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CONGREGATION
SUKKAT SHALOM
Bulletin

President's Message

by Lisa Fingerhut Carlton

I've been reading a lot about leadership lately. While scrolling through social media, I serendipitously came across *Lessons*



in Leadership: Insights on Leadership Throughout the Weekly Torah Portions by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (of blessed memory). This book has become my "dot-connector" to everything I've been reading on the subject.

While far from a biblical scholar, I'm intrigued by "real world" applications of Jewish thought. So, when I got to the chapter called "The Leader as Teacher," I recognized where we are right now in the lifecycle of Sukkat Shalom.

In the first chapter of Deuteronomy, Moses has led the Jewish people out of Egypt, but isn't going to be the one to take them to the promised land. He pivots from leader to teacher, sets up Joshua to be his successor and, in a series of addresses, gives the Jewish people their roadmap to pay forward for generations.

I couldn't help connecting this story with our own community of families, created from Rabbi Gordon's

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Sukkat Shalom: Our Journey Continues by Rabbi Sam Gordon



[In our last newsletter, Rabbi Gordon wrote about the founding and growth of Congregation Sukkat Shalom. In this piece, he charts our progress to the present day.]

Purchasing our building at 10th and Central was a defining moment for the congregation, although it was a somewhat controversial decision. Many members feared that we would lose our identity as a congregation more concerned about community than bricks-and-mortar or sacrifice our faith partnership with the First Congregational Church. We had to be certain that owning a building would not change our mission or culture.

There were certain promises made to the members to ensure that the core values of the congregation would not be lost. There would be no imposed building fund fees. The congregation would not carry any long-term debt. Donations would be anonymous, and there would be no recognition plaques or naming opportunities.

Remarkably, we were able to raise all the money needed for purchase, renovation, and maintenance. The building's redesign

reflected the openness and diversity of the congregation. Ultimately, there was near universal support for the new building.

At that time, the staff included Rabbi Sam Gordon, Rabbi Ari Moffic, Cantor

Ross Wolman, and Executive Director Judy Buckman. Our first ordained cantor, Jill Abramson, had left Sukkat Shalom to become Senior Cantor

of Westchester (N.Y.) Reform Temple, but our relationship remains close and mutually supportive.

Since acquiring our building, we have welcomed Rabbi Carlie Daniels as Associate Rabbi and Director of Family Education, and Kenny Lyonswright as Cantorial Soloist. Both are passionate about their roles and deeply involved with our youngest congregants and their family members.

We also marked the retirement of our

beloved, long-time Executive Director, Judy Buckman, and welcomed her able and savvy successor,

Andy Schultz.

Our congregation continues to grow and innovate, retaining the model of Fam-

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***"We are deeply engaged in
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"Conversations with Rabbi Gordon" Kicks Off with Susannah Heschel on Oct. 10th

While our search for a new senior rabbi continues, an important part of the transition is honoring the legacy of our founding rabbi, Sam Gordon. Rabbi Gordon has chosen to celebrate the months leading up to his sabbatical by holding a series of public conversations with individuals who have influenced and inspired him.

The first conversation, with **Professor Susannah Heschel**, will occur on Sunday, October 10th, at 7 pm Central. Dr. Heschel is the Eli M. Black Distinguished Professor of Jewish Studies at Dartmouth College. The author and editor of numerous books and articles, she is a Guggenheim Fellow and recipient of many awards, including four honorary doctorates.

Professor Heschel is the daughter of the late Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), a Polish-born American rabbi and one of the leading Jewish theologians and Jewish philosophers of the 20th century. He was a leader in the civil rights movement and accompanied Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the famous 1965 voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.

The topic of the conversation will be The Continuing Inspiration and Influence of Abraham Joshua Heschel.

Congregants and friends will be able to join the conversation through the Sukkat Shalom webpage or through its Facebook page or YouTube channel.

