning to engage our young people at family services. Carly Fleming will be playing cello for Kol Nidrei. Andrew Feinstein will be challenging our intellects with a Yom Kippur discussion group. In the coming weeks, we will send you information on how to register for services. As always, there are no tickets required.

We will have a special guest speaker on Yom Kippur afternoon. Within the pandemic is folded a re-invigorated social justice movement. Reverend Florence Clarke will help us unpack the deep meaning of the events of our times through her perspective as a black woman and pastor. Pandemic or not, Jews must be seekers of justice and peace. Florence will help us know justice so that we can lead the world to know peace.

Many people are working very hard to make these High Holy Days memorable for all the right reasons. The key ingredient is you. We need you more than ever. The sustainability of Temple Emanu-El, the only Reform congregation in Southeastern Connecticut, depends on your presence and support.

L'shanah Tovah,

Rabbi Marc