



Dearest Families of Or Atid,

As you know, we have a special community. We gather for the highs, the lows, and everything in between. That's because community is the foundation of Jewish life: we pray with a *minyan* (a group of at least 10 people), we gather to learn, to socialize, and perhaps most of all, we gather to share delicious food and drink.

But our tradition also teaches that our most sacred obligation, our highest value, is human health and safety - the *mitzvah* of *piku'ah nefesh*, preserving life. The Talmud teaches that this *mitzvah* surpasses and, if necessary, cancels out all others, from *Shabbat* to *kashrut* to prayer and beyond.

Governor Baker has declared a state of emergency in Massachusetts and the World Health Organization has officially declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Public health officials are advising communities to take action to limit possible transmission of the virus. Much of this advice you have likely heard or read. As a synagogue community, the most important thing we can do now to prevent transmission is to restrict large public gatherings.

Though this was a difficult decision, **we have decided to postpone or cancel all in-person events or programs for two weeks to ensure the safety of all members of our community.** Our Office Administrator Beth Whitman will be in the office tomorrow (Friday, March 13th) until 3pm, and her hours going forward will be communicated on Sunday.

We want to be clear: **to our knowledge, no one in the Or Atid community has tested positive for the coronavirus.** This is a precautionary decision borne out of an abundance of caution and an acknowledgement that, though the virus is spreading, **we can and must slow the spread.** In this way, we recognize and affirm our responsibility as Jews and as human beings to protect each other, especially those who are elderly and/or have weaker immune systems.

This decision means that:

- We will be postponing all in-person events, classes, and meetings, such as Adult Education classes, Super Tot Sunday, and more. We plan to offer virtual classes as soon as we're able to do so, and we will let you know when those are up and running.
- The Jewish Learning Collaborative of MetroWest will be canceling in-person classes and events for the month of March, and again, we plan to offer some virtual learning opportunities as soon as possible.
- Our in-person *Shabbat* morning services this week (March 14th) and next week (March 21st) are canceled. We will determine future services as the situation unfolds. We hope to have a live-streaming option up and running as soon as possible so that you can pray, sing, and learn with Rabbi Polisson from your homes.
- Urgent life cycle events (e.g. funerals) will take place as needed. *Benei Mitzvah* will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, while following the latest public health guidelines.
- Please continue to follow the CDC guidelines and instructions from local public health organizations.
- In light of the situation, we have been advised to not host a community *Seder* on the second night of Passover. If you need help finding another *Seder* to attend, please

let us know, and we will do our best to help you find a *Seder* or to get you supplies to have your own.

We hope that our upcoming online offerings will be a meaningful way for us to stay in touch and see each other in what might be a time of relative isolation. I look forward to experimenting with online discussions, opportunities for socializing, and Torah study. We will do our best to share clear and easy instructions on how to join any virtual gatherings we'll be having using online tools.

I know this is a confusing and surreal time for many. In times of difficulty, we naturally want to seek out our community – the place where we can go for comfort and to support each other. This current situation feels even more difficult because we are told that the safe and responsible thing to do is to be distant, to keep away.

Please know that we are a community even when we are not gathered together in our beautiful building. And please know that, like all times and seasons, *gam zeh ya'avur* - this too shall pass. In the meantime, know that **you are not alone**.

We also know how hard it is for many of us not to be allowed to visit relatives, whether they are elderly, sick, or just far away. We know that some families may have college students who have been asked not to return to campus after their break, or to vacate their dormitories on just a few days' notice. I am here for all of you to support and to talk - by email, phone, or video call.

And we know that some of you might need extra help with a variety of things during this time - such as getting groceries if you're home-bound. If you need help, please let me know, and I will find someone who can help you.

I plan to reach out to as many of you as possible in these next few weeks by phone to see how you're doing. If you haven't heard from me yet and would like a phone call or video call, please email or call me at (774) 421-9649 to let me know, and I'll get back to you as soon as I can. If we had a meeting scheduled already, I'll reach out to make a plan to meet by phone or video call.

None of us really knows what course this pandemic will take. We are doing what we deem best while considering that many members of our community are at risk during this health crisis. We hope you understand and support our decision. We are happy to discuss our reasons for making these decisions with you personally if you feel the need.

May we all stay safe and healthy, and may *Shabbat* bring *shalom* - peace and well-being.

Rabbi Louis Polisson
Robin Wolk, President

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