Future participants in Rabbi Gordon's series of conversations will include **Martha Minow**, law professor and former-Dean of the Harvard Law School; **Dr. Stephen J. Ray, Jr.**, President of the Chicago Theological Seminary; and **Rabbi David Saperstein**, former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom.

Also, **David Axelrod**, former-Senior Adviser to President Barack Obama; **Rabbi Daniel H. Freeland**, past-president of the World Union for Progressive Judaism; and **Rev. Stephanie Perdew**, Senior Pastor of the First Congregational Church of Wilmette and long-time friend of Congregation Sukkat Shalom.

Specific details of dates and topics will be forthcoming soon.

We thank Rabbi Gordon for choosing to celebrate his transition to Rabbi Emeritus by giving members and friends of our congregation the opportunity to benefit from his conversations with these esteemed leaders and thinkers.



In addition to these conversations to celebrate his retirement, Rabbi Gordon will be delivering a series of Shabbat sermons on his reflections beginning on Friday, October 15th.

Themes to be explored in the sermon series include: My Personal Spiritual Journey; The Meaning of Sacred Time; What are My Sacred Sources; An Expansive Universal Judaism; America and Israel; and Where We Go from Here.

The sermons (and complete Shabbat services) will be available online as well as in-person in the sanctuary. Watch your email for more information.

Mary Schmich and Barbara Brotman to Speak at Oct. 26th Women's Connections

Sukkat Shalom's next Women's Connection program will feature Mary Schmich and Barbara Brotman – two esteemed former-columnists for the Chicago Tribune.

The virtual event, open to all congregants, will take place on Tuesday, October 26th, at 7 p.m.



Mary Schmich

Over the years we have all enjoyed Mary Schmich's Pulitzer Prize-winning columns exploring life and her adopted City of Chicago with whimsy and poignancy. Her mock commencement address, "Wear Sunscreen," became an internet sensation, and later a book and song.

Barbara Brotman, also a long-time Tribune reporter and columnist, wrote passionately about the outdoors and humorously about the quirks of modern life.

The topic of their conversation will be Journalism, Life, and Changing Gears.

A link to the conversation will be shared with congregants a number of times before the October 26th event.

We hope to "see" you there!

Transition Committee Completes Work on Senior Rabbi Application

by John Kupper, Chair

With tremendous assistance from members across the entire congregation, the Transition Committee of Congregation Sukkat Shalom produced an application for senior rabbi, which was submitted to the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) in early-August.

The application was the culmination of months of research and discussion involving members of every demographic within Sukkat Shalom. It included 230 responses to a congregation-wide, online survey, and approximately 50 participants in six follow-up focus groups.

Individual interviews were conducted with members of the clergy and staff, along with board members and other lay leaders.

The result was a 20-page illustrated application, which describes the history and culture of Sukkat Shalom and its members' priorities for the next senior rabbi. A copy of the application has been posted on the Sukkat Shalom website.

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Musical Notes: Choosing and Arranging Our High Holy Days Music

by Kenny Lyonswright, Cantorial Soloist

Each year, we spend so much time and energy thinking about services—how they should look and feel, what our congregants should walk away thinking or doing. And yet, my source material—the prayerbook—never really changes. I can choose different settings of music to include. But even then, I have to be careful not to introduce too many new things or the service may start to feel unfamiliar.

"My process for identifying and choosing a piece of music to follow the rabbis' sermons is very straightforward."

There is, however, one spot in each service that allows for something totally different every year—the music that follows the rabbi's sermon.

My process for identifying and choosing a piece of music to follow the rabbis' sermons is very straightforward. Ahead of the High Holy Days, Rabbi Gordon, Rabbi Daniels and I plan quite extensively for services. Part of that process is discussing their sermon themes for the year. I generally attempt to zero-in on key words in their themes—things like "trust," "truth," "isolation," "brokenness," "healing."

