

Installation Speech for Congregation Beth Yeshurun – Andy Burger

Good evening everyone.

Many of you know me as Linda Burger's husband.

Linda has been my partner in raising a beautiful and loving family that includes my daughter Lauri and her fiancé Ryan, my son Michael and his wife Allie, and my 1-year old granddaughter Ellie. For over 35 years, while Linda has led the Houston Jewish community in a variety of executive roles, I've had the pleasure and privilege of being at her side. But in recent years, Congregation Beth Yeshurun has challenged me to give my voice. To Linda, I pray that my actions as president bring you nothing but nachas.

With that in mind...

I accept the responsibility – and the honor – of serving as your president. I am particularly excited and inspired to lead our congregation during this significant time of restoration and renewal.

“Excited?”, you say? “After all that our synagogue has gone through, and all the challenges that lie ahead.... you’re excited?”

Yes. I’m excited, inspired, AND optimistic. Here's why.

Pre-Harvey, at the request of our now serene and immediate past president, I assembled a very talented strategic planning committee representing a diverse cross-section of our membership. Our purpose was to check the pulse of our community as we began looking toward our future. We dug in and asked, “What do you like about Beth Yeshurun? How can we build on that to make us stronger? What could we do differently?”

We started listening. And people started sharing. A few trends and patterns began emerging. People wanted more connection...more meaning. They wanted to feel a deeper sense of belonging – and purpose.

It was becoming clear that we needed to do a better job articulating and delivering on the promise of our current mission statement's three pillars – to provide a SPIRITUAL community, a LEARNING community and a CARING community – in ways that would excite, resonate, and engage.

We were well into the process of listening, and then – boom. Harvey came. We put the project on hold.

Then, something wonderful happened.

Despite the flooding in their own homes or those around them, people started stepping up with offers of time, energy, and funds. More people than we imagined said, “We had it bad, but others had it much worse.”

Almost overnight, the pillar of CARING that holds up our synagogue naturally -- and exponentially -- strengthened.

And why?

It's because people feel a love and connection to Beth Yeshurun. A depth of commitment to their relationship with our synagogue and with each other. That's what gives me -- us -- hope. Bolstered by our pillar of CARING, we are optimistic that we will make it. Our synagogue has good bones, good people, and good resources. We can and will meet the challenges. Not only will we recover from the flood, we will thrive!

So, it turns out that what we began hearing, pre-Harvey, has only ramped up. Many of our members want to do more. They want to be a meaningful part of Beth Yeshurun. In many ways... it's a new day here. Our members, including young families and empty nesters alike, want reasons to be involved – to invent – to innovate.

And we can enable our members – by equipping them through education and experiences that make them comfortable enough to participate in our services...knowledgeable enough to actively lead if that's their desire...wise enough to help shape our approach to Judaism while remaining authentic to our traditions...and nimble enough to adapt to inevitable change.

By enabling these pathways to education and engagement, we will strengthen the pillar that calls on us to be a LEARNING community – that enriches Jewish knowledge and experiences for all ages.

As we become enriched by our pillars of LEARNING and CARING, so too will we grow together as a SPIRITUAL community that celebrates the richness and traditions of Torah, prayer and lifecycle events.

Friends, the time has never been better to sharpen our vision, to find ways to strengthen our pillars....to make US better...to deepen what is meaningful to us as individuals, families, and as a sacred community.

And that's exactly why I'm excited, inspired and optimistic about the future of Beth Yeshurun. As I take on the privilege and responsibility of serving as your president, I pledge to do three things as a synagogue:

1. First, LISTEN

- Find out who's passionate and committed enough to show up – to participate in a conversation.
- Listen to what they value. Really LISTEN.

2. Second, be OPEN and CURIOUS

- Be open to new ideas. Explore new opportunities to develop as Jews and Jewish leaders...to be involved and to lead in new ways.
- Be curious about the people around us and Identify those with the skill, will, and capacity to share their gifts.

3. Third, to EXPERIMENT and INNOVATE

- Match passions with experiences to help our members find their place at Beth Yeshurun. This is how we can expand our community of engaged members
- And create a safe space for our partnership of members, clergy, and staff to collaborate and experiment along the way. Applaud innovation and trial. To borrow a core value from our member Jay Steinfeld's company, Blinds.com, **EMBRACE experimentation without fear.**

This is my pledge. If I, WE, succeed, ...stay tuned for what happens next.

What's your role in all this?

Show up. Reflect. Ask probing questions. Share ideas. Meet someone new. Engage with our people, our programs and our schools. I call on all of us to be part of our future by taking advantage of the many “connecting” opportunities we offer. Be part of our future by contributing. By cultivating relationships. By sharing and enabling YOUR vision.

The events of the past five months proved that we are a resilient, strong and determined community not afraid to roll up our sleeves and dig in. But isn't that consistent with what we are as a Jewish people? We've always faced a changing and uncertain future. But the wisdom of our past, handed down through Torah and tradition, has anchored us in our values to navigate change. While our present remains challenging and our future uncertain, we can draw from our Judaism – and from each other – to grasp onto a vision that guides us, values that ground us, and the ability to adapt when G_d tests us in new ways.

Our visiting scholar February 16th and 17th, Rabbi Naomi Levy, wrote the following prayer that really resonates with me in my hope to always remember what being president of a congregation is about.

She says, "Open my eyes, God. Help me to perceive what I have ignored, to uncover what I have forgotten, to find what I have been searching for. Remind me that I don't have to journey far to discover something new, for miracles surround me, blessings and holiness abound. And You are near.

Amen."

Are you still wondering who I am? Join me and we'll find out together.

Thank you for your trust and confidence in me, the Executive Committee and your Board of Trustees.

And Thank YOU for being here tonight