

From the Rabbi's Desk

October 2021

Friends,

The High Holy Days, Sukkot and Simchat Torah are behind us. Once again, because of the pandemic, we were not able to gather in person for many of these holidays. Yet with the help of many dedicated AV Club members, we were able to offer meaningful online High Holy Day services. Thanks so much to Sean Bendick, Armi Rowe, Stanley Bloustine, Jonathan Rowe and Nathaniel Rowe. Every time we have a hybrid or virtual service, it is like a TV show production. Everything must be planned and executed precisely. We simply could not provide you the same quality level of online services without this dedicated crew. We are also very thankful for Leslie Merwin, our organist and pianist. Leslie has been with us for four years. We knew Leslie was the right organist for us when we first met her. Sherry and Leslie have worked together better each year. This year, Leslie has been struggling with her health. It was all the sweeter that we could work together this year – a little spiritual therapy for all of us. Keep Leslie in your prayers for healing.

We were able to have two spectacular outdoor HHD programs. We had a wonderful afternoon at the beach on Rosh Hashanah, celebrating the birthday of the world. Kids and a few adult kids made sand art murals representing the six days of creation from Genesis. Then we joined together for song, *tashlich*, and capped it off with a shofar blast. It was great fun. We have a lot of new families in the religious school. It was wonderful to see so many of you at the beach and get to know each other. We were also outdoors for a Yom Kippur afternoon program with our own Jonah play included, and the closing Neilah service. McCook's Beach was an amazing venue for Neilah. The weather held out and we even had sunshine just before sunset. The sound of the waves, voices singing, children running around were capped off with Jose Cordero's final *t'kiah g'dolah* shofar blast. Thank you, Jose.

There are a couple of people that I would like to recognize for their efforts bringing all of these programs together. Susan Cramer collaborated with Sherry and me to create our Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur afternoon programs. Susan is very creative and very organized. Sherry and I are so grateful to Susan for helping us bring these programs to you. Barbara Senges also helped with many aspects of planning for the services. This year was particularly difficult because we had originally planned hybrid services. Turning on a dime to go 100% virtual required a lot of careful decisions. Barbara's wisdom helped us navigate every turn. Thank you to Susan and Barbara.

The first days of religious school are also behind us. One of the most important missions of Temple Emanu-el is to teach our children about Judaism and Reform Jewish values. Jennifer Zetter and Armi Rowe turned over the directorship of our Religious School to Rachel O'Brien. Rachel brought many people together over the summer to clean, reorganize and paint the school wing. The school looks fabulous. Amy Orce has also been instrumental in organizing the school.

With the addition of several new families, we once again have a bustling school wing on Sunday mornings. It is so wonderful to have our children back for in-person learning. Thanks to Rachel, Amy, all of the teachers, and our faculty assistants. It is going to be a fabulous year.

Lastly, thanks to you. It was very difficult to make the decision to be virtual for the main services of the High Holy Days. We know how much you were looking forward to in person services. We tried our best to plan safe in-person services, but the pandemic numbers just didn't cooperate. Thanks to Jo-el Fernandez and Andy Parad for their leadership. But thanks especially to you for your patience and faith. With your continued support, we will emerge from this pandemic a stronger and more vibrant congregation.

L'shana Tova,

Rabbi Marc