These key, expansive words might apply to a variety of music. Once I have two or three words that represent the overarching themes behind their message, it is time to start scrolling through my iPod music library for inspiration!

Often, the catalogues of Bob Dylan, Simon and Garfunkel, or their contemporaries will yield the perfect choice. Those songs generally need very little rearranging. Other songs need a significant amount of musical tweaking to become appropriate for a worship service. I tend to have more fun when that is the case! Stripping away the orchestration of a song can often uncover a new understanding of the lyrics that was otherwise concealed.

I don't just choose music that satisfies the thematic elements of a sermon. It is also important to me to choose music that some of you will have heard before and can identify with. I have always been struck by how intensely different the words of our *machzor* (High Holy Days prayerbook) can feel from year to year. The words never change. But the year we've lived through, and the new experiences we've gained, can radically change the way in which those words affect us.

So, too, with music you've heard many times before, but now hear in an entirely new context. In many ways, that is one of the key intentions of our time together in the sanctuary every Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur—to draw renewed meaning and inspiration from familiar themes and ideas. I hope you enjoyed and found meaning in the song choices this year.

President's Message, cont'd

and the founders' vision; a foundation built through his leadership of 25 years that will serve us beyond his retirement and into our future.

As you will read elsewhere in this newsletter, we are well on our way in our senior rabbi search. Our foundational strength is evident through the eyes of the applicants. Rabbi Gordon -- along with our past presidents, board and committee members, social action volunteers, past and present clergy and staff, and every single congregant -- has set us up for success. We are well respected for our mission and values, commitment to equity and inclusion, and forward-thinking approach to everything we do.

I want to underscore the extraordinary pride all of us take in representing Sukkat Shalom. You have our commitment that we will leave no stone unturned to assure that the roadmap Rabbi Gordon has created with us will be paid forward for future generations of our congregation.

We are setting out on a special year and our recent High Holy Day experience reflected that. We embraced Rabbi Gordon's inspiring reflections, Carlie's thoughtful words, Kenny's stirring

music and, most important, their commitment to bringing our community together during difficult times. We accommodated a wide range of preferences: safely worshipping

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in our wonderful sanctuary; from our homes through our new, live-streaming infrastructure; and in outdoor worship at the beautiful Gillson Park amphitheater.

Many thanks to Andy Schultz and Seth Zimmerman for managing the most logistically complex holidays ever. And many thanks to you for your High Holy Day contributions, which help us to offset these expenses. Your gifts enable us to keep our congregation fiscally strong through these challenging times. Please consider giving if you have not yet done so.

It is an incredible privilege to serve as President during this exciting new chapter of our story. Our Transition and Search Committee chairs and I are always available, should you have any thoughts or questions.

Shana Tovah, and may we all have a healthy, sweet, and fulfilling year.

Sukkat Shalom: Our Journey, cont'd

ily School education and continuing our partnership with First Congregational Church -- and expanding our work with First Presbyterian Church of Wilmette and Kenilworth Union Church. Much of our joint programming revolves around our interfaith scholar programs.

Guest speakers regularly appear at the adult sessions of Family School, under the moniker of "Caffeine for the Brain." They have included: James Carroll, Thomas Cahill, Susannah Heschel, Amy Jill Levine, Paula Fredriksen, Eric Myers, Jodi Magness, Bruce Feiler, Larry Tye, Ruth Messinger, Larry Hoffman, Ron Wolfson, and many others.

Our downtown Lunch and Learn program hosted Newton Minow, David Axelrod, Ambassador Andrew Schapiro, Blair Kamin, Geoffrey Baer, and numerous others. There are Lunch and Learn sessions in Wilmette, senior men's lunch gatherings, women's spirituality groups, Torah study, and book groups.

