

Presidential Message

March 2021

Shalom Chaverim,

The calendar has come full circle. This month marks one year since we have been able to gather in person in our synagogue. One year since I have set foot in my former office of 200 people in an old building with an antiquated HVAC system in Norwich. One year since we have been able to travel, have dinner with friends, or go to concerts and plays. And yet, we have hope. Spring is coming again. I have learned that I can do my job just as effectively and more efficiently from home, which even included transitioning into a new position last spring. The vaccines are here, and are proving to be very effective. As I write this, our positivity rate is hovering around 2%---- significantly better than we were one short month ago. Hospitalizations continue to decrease. and, Connecticut was the 1st state in the country to get nursing home staff and residents fully vaccinated. As a result, in a little over a month, cases among nursing home residents statewide have gone from 483 down to 30! And currently, those ages 65 and up are eligible to be vaccinated, and by the time you are reading this, front line essential workers and younger adults with serious health conditions should also be eligible.

What does all of this mean? The Temple Emanu-El COVID-19 Task Force/Re-Entry Committee continues to meet on a regular basis and to utilize science first, and then Jewish values, as the basis for all decision making. Thankfully, Jewish values are highly compatible with science, so there has been no cognitive dissonance with regard to preserving life as the highest value. During our last meeting, we focused on the prioritization of the operations that are most critical to restore first (in-person Religious School, in-person life cycle events, and Shabbat services, starting with outdoor services when the weather is conducive). We also had discussion regarding which operations we can most safely resume first (outdoor services, small youth group events, and small life cycle events), and which operations are the most difficult to replicate virtually (visiting the sick, spiritual counseling, cabaret and other fundraisers, social events, and Religious School). Our next meeting will be focused on developing very specific guidelines in order to safely hold small life cycle events consisting of immediate family and clergy in the synagogue for the upcoming b'nei mitzvot in the spring.

With regard to the Community Campus initiative, the committee is working on final revisions to a vision statement that will emphasize the inclusive nature of a campus. Meanwhile, the architect is working on a rendering that will display an option for the design and footprint of the structure. The committee will be hiring an accountant with experience in this area to help determine a plan for the financial and organizational structure of the campus that is fair to all three entities involved. Once a plan is developed, a congregational meeting will be held for discussion and approval of the project.

Stay tuned for more information over the upcoming months, and please contact myself or Gail Weber, the Community Campus committee chairperson, with any questions or comments.

In Temple board business, I am pleased to report that Temple Emanu-El was approved for the 2nd draw Payroll Protection Plan loan from the Small Business Administration, which is immensely helpful in filling some of the holes in our budget caused by the financial impact of the pandemic and loss of our usual fundraising activities. If you have been less financially impacted during this time than others, please consider increasing your contributions to our Temple in order to sustain our crucial operations. I would also like to welcome Temple Emanu-El's newest board trustee! Michael Barnett has filled a current vacancy and is interested in continuing to serve on the board next year. Michael is a relatively new member of Temple Emanu-El, as he relocated from South Windsor to Niantic. He was an active member of a Reform congregation there, and served on their board for a number of years. Michael is also an active Rotary club member and brings a wealth of experience and community involvement to our board. Welcome, Michael. We are lucky to have you! If you are interested in serving on the Temple Emanu-El board next year, please contact nominating committee chairperson Andy Parad.

Be happy, it's Adar! And please get your vaccines when it's your turn!

L'shalom,

Jo-el Fernandez