



August 16, 2021/ 8 Elul 5781

Dear Judea Reform Congregants,

With the advent of the Delta variant of the COVID virus, and with the metrics available to us, we are writing to let you know that Judea Reform Congregation will return to virtual congregational worship for the near future. After much careful and difficult deliberation, and based on the recommendation of our Reopening Task Force leaders, **our High Holy Day worship will be all virtual, as will our Shabbat Services for the rest of August.**

This is deeply disappointing news to share. We have worked hard on a plan for regathering and for hybrid holidays, where many of our congregants could come together in-person. But, as has been our practice throughout the pandemic, we remain steadfast in our commitment to our Jewish values of *Pikuach Nefesh* (preserving human life). This decision is no different.

The rapid and alarming rise of the Delta variant in North Carolina, and the risk it poses to both vaccinated and unvaccinated people, causes us to act for the greater good of the congregation. We have been meeting regularly--with leaders of our Task Force, in conjunction with members of staff--to monitor community metrics, and to continually update the recommended protocols as metrics changed. As always, our reopening plans have been based in science and guided by professionals at the frontlines of the pandemic.

Throughout these past months, we have expanded and reformed the meaning of "gates," ensuring Judea Reform Congregation has been vibrant, meaningful, and fully present in the lives of our members. Now we enter the High Holy Days for a second time during this pandemic, we need to draw on the resilience and grace of our Judea Reform sacred community and the strength of our ancestors to reimagine our sacred spaces, yet again, for virtual worship.

As we are busy pivoting to all virtual worship, we feel confident that Judea Reform's High Holy Days will

be a season for togetherness, inspiration, and renewal.

What will this look like?

- As programmed, we will hold family, traditional evening & morning services for both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.
- All services will be streamed via our website livestream and Facebook live.
- We will *not* have in-person, outside family services.
- Guests will be welcome at all services. (*We will be in touch with all congregants and guests who have already purchased passes.*)
- Thank you to all who have signed up for services; this sign up will no longer be necessary.
- We will re-introduce an Open Ark week before Rosh Hashanah for congregants to borrow prayer books; hear the shofar; spend a few minutes in front of our portable Ark; and drop off items for the food drive.
- We will have an opportunity for time in front of the portable Ark (outside) for our mourners during Yizkor.

While we will be virtual for the High Holy Days, please note that our plans currently consider creative, outside experiences for smaller groups of families in September and through this important season, as we head toward our anticipated in-person opening of Religious School in early October.

We know **we belong together**. Thousands of years ago the Prophet Isaiah cried out, “*ufitchu sh’arayich tamid, yomam valailah lo--your gates shall open continually, day and night-- they shall never be closed!*” (Isaiah 60:11). Speaking out of the pain of the Temple in ruins, he yearned for a day of return, of a Temple filled with God’s presence but with gates wide open for our presence as well. We also yearn to be together, in person as a community with our gates wide open to all. Yet we know that we must continue to care for each other, including those among us who are not yet able to be vaccinated.

We look forward to sharing a meaningful Days of Awe with each of you. Thank you for your continued support, understanding, and patience.

L’shalom,

Senior Rabbi Matthew V. Soffer

Heidi Tyson, President

Emily Young, Executive Director