Dear PTS Community,

Since we last sent an update, our community has experienced an inspiring High Holy Day season, with virtual worship, special youth programs, and a handful of onsite activities that were structured with COVID safety in mind. Our clergy loved seeing many of you at our Drive Thru Sukkah less than two weeks ago! While we’d prefer to be together in person all the time, until that can happen safely, we have proven that we can build meaning and community using online tools.

Thank you to the many congregants who have supported this endeavor by contributing to our COVID-19 Recovery Fund, which is making an important difference in this year where regular sources of revenue have declined dramatically. If you have not yet contributed, please consider making a donation today.

Some of you have asked about why we are not yet holding onsite worship or Youth Education. The safety of our sacred community is our top priority, so we are paying close attention to guidelines for worship and schools provided by state and county health organizations. San Mateo County is currently in California’s red tier, which means that our risk level is “substantial.”

While state guidelines allow for limited onsite worship, there are serious restrictions that would impact the quality of the experience. Specifically, the guidelines state, “Convening in a congregational setting of multiple different households to practice a personal faith carries a relatively higher risk for widespread transmission” and “Places of worship must therefore discontinue indoor singing and chanting activities.” Given the extent of the limits, and because singing and chanting are integral parts of our worship services, we believe that we can currently offer a better experience online than in person.

Regarding Youth Education, we are closely monitoring state and local guidelines to determine when it may be appropriate to offer in-person programming. Youth Education is considered a supplemental school program, which is subject to substantial restrictions for in-person programming that would hinder
our students’ learning experience. At this time, we feel we can offer safer, more inclusive, and more meaningful programming online rather than onsite. We look forward to the situation improving so that we can move our program to PTS once again. When the staff and COVID-19 Task Force decide that it is safe to do so, we will endeavor to give you two months’ notice so that you can make appropriate plans.

On the other hand, we have indeed been fortunate to give b’nai mitzvah families the option of holding their children’s b’nai mitzvah by Zoom either from their homes or from the PTS Sanctuary. In both cases, students are becoming b’nai mitzvah while reading directly from a PTS Torah scroll with the clergy participating virtually from other locations. For events that take place onsite, there are, of course, a detailed set of guidelines for COVID safety. For more information, visit B’nai Mitzvah FAQs During Covid.

We hope to begin holding other small group programs onsite soon, such as study groups or social justice activities, especially when they can be held outdoors. Keep an eye on your Schmooze and PTS website for the latest information. And, stay tuned to our new COVID-19 Web Page for up to date information on PTS’s response.

We are so pleased that our community has continued to thrive throughout this time. Our Sukkat Shalom (sacred space) is so much more than a physical thing: it is our strength, our resilience, our faith, and our commitment to each other.

May we continue to go from strength to strength.

Jon Herstein, President
Karen Wisialowski, Chief Community Officer