



April 22, 2021/ Iyar 10, 5781

Dear Judea Reform Community,

We are writing to you with an update on our plans for the coming months. We understand how much we all want to gather with one another again—draw nearer—after this long and arduous year of pandemic. As the vaccine distribution is moving forward, we are witnessing many parts of our society and country “reopening” and we are seeing our community metrics begin to get better.

Judea Reform’s institutional response to the pandemic has been thoughtful, measured, and always guided by scientific and medical expertise. This “reopening” moment is no different; we continue to make all our decisions based on science, at every turn holding the tension around risk assessment and keeping our community safe, as we start to come back together. We continue to be guided by *Pikuach Nefesh*—the mitzvah of saving lives.

We understand that many of you may be relaxing your own practices, with the availability of the vaccine. We are working hard to “get it right” for Judea Reform—to be egalitarian and equitable, that puts health and safety first, as the vaccine becomes more widely available. We ask that you trust the decisions being made by our leaders, who have the best interest of our community at heart as we/they navigate this complex puzzle.

An expert Reopening Task Force was convened in December (2020). Led by Gale Adland, the team—Chip Hughes, Andrew Geller, Mark Hainline, and Ray Jones—created a careful and robust set of guidelines to guide us in reopening. This was then reviewed by our Executive Committee, Board of Trustees, and our Health & Advisory Task Force, and at the end of March it was finalized.

We will be reopening our indoor facilities in phases. The decision-making to determine how and when we gather again in our building will be based on the excellent guidance from the Reopening

Plan, CDC guidelines, and two key scientific metrics (based on the average from 5 counties Alamance, Chatham, Durham, Orange, Wake)

- # of new cases per 100,000 people per day (to measure community spread)
- PCR positivity rate for 5 counties

During this next few months we will be creatively planning for outdoor engagement

opportunities (with limited numbers). This will include, to begin with, select Religious School classes; youth group gatherings; Kabbalat Torah, among other events. We know those of you who have upcoming *simchas* (B'nei Mitzvah, weddings, namings, etc.) are eager to know how to plan. We understand and will continue to work directly with you. We are working hard to get in the ready position for that time when we can have a limited number of people in our building for worship.

Getting ready to reopen the building has a few other puzzle pieces:

Environmental Engineering Building Consultation: Our building is 18 years old and we have brought in professional environmental engineers to assess best practices post-COVID for reopening. Of particular focus is adequate ventilation—in our sanctuary, bathrooms, and offices. This assessment is forthcoming in the near future.

HVAC Replacement: We need to replace our HVAC system as the centerpiece of our building-wide ventilation. The Board of Trustees has approved the replacement of our failing HVAC systems and it is likely that replacement will begin next month.

Hybrid Technology: Our staff is working hard to get hybrid technology solutions in place for both inside and outside; we know the “new normal” in this next year (and perhaps permanently) will be premised on technology that meets the needs of in-person and remote attendance simultaneously.

We know this is hard; our community is eager to be in proximity to one another. We feel it deeply. We are asking you to hold on a little longer. We endeavor to get this right, which takes time, patience, and grace. In the meantime, we hope you will continue to participate in online services, Torah study, adult education programming, social action opportunities, and social schmoozes.

Our reopening crystal ball is pointing to sometime in late spring/early summer when we can start to worship together indoors, in small numbers. We will continue to communicate as things evolve in real time, so much is changing quickly. We will let you know of small outdoor opportunities to gather as we create them.

B'Shalom,

Rabbi Matthew V. Soffer

Ziva Starr Raney, President

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