

# Presidential Message

June 2021

All good things must come to an end.

My time to serve Temple Emanu-El as your president came at what may have been the strangest time in history. I ascended to the presidency abruptly in January 2021, spent 2 or 3 Shabbats sitting on the bima and delivering the announcements after services, and then went away on a long-awaited vacation to Chile and Argentina while a newly identified virus was just starting to make the news. By the time I returned, the world had changed. And on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> board meeting of my presidency, we made the prescient decision to close the doors of our beloved temple due to the threat posed by the novel coronavirus, which was named a pandemic on that very day by the World Health Organization. Within 48 hours, the other religious organizations in our area and many other businesses had followed suit, and COVID-19 was declared a national emergency on March 13, 2020. My last day in my 200-person, poorly ventilated office was March 16, 2020. I have been privileged enough to work from home since that time.

And here we are, in June 2021, preparing to hold another annual meeting on Zoom. I missed out on some of the “fun” parts of being president, like getting to know congregants at onegs, the Starry Night gala, and holiday celebrations, and having the honor of standing on the bima holding the Torah during the Kol Nidre service. But what I gained was deeper than that. I saw the resilience of our congregation when we had to abruptly shift to an entirely new way of operating. I got to see old connections strengthened and new connections forged when we went virtual, which despite its drawbacks, also allowed some congregants who could not attend services and programs in person to have increased accessibility to temple offerings. And by the time you read this, hopefully outdoor in-person Shabbat services at Temple Emanu-El will have started and we will be actively planning a return to indoor services and events.

There is no way that I can thank every one of you by name, but know that each of you has played a role in keeping Temple Emanu-El a vibrant community during the most challenging time in our history. First and foremost, I want to thank **Rabbi Marc Ekstrand**. His skill sets as a spiritual leader, an engineer, a manager, a teacher, a community activist, and a visionary were highly valued during the past year and a half. I am proud to call him my rabbi, and my friend. And the beautiful voice of **Sherry Barnes**, our cantorial soloist and the heart and soul of Temple Emanu-El came shining through on Zoom just as beautifully as if we were in person. While I am certain that Sherry would prefer to hear all of us singing along with her, her sweet voice and her melodies gave us all comfort throughout the pandemic, when we needed it the most.

I also want to offer a heartfelt thanks to **Roberta Reisner-Winograd**. No one knows Temple Emanu-El like Roberta, and she has always been there to guide me back when I have made mistakes or overlooked something.

She was a wealth of information for me as a new president, and was instrumental in getting accurate and timely documents to me so that I could apply for 2 federal Payroll Protection Program loans on behalf of the temple, and then apply for forgiveness of such loans. I also wish to thank recent past presidents **Sean Bendick, Gail Weber, and Jonathan Rowe** for mentoring me and always being willing to be a sounding board, advise me on bylaws interpretations, and in so many other ways helped me transition into my role.

I want to thank **Armi Rowe and Jennifer Zettler** for doing such a phenomenal job with the transition to virtual Religious School. I have heard nothing but positives about how well our entire Religious School staff was able to engage and teach our youngest members during these unprecedented times, and Armi, Jen, and **all the teachers** have my utmost admiration and respect. I look forward to watching **Rachel O'Brien** carry forward this work and continue to enliven our Religious School experience!

Thanks to the entire **Temple Emanu-El Board of Directors** for all your hard work and your very quick adjustment to Zoom meetings! Every single one of you cares deeply about the future of Temple Emanu-El, and it is very evident in the thoughtful discussions and occasional disagreements that we have! And I especially wish to thank our executive board members **Sean Bendick, Andy Parad, Tom Smith, Jo Michaelson, Russell Sheikowitz, Bruce Goldstein, Marcia Reinhard, and Deb Linder** for your willingness to step into leadership roles and to volunteer so much of your time to our community. I look forward to continuing to work with you in my new role.

I want to thank **Gail Weber** for the countless hours that she has spent chairing the Community Campus committee, and also to thank our committee members **Kenn Fischburg, Nate Weiss, Rabbi Marc, and Andy Parad** (who took over for me in March 2021 when I needed to delegate some of my responsibilities). I know firsthand the number of hours you spend each and every month to bring this project to fruition for the betterment of our entire Jewish community.

Finally, I wish to thank our COVID-19 Task Force/Re-Entry Committee members **Andy Parad, Sandy Greenhouse, Jo Michaelson, Barbara Wolfe, Lois Panikoff, Rabbi Marc, Sherry Barnes, Armi Rowe, Jennifer Zettler, Roberta Reisner-Winograd, and Russell Sheikowitz** for our numerous meetings, data analysis, and outreach to other Jewish organizations in order to help us collectively make the best decisions possible to keep our members safe while still maintaining the sense of love and community that Temple Emanu-El values. This committee will be working hard over the upcoming weeks and months to plan for the reopening of the building, to include plans in the immediate present for outdoor and then indoor Shabbat services, and then a return to in-person Religious School for fall 2021, considerations for the High Holidays, the return of renters to Temple Emanu-El, the return of in-person life cycle events, and the return of in-person social events and fundraisers. We can't wait until we can all be together again!

I owe a huge thank you to my significant other **Sandy Greenhouse**, who has had to endure me being upstairs on Zoom meetings most nights of the week and has always been willing to listen when I occasionally left those meetings either inspired or frustrated!

I could not have been successful without his love, support, and his willingness to do the dishes while I Zoomed into yet another evening meeting!

“To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under the heavens” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). And as my time as your president comes to an end, I most of all want to thank **all of you** for the tremendous strength and resilience that we have shown in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through our shared commitment to and love for Temple Emanu-El and one another, we have kept our community together. I couldn't have asked for anything more.

With love and peace,

Jo-el