

Every year, we come together and take time to embark in *Cheshbon Hanefesh* during the month leading up to the High Holy Days. This accounting of the soul helps us examine our individual lives, how we may go forward into the next year and be better, do better and live better. *Cheshbon Hanefesh* can be a collective experience as well. Taking inventory is the prelude to meaningful change.

Change brings the opportunity to reimagine how new and different can be a catalyst for growth. As a congregation, we are at this pivotal moment, where we can do some collective self-examining, some collective *Cheshbon Hanefesh* – to think about who we have been, and how we can, together, reimagine who we can become in our next chapter. Who do we want to be as a congregation?

In January of this year, our congregation became part of a Union of Reform Judaism (URJ) network initiative. We met with other congregational leaders across the reform movement, looking to transform the ecosystem of membership, engagement, and financial sustainability. This initiative from the URJ included approximately 60 other congregations seeking to understand sustainability during this moment in history. One of the goals of this project was to study and understand the concept of “Belonging” at the center of this transformation.

What do we mean by “Belonging”? Belonging, ultimately, is about not being alone. Creating a culture of belonging in synagogue life is about helping congregants feel like they are truly seen, truly known, and that they truly belong. Ideally, things that we want-volunteer engagement, fundraising, growth-all those things that are usually “goals” for a congregation, to instead be results of a culture of belonging. Our Board of Trustees has chosen this as a strategic initiative for Temple Emanuel. Over the coming months, we will be communicating additional opportunities for engagement to help our members become part of this focus.

As part of our continued efforts to create Belonging, we need to be introspective and examine how we can improve. Temple Emanuel has also

engaged in the URJ Benchmarking and Assessment Project. It is a three-part set of tools to help congregations understand themselves and how they compare to others like them. It includes a Financial Assessment, which we completed this past Spring, and also a Board Assessment and finally, a Congregational Survey.

Over the next few weeks, we will be deploying a congregational survey to help us capture your voice as to what we need to keep and where we need to improve, and hopefully what we are doing well. Having the most participation possible is the only way for our Rabbi, for our Board, for our congregation to understand what is most important to this community. So, when you see the email, please respond. Please help us re-imagine who we want to be as a congregation in this next chapter.

We never turn anyone away who wants to be here. We rely on our generous and inclusive community to make that possible. We also count on our High Holy Days' Appeal to meet the cost of yearly operations – it is our primary fundraising effort.

We are asking you to give what you can. For the past two years, we benefited from the PPP Loan program that brought in more than \$100,000 each year, greatly helping us to offset some of the financial gaps and deficits we had. This year, we do not have that. While we have cash reserves that have allowed us to balance our budget, that is not sustainable.

As part of our goal of transparency, we have set the amount of \$45,000 as our fundraising goal for this year. We will track this goal and report on it so that you can be informed about how the generosity of our members is helping us remain sustainable. Every dollar your family contributes makes our synagogue's programming and operations possible (which is especially important as our true costs are not fully covered by our Annual Commitments and Religious School Fees). Indeed, your "above and beyond" giving each year makes an enormous difference to our congregational life.

Temple Emanuel belongs to us. It is our responsibility to provide for its future. I ask that we give generously at this time, when – like Jews the world over – we begin anew; when we reflect on all that is meaningful.

Let's increase our giving for the High Holy Days' Appeal this Jewish year, 5783, when we recommit to the fact that this Temple community is ours, and for us, and for the future generations! On behalf of our entire community, thank you for your generosity.

I want to end by recognizing our incredible Temple Emanuel team. Thank you to Rabbi Olshein, who as our spiritual leader is striving to meet the needs of over 300 families – thank you for all you do for us as a community.

Thank you to Gerri Madenberg, our Managing Director; Jocelyn Richards, our Director of Finance; Jessie Rubenstein, our Religious School Director; Angela Sanders and Julee Gabay, our amazing assistants, and Les Ingram, who makes all of the facilities things happen – THANK YOU. Thank you, sincerely for all that you do to make our temple function and thrive, to be welcoming and inclusive in every way possible. And thank you to our amazing volunteers. You are the heartbeat of Temple Emanuel and why we continue to exist. Thank you to our Religious School teachers for all they do to enrich the Jewish journeys of our children. We don't tell you enough, but we appreciate you. These Holy Days and our temple life run beautifully because of you all. Thank you for your tireless dedication.

Finally, thank you to our visiting cantor, Michael Kruk, for leading us beautifully during these High Holy Days. Thank you for elevating our communal worship experience during these High Holy Days. Thank you to our musical director, Dr. Jeremy Peterman for the many hours he has spent to help our choir lead our congregation this High Holy Day season and for being patient and really fun to work with. We are lucky to have you here to help us create beautiful music and pray together.

TOGETHER: Let's build a temple culture that is inviting, accessible and safe.

TOGETHER: Let's bring those who are outside, in, and create belonging for all.

TOGETHER: Let's break new ground to enrich lives and build community.

G'mar chatimah tovah . . . may we all be sealed only for good for the year to come. May we all be inscribed for a year of abundance, blessings, and joy.

Shanah Tovah,

Karen Kahn, President

Temple Emanuel Board of Trustees