

# President's Report

**Ziva Raney**

Judea Reform Congregation Annual Meeting

May 31, 2020 / 8 Sivan 5780

*Chazak Chazak V'Nithazek* – These are the words with which I began my president's remarks last year, and my High Holiday remarks the last 2 years. This is our mantra.

This is the spirit of Judea Reform Congregation. Together we are stronger! We are showing up for each other in remarkable ways and I am honored to be in community with all of you.

Over the last year, we have had many reasons to celebrate and I would like to just name a few:

In addition to the family *simchas* and beautiful worship:

- We welcomed Rabbi Soffer and his family into our community – we had many joyous occasions to get together through these welcoming events including a special Installation weekend. And together, we launched into a year of exploration and growth in our community.
- Rabbi Josh Weinberg the Vice President of the Union for Reform Judaism spent some time with us in sessions about our Movement and the Reform Movement in Israel. It was a great way to kick off the Movement's push to vote in the World Zionist Congress election.
- Our Social Action Committee has been as active as always – adding to our regular commitments the opportunity to bring meals for those displaced from MacDougal terrace a few months ago.

- We had a terrific delegation attend the Biennial convention in Chicago in December. We spent 4 days filling our souls with learning and networking and worshipping with more than 5,000 Reform Jews.
- Thanks to the generosity of the Bossen Families, our Bossen Library went through a wonderful redesign for the multipurpose space we need. We had plans to re-dedicate that beautiful new space. And we still will.
- Our Legacy giving program continues to grow. We have nearly 100 legacy gifts from generous donors ensuring the future of Judea Reform.
- In late February 6 teens from our congregation participated in the URJ's *L'Taken* seminar at the Religious Action Center in Washington, DC and experienced social justice as it connects to our government and policy work.

And then—**COVID-19**—and we had some very difficult decisions to make.

- As we navigate this crisis, we are **not** alone. We have strong relationships with our partners on our campus and the other synagogues in our area. Our partners in the Reform Movement are walking this path alongside us, providing guidance and engagement with our counterparts across North America; webinars on how to create scenario plans; navigating the SBA loan application process; and bringing together experts across Jewish organizations.
- Your Judea Reform leadership team has been thoughtful and thorough every step of the way. We are guided by our Jewish values as well as the scientific data, in the decisions we are making. Our number one concern has been the health and well-being of every one of our members and our staff – and it will continue to be.
- Although our building has now been closed for more than 2 months, our congregation is definitely open for business, finding

new ways to engage with each other; new ways to “meet” and celebrate; new ways to learn. Thanks to the generosity, and perhaps foresight, of Iris and Steve Weiss, our ability to pivot gracefully to virtual connection is made possible by support from the Daniel Weiss Fund, which has enabled us to have Livestreaming capabilities for some time now!

- Right away, Friday evening Shabbat services evolved and are as interactive as ever with our technological abilities developing each week.
- We have developed meaningful ways to stay connected. We started with calls to each and every one of you and we moved to additional ways to connect – including online study, Mah Jongg and learning opportunities.
- Religious School pivoted to continue the valuable learning started earlier in the year and moved to choice boards and virtual learning, including worship with Zemer Allan, Zach, and Lily.
- As families, our celebration of Passover took creativity and innovation. Our leadership put out resources and tools to help, and Rabbi Soffer conducted learning opportunities. And, did you see those Seder Selfies??
- Our youth group, DRTY, has continued to gather remotely with a virtual Havdalah & Bob Ross painting night & a Google Slides into Summer event. Congratulations to two of our own DRTY members who were recently elected to our Regional NFTY Board – Owen Rice and Noah Volin. We are so proud to have you represent our community on the regional level!
- We have now celebrated our first few virtual *b'nai mitzvot* and our students have taught such valuable Torah! These *b'nai mitzvah* students are the next general of JRC and I love that our community is celebrating with their families.
- Along with these opportunities came heartache – we have mourned from a distance with our members thru virtual

*shivas*. And our *Chevra Kadisha* has pivoted to honor this sacred tradition with a safe, contactless way to fulfill the mitzvah of *tahara*.

- And concerns and fear and frustrations and loneliness and now added pain and frustration– and often more questions than answers.
- And many of us are experiencing unique pressures of this quarantine – from family, to work from home, to social isolation.

So what lies ahead?

We have many plans for the coming year – our committees & staff are hard at work planning new programs and volunteer projects. We will have new learning opportunities for all ages. And we will continue to innovate the ways in which we engage.

In a few minutes you will hear from our Treasurer, Stan Paskoff, who has been really busy lately working with the Finance Committee and staff to build a budget for your approval today.

- As we began to develop the budget, we had a vision that included growth. But because of current circumstances, we had to find ways to keep that vision alive, while at the same time recognize the challenges of the moment we are in.
- Last year we presented a deficit budget with the plan to support it and the financial position behind making those investments. At the time, we knew it would be a multi-year investment and we expected to bring a deficit budget again this year.
- And we are. And we have a plan and we have contingencies and we will be carefully monitoring the situation. We also have complete confidence in the professionals on our team who will use this to manage our organization and serve our community.

We are a community because of the people in it, not because of the building we have. We have many, many things to consider as we think about re-entry and I know this is on your minds, too.

*Pirkei Avot* teaches, "Who is wise? One who learns from everyone." To that end, Rabbi Soffer, Emily Young, & I have convened an expert Health Advisory Team to work with us in distilling and discerning the most critical information we need to make informed decisions. We are approaching every decision as diligent learners and listeners. We are listening to the Reform Movement and other trustworthy congregational authorities. We are listening to our state and local government. As you have heard me say, we are guided by Jewish values, science, and reason as we make these decisions that are in the best interest, safety and well-being of our members and our staff.

*Here is what you can count on from Judea Reform Congregation:*

- We will be honest and clear in our communications.
- We will honor our people's commitment to *Pikuach Nefesh*—saving human life is Judaism's highest mitzvah.
- And, we are not slowing down. We will continue to bring Judaism to life. We responded to this epidemic, from day one, by creating more community, more mitzvot, more relationships, more calls. We are redefining community and will continue to do so in ways that bring honor to our past and dignity to future generations in the best ways we can.

**A word about a building:** we **do not** plan to open our building for group gatherings in June or July. In this period our staff will continue to work remotely. Our return to group gatherings will be prudent, gradual, and safe; it will involve a process of establishing careful protocols that ensure everyone's safety. We appreciate your respect and patience for

this process, and as soon as we find it safe to re-convene physically in the building, we will communicate with you.

Many have asked about how we will gather for the High Holy Days. The High Holy Days are when we aspire toward our **most** responsible way of living. We will not be physically gathering in the same space in the same way, as we have in years past. We have every intention of creating an experience for all our community members that connects us to the meaning, the power, and the essence of the Days of Awe.

I am confident this what you have come to expect from our congregation. So, let's save the world together.

No matter what the year ahead looks like or what “new normal” will mean, we will fill it with our Jewish values, with love and compassion toward each other, with social justice and learning, with respect and dignity for all.

In the coming weeks we will begin our membership renewal process. We need each other as much today **as** ever. This congregation is about the people and relationships we have each other. And we are stronger because of you. There are visions of a better tomorrow. And with your support and engagement we will create a better tomorrow together.

I look forward to a time when we can embrace each other in person, until then, I hope you will find ways to join together, in community, in the ways you feel most comfortable. You are Judea Reform Congregation today and tomorrow.