

Presidential Message

May 2021

April 18th, 2021 was a historic day for Temple Emanu-El. On this day, Temple Emanu-El members voted overwhelmingly, with vision and courage, to approve moving forward towards a partnership with our friends at Congregation Beth El and at the Jewish Federation of Eastern Connecticut to co-locate on one campus at 29 Dayton Road, Waterford.

In the hours after the meeting, I spoke with Beth El president Kathleen McFadden and JFEC president Romana Primus. We are all in agreement that this will lead all 3 organizations towards greater financial stability, more vibrant holiday observances and social events, and a more secure future for Jewish life in southeastern Connecticut. And, we are all committed to maintaining a fair, open, and transparent process of negotiating our differences while respecting and appreciating the identity of each organization.

I cannot offer enough thanks to Temple Emanu-El's representatives on the campus committee: committee chairperson Gail Weber, TE vice president Andy Parad, Rabbi Marc Ekstrand, Kenn Fischburg, and Nate Weiss. As I can attest firsthand, each of these individuals put in countless hundreds of hours during days, evenings, weekends, and some very late nights in order to present a proposal that is truly in the best interest of our temple and the entire southeastern Connecticut Jewish community. This proposal will allow us to remain a strong, vibrant, Reform synagogue through a pluralistic partnership with our friends in the larger community and will allow us to continue to fulfill our mission and vision.

What is our mission and vision, you might ask? Hopefully by now, all of you know our mission statement: Building a Vibrant Community through Reform Judaism. But we did not have a vision statement until a few weeks ago, when Rabbi Marc expertly led an ad hoc committee consisting of myself, Andy Parad, Hali Keeler, Barbara Senges, Violet Kanfer, Gail Weber, Jennifer Zettler, Scott Zettler, Michael Barnett, Sue Fornara, and Tom Smith through a series of self-reflective exercises that enabled us to drill down to the very core of our values, and from there, to develop a vision statement that accurately reflects them. As a result, the committee developed the following mission/vision statement, which was approved by the Board of Trustees on 3/29/21:

[“Let them rejoice in My house...” \(Isaiah 56:7\)](#)

[Building a vibrant community through Reform Judaism.](#)

[Temple Emanu-El strives to be a welcoming, diverse, and inclusive spiritual home that nourishes mind, body and soul, and inspires the next generation by living our values through meaningful worship, lifelong learning, impactful social action, and shared celebrations within a fun and caring community.](#)

This statement will guide the Board of Trustees in making decisions that reflect our values.

As I was finishing this article, I heard the news that Derek Chauvin was found guilty on all 3 counts for the murder of George Floyd. It is imperative that we at Temple Emanu-El live our shared value and vision of impactful social action by getting involved in the racial justice movement on some level. While many emotions are still swirling at the news of this verdict, it is important to remember that this is accountability, not justice. Jewish organizations must speak up and fight tirelessly for true justice for our black and brown neighbors and friends, and to help make our world reflect the values that we profess.

Jo-el Fernandez, president