We are deeply engaged in social justice programming and opportunities. We partner with local churches in Family Promise, providing temporary shelter in our buildings for homeless families. We have sponsored and resettled two families of Rohingya refugees and created the Stock the Shelves program for refugee assistance in the Rogers Park neighborhood of Chicago. Our interfaith partnerships have been vital in our response to crises such as 9/11, the white supremacist march on Charlottesville, the Tree of Life Synagogue massacre in Pittsburgh, and the George Floyd murder and Black Lives Matter movement.

We have traveled together as a congregation on many occasions. There have been numerous congregational trips to Israel. First Congregational Church and Sukkat Shalom co-sponsored an interfaith trip to Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. There were recent congregational trips to Cuba and Morocco. There have been youth trips to New York, Selma, and Washington, D.C. as part of LeTaken. A number of our families send their children to summer camp at the URJ's nearby OSRUI, and family retreats occur there during the school year.

As we move into our second 25 years as a congregation, Sukkat Shalom continues to blaze new trails as a transformational synagogue -- providing a meaningful Jewish life and deeply connected faith community for our diverse and committed member families. I am confident that this remarkable history will continue under the next senior rabbi, who will be helped and supported by our dedicated clergy, excellent staff, and our engaged and devoted members.

Update from the Rabbinic Search Committee

by Andrea Pauls Backman, Co-Chair

This summer, Sukkat Shalom's Rabbinic Search Committee enthusiastically worked through the many processes associated with the search for our new senior rabbi. We brought on Debbie Joseph of Debbie Joseph Consulting, who had consulted with the Transition Committee, to help us through the various steps that needed to be in place to interview rabbinic candidates on a rolling basis until the end of the year.

In July, we worked closely with the Transition Committee to finalize the application to the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) and completed Implicit Bias training with executive coach Eric McDonnell. The

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purpose of the Implicit Bias training is to identify our own biases when evaluating resumes and candidates – and in working with people in general – and has already proven useful in our candidate evaluations.

As a committee, we met with congregant Mitchell Cohen, PhD, a behavioral psychologist, who volunteered his expertise to discuss the best ways to ask questions and effectively assess an executive-level candidate. Rabbi Cindy Enger and now Rabbi Deborah Hirsch of CCAR are also valuable sources of information throughout this process.

We developed tools to track and evaluate applicants and stress-tested different forms of questions and interview processes until we found one that was comfortable for us and the candidates to help us assess their potential fit with Sukkat Shalom.

To help us get to know each other better, we met for a happy hour at Andrea's house in August. Meeting face to face was a refreshing change from hours of Zoom calls!

After all this preparation, we received our first batch of resumes in mid-August. We have begun Round One interviews and are currently meeting twice a week to interview candidates. Now that the holidays are over, we expect to receive more resumes from applicants. As a committee, we have been impressed with the caliber of the candidates and their interest in Sukkat Shalom.

We will have another update for the congregation in about a month when we expect to begin to move to Round Two interviews. Ultimately, we intend to have the finalists come to Chicago for live interviews with a range of congregants and staff before we come to a final decision, likely in the December/January timeframe.

Please feel free to reach out to the Search Committee Co-Chairs, Andrea Pauls Backman (backmanandrea@gmail.com) or Cathy Baker (Cathleen.baker@comcast.net) with any questions.



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Transition Committee Report, cont'd

We are grateful for the efforts of Andy Schultz and Seth Zimmerman of the Sukkat Shalom staff, who designed and produced the attractive and eye-catching application.

Responses to the application are being directed to the Rabbinic Search Committee. The Transition Committee will be working with the Search Committee to bring the final candidates for our next senior rabbi and their families to Wilmette, so that congregants can meet them.

Once the Search Committee's recommendation for the new senior rabbi has been approved by the members of the congregation, the Transition Committee will work to ensure that the new rabbi receives the encouragement, friendship and support they will need from all our members to ensure our community's continuing success.

As always, please feel free to direct any questions to the Transition Committee Chair, John Kupper, at: john@kuppercom.com.

Congregation Sukkat Shalom



Application
for Senior
Rabbi

