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President Joseph R. Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

Congratulations on your inauguration as president. I pray that you will be blessed with health, strength, courage, and wisdom as you lead our country.

I serve as the senior rabbi of Temple B'rith Kodesh in Rochester, NY. We are a member of the Union for Reform Judaism. The congregation was founded in 1848, and I am proud our longstanding commitments to city, state, and country. We stand ready as partners to you in pursuit of justice, equality, and peace.

I have made it a practice throughout my rabbinate to write to newly inaugurated presidents and other elected officials, offering my support and perspective. This year, rather than simply retreat to my study and compose a letter, I asked members of the congregation as well as friends and colleagues what they thought was important to include. There were some very important themes that I wish to share with you.

We celebrate your compassion and your respectful and kind tone. I am anxious for your presidency to succeed in setting a new and inclusive tone in our country.

I think the most important statement you made on Inauguration Day was your commitment to be a president for *all* Americans. Here in Rochester, we wrestle with issues of deep-seated segregation and tragic gaps between neighborhoods. I pray that you will succeed in uniting us, and in creating dignity and equal opportunity for all. I pledge to support you and help you in this most important work.

Sharing directly from one of the temple members, "We know that you will need many helping hands as you tackle the burdens before us. We know that you will make

progress on some important goals, and suffer mistakes as well. We want you and your presidency to succeed—and we know that for this to be achieved you need not only all of us to be patient and to be understanding—you need a hand and help and resolve and sacrifice from each and every one of us. We pledge to join you in the quest to restore our nation’s soul and spirit.”

In our Jewish tradition, there are many teachings that urge us to support those who are most vulnerable. In our congregation, we have a significant commitment to helping the refugee and immigrant communities. I congratulate you on the early steps you have taken to restore America as a refuge and a safe harbor for those who come here from around the globe. As the grandchild of immigrants and a descendant of family who found closed borders and perished in the Holocaust, I urge you to use the power of the presidency and your unique stature to build bridges across our government in pursuit of a welcoming and inclusive stance at our borders.

Our Jewish tradition also calls us to engage in the urgent concerns around racial justice. I was so glad to hear your call to action in this regard, and I imagine the day when all Americans of all identities will be safe. Locally, of course, we have mourned and responded to the death of Daniel Prude, just as we react to tragic violence and discrimination across the country. We will be partners with you in the effort to end prejudice. Let us know how we can help.

Naturally, in my conversations, there has been grave concern about how we will strengthen our response to the COVID-19 pandemic and more broadly, what we can do to ensure good and accessible health care for all Americans. My congregation and my own family have suffered tragic losses to coronavirus, and we are ready to take action to end this danger. We urge you and support you in forming a strategy for vaccination and other lifesaving measures.

I congratulate you on the diversity of your cabinet and administration, and I hope that this will serve as a mirror for all of us, to reflect on the opportunities that we create and support for those of every identity, every ability, and every socioeconomic status to achieve their full potential. Further, I congratulate you on the choice of Vice President Harris, who not only breaks new ground due to her identity, but brings extraordinary gifts and talents to her office. We pray for her safety and success just as we hold you close.

You come into office at a time when the United States is bitterly divided. I am mindful of the lessons that come from Jewish history, in particular the hatred and infighting that led to a splintering of the population in the first century, CE. It is a central Jewish value to work towards cooperation, unity, and creating understanding among those who may have different points of view. This will undoubtedly be one of the most challenging aspects of your presidency. Know that I stand ready to work with you to unite us as a country.

We have a regular practice of offering a prayer for the country during our worship services. I recite this prayer with renewed fervor as you take office. Know that you are in our prayers, for success in your leadership. I look forward to your leadership and to working together with you in the coming years.

May God bless you, Mr. President, and may God bless America.

Shalom,

Rabbi Peter W. Stein

PS In addition to the contact information at the top of the first page, I can be reached by email at [rabbistein@tbk.org](mailto:rabbistein@tbk.org).