

May 8, 2020

Best Practices to Preserve Health and Life

Recommendations from the religious leaders of the Tampa Bay Jewish Community

Despite the easing of Florida restrictions upon holding public gatherings, we, the undersigned clergy who serve the Tampa Bay Jewish community, strongly recommend against the resumption through the end of the summer of in-person communal worship services and programs in our communities, with the possible exception of preschools and summer day-camps.

There are several reasons for this recommendation. First, the Coronavirus pandemic has not yet abated. New cases, hospitalizations and deaths from the virus are occurring in large numbers daily. Second, scientific experts have made it clear that personal contact spreads the disease. Third, we Jews are heirs to a religious tradition that teaches that the preservation of human life is an obligation that supersedes all other obligations including religious observance and worship services.

We remain committed, however, to serving the members of our respective congregations as well as those in the larger Jewish and general communities by providing worship and pastoral services remotely and guiding and participating with our staff and volunteers in their efforts to remotely provide educational programming for children and adults. We believe that even while staying at home, we and our members can continue to nurture a sense of community connection, and help our synagogues continue to fulfill the role assigned to them by our tradition. We will remain places of learning, places of worship and celebration, places that nurture the performance of deeds of kindness, and places of consolation and comfort as well.

We will carefully monitor the situation, and we will review and possibly revise our recommendations as the pandemic dictates. We will encourage the opening of the doors of our synagogues and community centers, as soon as the scientific community has determined that is truly safe to do so; but, out of an abundance of caution, not before then.

The Pinellas County Board of Rabbis (PCBR)

Rabbi Michael Torop (Temple Beth-El), PCBR President

Rabbi Gary Klein (Temple Ahavat Shalom)

Rabbi Josh Lobel (Temple B'nai Israel)

Rabbi Jacob Luski (Emeritus, Congregation B'nai Israel)

Rabbi Danielle Upbin (Congregation Beth Shalom)

Rabbi Phillip Weintraub (Congregation B'nai Israel)

Rabbi David Weizman (Congregation Beth Shalom)

The Tampa Rabbinical Association (TRA)

Rabbi Nathan Farb (Congregation Schaarai Zedek), TRA President

Rabbi Rachel Blatt (Congregation Kol Ami)

Rabbi Carla Freedman (Beth Israel of Sun City Center)

Rabbi Joshua Hearshen (Congregation Rodeph Sholom)

Rabbi Garson Herzfeld (Temple Beth Shalom, Polk County)

Rabbi Bryan Mann (Congregation Beth Shalom of Brandon)

Rabbi Jason Rosenberg (Congregation Beth Am)

Rabbi Joel Simon (Congregation Schaarai Zedek)

Endorsed by:

Rabbi Ed Rosenthal (Hillels of the Florida Suncoast)

Hazzan Jodi Sered-Lever (Congregation Mekor Shalom)

Rabbi Aaron Lever (Menorah Manor)