

Temple Sinai Annual Congregational Meeting | June 17, 2020

Ritual Committee Presentation: High Holy Days 2020/5781

Guidelines for Houses of Worship

Governor Baker's Phase 1 reopening plan allows people to return to churches, synagogues and mosques, BUT...

- **The decision on when to reopen individual houses of worship is left to the discretion of the individual entity**

There are many restrictions and guidelines on reopening houses of worship, including but not limited to:

- No more than **40% maximum occupancy** permitted. However, we must **also ensure compliance with the following guidelines.**
 - All attendees and staff must wear **face coverings or masks while in the building.** Exceptions may be made for people with medical conditions or young children
 - **Entry may be denied to people who refuse** to wear a mask or face covering for non-medical reasons
 - **Signage or floor markings** should be placed inside and outside the building to encourage one-way foot traffic and social distancing
 - Attendees not part of the same family must be **at least 6' apart**
 - Some **fixed seating rows must be blocked off** and kept empty to allow sufficient distance between rows

We are responsible monitoring the number of people entering the building to **ensure compliance with all of the restrictions/guidelines.**

Learning from other religious institutions' experience

Church reopenings have resulted in numerous significant outbreaks of coronavirus among attendees

- In Calgary, Alberta church service and gathering of 41 people (church capacity 200) resulted in 24 people becoming infected and two deaths, despite following recommended guidelines at the time. Similar events have occurred in Texas, Georgia, Arkansas, and elsewhere
- CDC noted that **large gatherings, such as religious services, can be efficient vectors for viral transmission**

Singing together isn't safe. The **CDC recommended suspending or decreasing singing during religious ceremonies**

- A May 12 report from the CDC indicated that the act of singing likely contributed to a coronavirus outbreak following a choir rehearsal in which dozens became infected
- A recent Boston Globe article headlined, "**With no official guidance, houses of worship hit a cautious note on singing,**" described the dangers of singing during religious services

- The potential for **singing producing “super-spreader outbreaks” of coronavirus** appears to be increasingly clear

Why will the 2020/5781 High Holy Days be different from other High Holy Days?

The commandment, *pikuach nefesh*, means saving a life. One of the basic principles of Jewish law is that human life comes first. Almost any religious commandment can be broken in order to save the life of a human being

There is consensus among our Temple Sinai leaders that High Holy Day services will not be in our building this year

- **Protecting the health and safety of our congregants, Rabbi, Cantor, and staff is our first priority.** *Pikuach nefesh* and the health and safety of all of our members, attendees, clergy and staff drives our decision-making along with information from medical experts as to where and how to hold our High Holy Day services
- One hundred percent of the Ritual Committee members support the policy that the Rabbi and Cantor should not be pressured into conducting High Holy Day services or any religious services inside the building when circumstances are deemed unsafe

Planning for Virtual High Holy Day Services

Will there be HHD services? Definitely! Will they be different? Yes!

- Key members of our community have been **actively planning for Virtual High Holy Day services in 2020/5781.** The Rabbi, Cantor, Executive Director, current and incoming Presidents and Ritual Committee members have been doing research, meeting in small groups, and consulting experts and colleagues to create a **new model for our 2020/5781 High Holy Day observances**

Subcommittees for Temple Sinai’s Virtual High Holy Day services include:

1. Steering Committee
2. Music Committee
3. Technology Committee
4. Congregant participation/honors
5. Communications
6. “Not-as-High” Holiday services (*Selichot, Sukkot, Simchat Torah*)
7. Children/teen events
8. Fundraising

Making Virtual Services Special & Meaningful

The goal is to craft **safe and spiritually-fulfilling** services that **meet the needs of the congregation** during this time of heightened anxiety. We are striving to make Temple Sinai's Virtual High Holy Day experiences **exceptional and meaningful**.

- Make every **home a sanctuary**
 - Let's try to **feel like a community** though we are physically apart
- **Don't try to replicate in-synagogue services**
 - Capitalize on the **strengths of available media and technology**
 - Be open to **creative ideas**
- Give people the **touchstones** they rely on and expect, such as **familiar music, to make the services feel like the High Holy Days**
 - Involve **the choir** as much as is feasible
 - Try to make the **services interactive** so people are not just passive screen watchers

Key Elements of Virtual High Holy Day Services

- **Live**, though probably separate, **participation by our Rabbi and Cantor** will be part of the services.
- A **Visual T'filah** which will be available for purchase and may be used as our *machzor* (High Holy Day prayer book)
- The Cantor is planning some **wonderful music** along with Choir Director Carol Marton and accompanist Valerie Becker
 - Video and audio recordings of the choir singing many of the well-known High Holy Day prayers and music will likely be part of the mix
- **Torah and Haftarah portions may have to be pre-recorded** by participants in their homes
- *Due to the smaller number of slots for member participation, congregational volunteers may be thanked for their service to Temple Sinai in a way **other than receiving a High Holy Day honor***

Other Creative Opportunities

- Drive-by Shofar blowing outside Temple Sinai
- Split-screen Torah readings may include a video of the reader alongside an image of the Rabbi or Cantor pointing to the words in a *Torah* with a *yad*.
- Consider breaking up the services into different sections to avoid screen time overload for the congregants
- Perhaps part of the *Yizkor* service can include remembrance of those lost by in the Coronavirus pandemic
- And YOUR other creative suggestions and solutions!

Our World Has Changed

The coronavirus pandemic has uprooted our lives and caused a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety. Many people are uncertain about what is safe to do, which places are safe to go to, and with whom can they comfortably visit. These uncertainties will generate great differences in how the High Holy Days are observed at Temple Sinai during the pandemic

Different is not always bad. **By working together, we hope to make the 2020 High Holy Days different, meaningful, and extraordinary for our congregants**

Questions? Suggestions? Looking to Volunteer on a Committee?

We welcome the opportunity to hear your questions and suggestions and we will answer them to the best of our ability. In addition to reaching out to us directly, we will be holding several open Zoom meetings to give all members and opportunity to be heard.

This will take tremendous effort from all of us. We would love to have you as a volunteer. Please reach out to us!

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