Dear PTS Community,

These past several months, we have enjoyed hearing your stories and seeing you on Zoom for our many PTS programs and Shabbat experiences. Although we would prefer to be together in person, we are proud of our community for remaining connected and are optimistic about our ability to support one another no matter the state of the world.

We want to share with you our current thinking regarding how we plan to use our beautiful PTS campus during this COVID pandemic. Thank you for taking the time to read this lengthy but important letter.

Please know that all of our decisions are based on careful consideration, deep thought, and above all a commitment to the safety and well-being of this sacred community. Our tradition teaches the importance of pikuach nefesh, saving and preserving a life. That teaching, as well as our PTS values, will continue to guide our decisions during this challenging time.

As you might imagine, the process of re-opening is complex. It is not as easy as flipping a light switch from off to on; rather, it's more like a dimmer switch. Our use of the PTS campus will be a gradual, deliberate, and studied process. While we hope to turn on more lights over time, and again be together, none of us knows what the future holds. We may end up returning to more complete shelter-in-place practices if conditions worsen. Given this uncertainty, we are planning ahead just a few months at a time.

We have taken care to follow the orders and guidelines of state and local authorities, including recommendations of Dr. Scott Morrow, San Mateo County Health Officer. Recently, Dr. Morrow sent a letter to faith-based organizations recommending that they do not gather, despite the fact that limited gatherings are allowed. Most recently, we received guidelines from Cal/OSHA and the California Department of Public Health recommending against in-person activity at places of worship. Notably, this guidance states that convening multiple different households in a congregational setting carries a relatively higher risk for widespread COVID-19 transmission, especially when there is singing and chanting. It further states that “places of worship must therefore discontinue indoor singing and chanting activities.”

In order to make the best decisions possible, last month we assembled a COVID-19 Task Force. This task force is made up of clergy, staff, and lay leaders, including professionals in the areas of medicine, emergency response, public health, and human resources. They are now working diligently to evaluate
the environment and make recommendations to the Board of Trustees. We will also rely on this team to help us create policies and procedures so that when congregants are able to return to the building, it will be in a way that is as safe as possible. We will keep you posted as this dedicated group continues its work.

The preschool community is the first to come back to our campus. We are happy to share that we are holding preschool summer camp for two four-week sessions, much to the joy of our preschool parent and student communities. Summer camp is operating under strict guidelines from state and local licensing authorities, including small group bubbles, restructured play spaces, health and safety protocols for families and staff, and intensive cleaning. In addition, the preschool has established a Preschool Reopening Task Force to help prepare for the fall.

The rest of our campus remains closed while we evaluate alternatives. When we return, we want to do so when the experience of being together in person is better than what we can do remotely. Masks, physical distancing, limited participation, and bathroom availability are all factors that weigh in this decision.

We expect that congregants will first return to campus for individual reflection and family group experiences. When appropriate, we will open the facility for larger groups. Even when we are able to return to campus, we will continue to provide online services for the benefit of those who would prefer to participate from afar.

We are sure that you are wondering about the upcoming High Holy Days. This year, we have come to the difficult decision that it is not realistic or responsible for us to gather in person. Therefore, out of an abundance of care and love for all members of our community, our High Holy Day services will be held online this year. Although we will miss greeting each other in person and sharing our sacred spaces together, these difficult months have shown us that we can create holy and meaningful moments virtually. In order to enhance our High Holy Day experience, we are working with a local production team to bring to your home a special worship experience, including the powerful call of the shofar, our new cantor’s voice, and inspiring sermons. Necessity is the mother of invention and, while none of this is of our choosing, we are using this moment to think creatively.
We care deeply about you and your well-being during this COVID-19 time. If you need help or are looking to connect, please reach out and let us know. Our clergy and fellow congregants are here for you.

We are stronger because of you. Thank you for being part of our PTS community.

L'shalom,
Jon Herstein, President
Rabbi Dan Feder
Karen Wisialowski, Chief Community Officer

Please consider giving to the PTS COVID-19 Recovery Fund. Your support will help us survive and thrive!