

From the Rabbi's Desk

May 2021

Friends,

We have arrived at a turning point. At our recent meeting, our congregation voted to authorize the Board of Trustees to convey our land to form a community campus with Congregation Beth El and the Jewish Federation of Eastern Connecticut. It was not an easy decision. Many good questions were asked. The congregation expressed through its vote faith that partnership with other Jewish organizations is the best way to ensure that Temple Emanu-El can fulfill its mission as the only Reform congregation in Southeastern Connecticut.

If the vote did not go the way you had hoped, a normal response might be to consider if Temple Emanu-El is still the Reform Jewish home for you and your family. The most frequent concern that I heard before this decision was that Temple Emanu-El would lose its Reform identity. The vote did not change any of the fundamental values of Temple Emanu-El. If the vote did not go the way you wanted or expected, rest assured that Reform Judaism is still the foundation of Temple Emanu-El's mission.

Our mission needs your strong support going forward. The best way to respond to concerns for our identity is to get involved in any way you can. If you felt that the best path forward is in collaboration, we need your support to be a good collaborative partner. If you have been a solid contributor to our mission, please don't back away now. We need you now more than ever. If you have been a more passive member, now is the time we could use your support of time, energy, and wealth. Our mission hasn't changed - building a vibrant community through Reform Judaism. If we approach you to be part of a committee, serve on the Board of Trustees, or volunteer, please figure out a way to say yes. If something is missing in what we do, help us get started doing it. If you have just a few dollars or many dollars, help us with regular donations. Please do not back away; instead, double down. The decision we made together does not solve our financial problems. Only a higher level of commitment from everyone will enable us to make our vision of building a vibrant community through Reform Judaism a reality.

We are at another turning point. We all just witnessed the historic trial in Minneapolis. Many of us were anxious before the verdict. During the trial, we watched painful videos and listened to heart-wrenching testimony. As much as it seemed that a just ruling from the jury was sure, there was enough doubt, based upon experience that justice could be denied once again.

It is a national tragedy that many in our country cannot see the police as helpful, protective public servants. The verdict in the trial for George Floyd's murder was not against all police but one particular former police officer. Yet, this murder and many others are evidence that our nation has a racism problem. Unjust policing is only one symptom of this terrible disease. The thoroughly documented racial imbalance in policing, prosecution, incarceration, wealth inequality, health care, educational outcomes, and many other statistics indicate that our racism is a structural problem. The white experience of America is far different than the American experience for people of color. Racism is our national disease. The vaccine for this disease is in our hearts and actions.

The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (The RAC) is on the front lines in developing responses to racism. Changes are necessary so that our country can live up to its highest ideals. Between my writing and when you receive this article, The RAC will have chosen its legislative focus over the next year. Whether the focus is on ensuring voting rights or exploring reparations for slavery, now is the time for action. If we are to be a light to the nations, we must help make change happen. Go to www.RAC.org to find out how. We have a voice. If we use it, we can be powerful. In the coming weeks, I'll be telling you more about how you and I can be involved with The RAC and other activities to build a vibrant community for all.

L'shalom,
Rabbi Marc