Dear TI Family,

In the current crisis circumstances we have tried to maintain as many points of connection as possible with our congregation. Many of these have been very successful. We are grateful to the staff, teachers, lay leaders and all contributors in the community to making our community as unified as possible during this time apart. We also acted quickly to create opportunities to Daven regularly through the use of Zoom. This quick change in our previous policy has been met with widespread thanks.

One critical area of connection that has been disappointing is over Shabbat. We had hoped that the audio streaming of the Shabbat morning service would be adequate to meet many needs. Unfortunately, that service has not been able to handle the demand and could not serve our community for 2 consecutive shabbatot. Given that this is unacceptable, and our community’s needs on Shabbat are so great, we have decided to exercise a number of available Halachic leniencies for the duration of this COVID-19 crisis during which the governor has instructed us all to stay in our homes. With the clear priority of saving lives (Pikuach Nefesh) paramount in our tradition, and knowing that Shabbat community is a critical part of our Shabbat experience, here is our approach.

I. Friday Night
   We had our first streamed Kabbalat Shabbat last week. It was very successful. (There were more than 50 participants.) This week we will keep the Zoom service open after Kabbalat Shabbat and we will offer the Maariv service as well.

II. Saturday Morning
   For this week, our Sanctuary service (made up of approximately 10 people) will be streamed as video and sound to all those who wish to join it. We are grateful that Larry Sandberg has organized the technology to make this available. When this service will be closed- as we expect it to be- future Shabbat and Yom Tov services will be entirely conducted on the Zoom platform.

III. Zoom offerings for youth and alternative study or services for all
   Teachers and clergy who are comfortable offering these services and programs will be invited to do so by the synagogue starting this shabbat. (Those who are not comfortable with using electricity on shabbat or yom tov will not be required to do so.)

A word about electricity on Shabbat. The issues around this question have been debated for more than a century. At the dawn of the age of electricity, some viewed its use as an absolute Biblical prohibition on shabbat based upon the (mistaken) assumption that somehow electricity was like fire. (Of course fire involves the rapid breaking of carbon bonds through oxidation, something that has nothing to do with electricity.) That view is not the basis upon which we understand prohibitions on the use of electricity on Shabbat.
Electricity is all around us, including on Shabbat. Like a river that rises and falls, electrical power is expressed through organizing and using this natural flow. By storing electric charge in a battery or by plugging into another electrical source we have access to a predictable and regular flow of electrical current. This current allows us to utilize electrical devices. By closing a circuit we are merely directing the flow in one direction, and by opening the circuit we are interrupting this flow. Neither of these acts, in and of themselves, is a violation of Shabbat. Some specific uses of electricity are prohibited in and of themselves. (Printing materials, cooking, making commercial transactions, or controlling a furnace for example.) By generally avoiding all uses of electricity we stand clear of the clearly prohibited acts made so easy through simply switching our devices on.*

There is a deeper concern about the use of electricity, however. This prohibition is widely observed due to its overall impact on how we experience Shabbat. It is our expectation that once the current crisis is past our synagogue policy will continue to be that we do not make active use of electricity on Shabbat. Shabbat acts as a bulwark against the encroaching power of the world of technology on our lives. By refraining from the use of electricity, we erect a fence against the degradation of the day of Shabbat in general. It is specifically by making Shabbat sacred through ‘turning off’ that we prioritize the values of connection to family and to community. Given our current situation, and given the fact that it is likely to continue for some time, these same values point us in the direction of leniency on the question of electricity for the time being.

We all look forward to returning to our full sanctuary. It is in direct, person-to-person connection to our robust community of prayer and friendship that we live out our Jewish spiritual commitments. As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel described it, Shabbat is the great cathedral in time that the Jewish tradition has built for us. We are privileged to enter into this sacred time, lovingly crafted by Jewish law through the centuries. Being liberated from the labor of this world, Shabbat elevates all of us to be in one sacred community centered around the covenant that defines us. More than any other part of our tradition, Shabbat observance has created our people and defined our values. In the words of Achad Haam, "More than the Jew has kept the Shabbat; the Shabbat has kept the Jews."

We will continue to observe and celebrate Shabbat in these challenging times. And our future celebrations of Shabbatot to come, in health and joy, as a true community, will be strengthened by the bonds we maintain and nurture today.

Rabbi Ron Fish
Rabbi Rachel Silverman

* CJLS Teshuva on Electricity by Rabbi Daniel Nevins The Use of Electrical and Electronic Devices on Shabbat