



Count Our Blessings Appeal - Congregation Har Shalom

“Whoever practices charity and justice fills the world with loving kindness” –
Talmud: Sukkah

July 17, 2020

Dear Friend,

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We know these have been and remain difficult times for all of us – in many ways and on most days. Hopefully, we are getting closer to being able to return to some sense of normalcy, at least to some extent. Indeed, we are excited that, as Montgomery County has moved to Phase 2, Har Shalom has resumed its in-person daily evening minyan at 7:30 p.m. Monday through Thursdays and Kabbalat Shabbat on Friday evenings at 6:30 p.m., albeit in the parking lot so we can remain socially distant!

Our Task Force on Reopening, composed of congregants with expertise in various medical, health policy, and public safety fields, is hard at work devising plans to "reopen" Har Shalom so we again can be together in person - safely. Of course, we will keep you apprised of these plans as they develop, and we welcome your input and feedback in the meantime.

We know that you are aware that "reopening" is not really the best word to describe our efforts, because, in the most meaningful sense, Har Shalom never really closed. Shortly after the pandemic struck, we immediately created At Home with Har Shalom to address members' spiritual and emotional needs. During the past four months, we have provided a wide variety of classes, services, and programs, many of which are listed below, in order to stay connected with congregants. We have done our utmost to ensure Har Shalom remains the vibrant religious community and spiritual home it has always been and aspires always to be. We hope you will agree that despite the challenging times we have much for which to be thankful, and many blessings to count.

Hence, we write to ask you to respond, as generously as you can, to this special appeal, called "Counting Our Blessings." The appeal began in early June to help address some of Har Shalom's serious financial needs brought on by the COVID-19 crisis. We have already raised \$85,000.

Now, back to all that Har Shalom has done since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis:

Our Hesed Committee has continued to provide critical assistance to the most vulnerable in our congregation. We offer weekly contact to over 100 Har Shalom members who are elderly, immuno-compromised, or otherwise homebound.

We are taking care of grocery shopping and prescription delivery for homebound congregants. We are also assisting the elderly or others in learning how to utilize technologies such as Zoom and Facebook to connect with the congregation, family, and friends.

To meet our congregation's spiritual needs, we are providing virtual morning minyans, contemplative evening services with nigunim to guide prayerful connections, traditional Sunday evening minyans, Kabbalat Shabbat, and Shabbat Morning Services. We are ensuring kaddish is recited achieving minyans via Zoom. In addition to all the services we are also offering an array of adult education opportunities.

Our Sherman Early Childhood Center students remained connected through online learning, story times, and interactions with teachers and classmates through the end of the school year in mid-June. The children and families have continued to stay connected through weekly Shabbat Sing over Zoom and we look forward to re-opening the school in just a few weeks. Our Religious School will be comprised of multi-layered virtual learning this year including small group Hebrew classes. We will be offering students more learning and social opportunities as well. Our strength is seeing each student in front of us - we understand that each child learns in their own way and our virtual program will incorporate flexibility to reach each student.

So, while the Har Shalom building has been empty, our Har Shalom community has remained spiritually full. Or, to put it as the banner facing Falls Road proudly proclaims: "Socially Distant, Spiritually Close."

But we need your help. While we do not yet have a full picture of how our financial condition will be adversely affected due the pandemic, we know there will be material impacts that concern us.

First, there is our Sherman Early Childhood Center. Like all daycare and preschool programs, its operations were suspended. While parents appreciated the online learning opportunities we had provided, you can imagine that it comes nowhere near replacing the full day of engaging and dynamic childcare for which they enrolled their children. As a result, we waived tuition for our Sherman ECC families for the months of May and June.

Due to the impressive efforts of staff and volunteers, we secured a loan from the Small Business Administration (SBA) which prevented the immediate furloughing of our dedicated Sherman ECC staff. Yet, the money received through the SBA loan lasted only through the month of June.

Our Sherman ECC will re-open for the school year but will be subject to the myriad of restrictions and guidelines which will, among other things, decrease the number of children it can accommodate and the time spent in school each day, while at the same time require increasing the number of staff per child. As you may know, under the leadership of Director Beth Hoch, our Sherman ECC had increased its enrollment to such an extent that it become a profitable endeavor for our congregation. However, as a result of the mandated requirements in place due to COVID-19, the financial picture has changed, and we now anticipate a significant operating deficit for our Sherman ECC.

Second, for the congregation generally, we must assume there will be an impact on the revenues we would otherwise receive in normal times. For example, it's possible, especially absent strong and determined efforts by our congregants to keep Har Shalom strong, that we may experience losses of synagogue membership and decreased enrollment in our Sherman ECC and Religious School, and

additional requests for dues financial consideration. To date, we have canceled/rescheduled many programs, including our spring auction and golf tournament.

We began by suggesting that, even during these difficult times –or perhaps because of these them – most of us recognize our good fortune, and look forward to a brighter, more fulfilling future – a future in which Har Shalom continues to play a central role in enabling us and our families to lead meaningful lives as part of a vibrant Jewish community.

Why Congregation Har Shalom Needs Your Support Now:

- **We Need to Support our Sherman ECC as it Transitions**
During the last few years, our Sherman ECC has been an engine for congregational success both in terms of the infusion of new members and needed revenue. As explained above, there will be, at least for the foreseeable future, a decrease in tuition revenue with an increase in expenditures, particularly on staff. Those additional costs will be borne by the congregation. We want to be in a financial position to do all that is needed to support our Sherman ECC.
- **We Need Concrete Special Efforts to Help Our Membership**
While it is too early to know how many families will need assistance, we anticipate a significant number of individuals and families will be unable to pay full membership. We want to proactively have a secure fund in place to support our members so that they can remain a vital part of the community and Jewish life.

Every congregant is an integral part of Congregation Har Shalom, and each of us has a role to play in sustaining the whole community. Your leadership at this time is vital to securing the vision and future of our community.

Please consider a gift – giving as much as you can – to help us meet our congregants’ spiritual, emotional, and educational needs during these extraordinary times – which no one could have foreseen four months ago. We are grateful for whatever assistance you can provide. To make a donation, please either send a check to Har Shalom using the enclosed addressed envelope or go to www.HarShalom.org/COB. Of course, contributions made as part of this “Counting Our Blessings” appeal will be properly recognized and acknowledged by the Congregation.

Thank you for your generosity – and, most importantly, be well!

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