



Rabbi Lauren Henderson

July 2020 President's Message

Dear Chaverim,

Welcome to Summer! We hope that you and your families are safe and healthy and continue to find ways to be together and stay engaged during these uncertain times. While our congregational life has certainly shifted during this time, we are grateful to have continued learning and praying, celebrating and comforting, and (of course) shmoozing with you, all from the safety of our homes. Our community is as busy and vibrant as ever.

Today we welcome Rabbi Lauren Henderson as our new spiritual leader and we are beyond excited to have her join our kehillah. She has already been working with us these past few months and is bringing an abundance of energy, creativity and wisdom to share with us. All of you will be invited to a Meet and Greet small group event over the summer for you and Rabbi Lauren to introduce yourselves to each other and to engage in conversation. Look for your invitation which we will send to you in a few weeks. Additionally, Rabbi Lauren's first solo Shabbat will be the weekend of July 17-18 and I encourage all of you to "zoom in" and be a part of this special Shabbat.

Many of you have been asking about when we will be "opening" the building, what is the plan for Machon Hadash and for High Holidays. I want to begin to answer those questions given what we know and don't know about our future. I also want to share some of the wonderful things we have planned and invite you to join us. Please know that we are open, have been open and will remain open! As a community with a history of many "homes," who we are has never been defined by the building we inhabit.

Sixty to seventy-five screens have been tuning in for Zoom Shabbat services every Friday night and our weekly Torah study (Torah in the Woods) and morning minyan have continued without interruption. Rabbi Lauren and Dr. Amy have already been a part of these sessions and will begin leading them starting next Tuesday. Our leadership and committees continue to meet and plan communal events and serve the needs of all of us. We will welcome several b'nai mitzvah to our community later in the summer and encourage you to participate, celebrate and welcome our newest members. Our L'Hitraot Shabbat for Rabbis Analia and Mario is next week, the Shabbat of July 10-11, and we would love to see all of you sharing in this final Shabbat with our Rabbis before they make aliyah to Israel.

Like you, we are eager to be able to meet in person again. And, like you, we know that we must be cautious and protect life - pikuach nefesh - above all else. We have drafted a plan that will allow us to step gradually into the complexity of gathering during a pandemic, beginning with small, simple discrete gatherings and eventually increasing the size and complexity of our gatherings when we feel it's warranted. Of course, pikuach nefesh still rules the day. Our task force will continue to review and monitor the public health data and guidelines and we will adjust our plans accordingly. Shabbat services, minyanim and learning sessions will remain virtual as we oversee a smooth, seamless hand-off between Rabbis Analia and Mario and Rabbi Lauren in support of our kehillah kedoshah.

We have begun individual in-person meetings with our leadership and those will continue throughout the summer to the degree that Rabbi Lauren, Dr. Amy and the staff are comfortable. We will also support small gatherings of up to 10 people, starting in the second half of July, to take place in the social hall or the courtyard. We are also looking for opportunities to hold some program options for in-person gatherings in larger outside venues. We will send out a separate communication with the specific guidelines everyone will be required to follow regarding mandatory mask wearing, social distancing, reservations/appointments, and overall movement and flow within the building.

Dr. Amy has been planning an exciting, flexible, fun, wildly creative educational program for Machon Hadash. The first 6-week module will be predominantly virtual, with plans for some limited in-person gatherings in the great outdoors. We hope to offer some in-building learning opportunities after the holidays. Please look for your online enrollment materials in this week's E-Hadashot.

The High Holiday committee is in high gear developing robust, creative and engaging virtual High Holiday programs throughout the month of Elul. While the traditional aspects of High Holiday services will be held virtually to accommodate the needs of our community, we will be incorporating many new and engaging aspects to our communal prayers. Rabbi Lauren will be leading a special book club to help us prepare for the High Holidays as well as introducing a Niggun Circle to share melodies for the High Holiday season. We are also creating program elements that lend themselves to safe, smaller in-person gatherings. We can't wait to share additional details about our plans for the High Holidays in the next few weeks.

Thank you for completing the congregational survey and for sharing wonderful ideas for additional activities and programs you'd like to see (e.g. cooking/baking, movie series, Hebrew chugs, kid's activities). Please reach out to me or the office if you would like to organize an activity to offer to our members.

I look forward to seeing all of you on zoom, in the building or outdoors. Thank you for being a part of this incredible community. I will continue to communicate our thinking and strategy as we navigate these uncertain times together.

B'Shalom,

Gail Duner
President, Congregation Or Hadash