

Presidential Message

January 2021

Shalom Chaverim,

We made it!!! 2020 is over!!!

While I never want to wish my life away, I think we can all agree that this year has been challenging in so many areas---the pandemic, of course, but also deep moral and political divisions in our country and ongoing racial and social justice concerns.

There is finally light at the end of the tunnel concerning the pandemic. . As I write this, the first New London County healthcare workers are being vaccinated to prevent them from contracting COVID-19. Next come the long-term care facility residents and staff, and our elderly and most vulnerable citizens. Hopefully, by late spring/early summer, those of us who choose to be vaccinated will have received the 2-shot series. Those of you who know me are likely aware that I will be there with my sleeve rolled up as soon as my name is called! I urge all of you to discuss this decision with your healthcare providers in order to make a choice for yourself and your family that is grounded in the best science available to us at this time.

With regard to our deep political divisions in our nation, the Union for Reform Judaism's "Every Voice, Every Vote" movement has worked tirelessly to ensure that every voice is heard and that all votes are counted. Nearly 1000 URJ civic engagement campaign participants used the Empower app to reach out to more than 4390 individuals in their own networks to get out the vote, understanding that a text or call from a friend, family member, or fellow congregant will likely be more effective than hearing from a stranger. Overall, the URJ was able to reach more than 550,000 voters in an effort to mobilize them to cast their ballots, and the work continues to ensure that every voice is heard in the Georgia Senate runoff elections occurring this month.

This month, your Temple Emanu-El board has been busy working for you. At our December board meeting, we reviewed and discussed a Synagogue Leadership Excellence tool that is part of a larger URJ Benchmarking and Assessment project. After completing and submitting this questionnaire, synagogue leadership will have the opportunity to work with a trained mentor to interpret the results, consider strengths to further leverage, and identify and prioritize potential improvements.

I am about to start the process with Chelsea Groton Bank of applying for forgiveness of the Payroll Protection Program loan that we received in May 2020 to help keep our staff on the payroll during the pandemic. Those of you who may have applied for these loans for your own small business know what an onerous process this can be.

With regard to the potential Community Campus project, the executive board met, and then several of us met with the Community Campus committee and the architects who have been hired for the exploration.

We were very honest about what we perceive could be the value of a community campus on the property of 29 Dayton Road that would house Temple Emanu-El, Congregation Beth El, and the Jewish Federation of Eastern Connecticut, and we were equally honest about our hopes and fears regarding any such project. The architects will develop a proposal utilizing this feedback that will be presented to the Temple Emanu-El board, and eventually to the congregation at large. I urge you to keep an open mind about this exciting possibility for the Jewish community of southeastern Connecticut. This project has the potential to provide Temple Emanu-El with strong connections with our wider Jewish community, as well as sustainability to exist as a vibrant Reform congregation for many years into the future. Stay tuned for more information!

Jo-el Fernandez