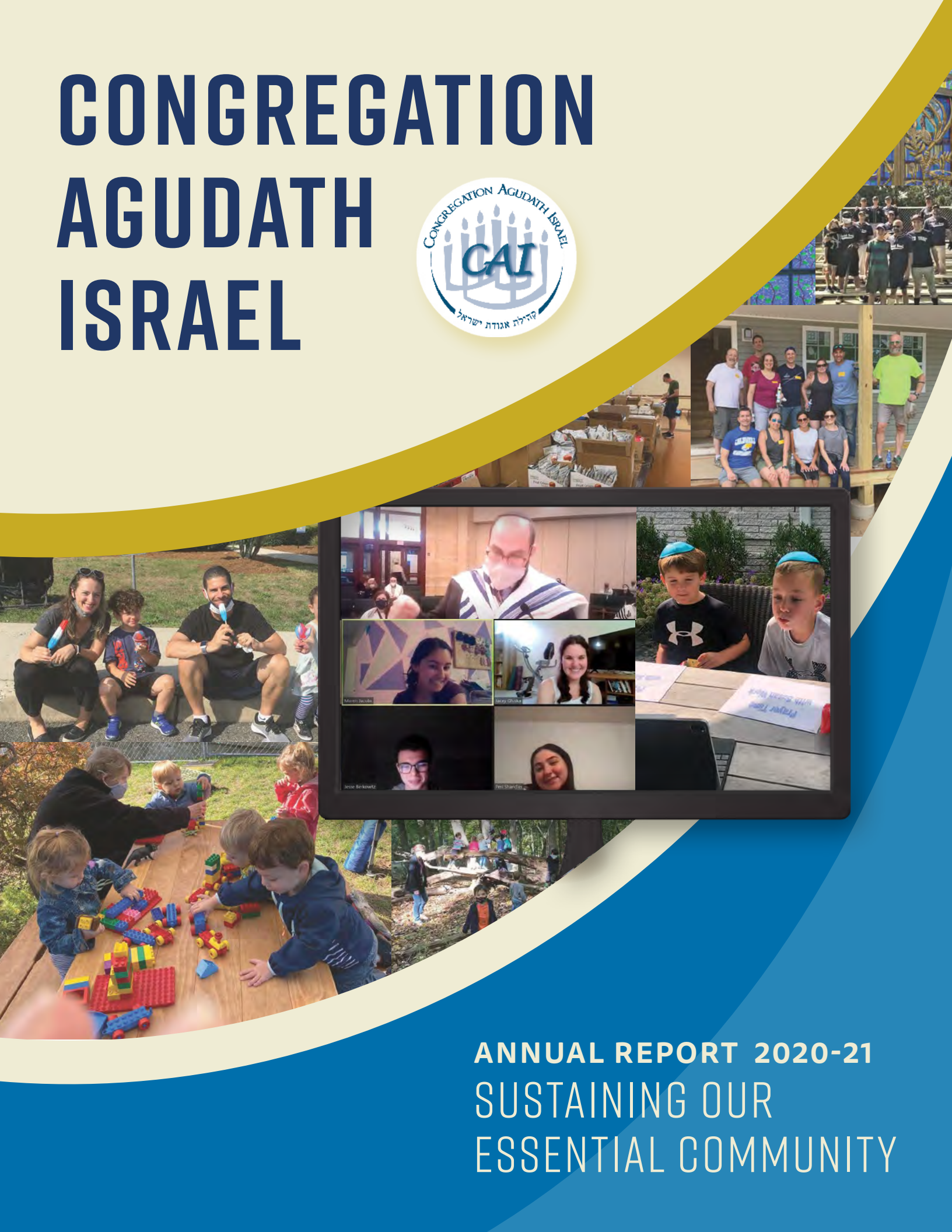


CONGREGATION AGUDATH ISRAEL



ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21
SUSTAINING OUR
ESSENTIAL COMMUNITY

A MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERSHIP



This past year and a half, our society has had to contend with questions of what is considered “essential work” and who are “essential workers?” Which functions can wait and which cannot? At CAI we’ve kept doing what we’ve always done for our 100 year history - caring for those in need, expanding

Jewish education, and keeping our community connected to one another and to Jewish tradition.

Our teachers in The Lerner ECC and Religious School had an incredible year of learning. They innovated with online platforms and went the extra mile to support parents and students in a most challenging year. They kept our school doors open and our students engaged in Jewish life. They are most certainly essential workers.

Our clergy and staff have kept our religious services and adult education program strong throughout the pandemic - some on Zoom, some in person, some hybrid, but always meaningful and rooted in tradition. We’ve reached more diverse audiences and provided meaningful engagement while people were open to what our tradition had to say to this moment in their lives. As the world changed so rapidly around us, it was comforting to know that you could check in with your communal home for Shabbat and holy days, to pray, learn, or simply reconnect with a friend. When you participated in a drive-by hanukkah candle lighting in our parking lot or heard the megillah read online, it kept you grounded and connected. This is the essential work of Jewish community.

We have welcomed new babies into a sacred relationship with Jewish tradition, we’ve rejoiced at weddings, and we’ve celebrated b’nei mitzvah. Even if we had to wear masks, the smiles behind the masks shined through. And when a member of our community experienced a loss, we were also there to support them at a funeral or shiva or to help them say kaddish. This too is essential, holy work.

We honored a beloved rabbi whose warmth and legacy is felt throughout the community and far beyond. We told stories of how he touched our lives and thanked him for all he gave to us. For over forty years, Rabbi Silverstein has been our essential worker and with a bittersweet feeling in our hearts, we reflected on his tenure and wished him well in the next chapter of his leadership of the Jewish community.

For all these reasons and so many more, CAI has been and remains an essential part of sustaining our communal connections to one another. As we conclude one challenging year and look ahead to what we hope will be a better year to come, we can be grateful for the ways in which CAI has helped us survive and even thrive. We are only able to do this essential work because of the partnership, participation, and volunteerism of so many of you. Todah rabbah —thank you. Each one of you is an essential part of our community and together we can look forward to even more wonderful things in the year to come.

Best wishes for shanah tovah,

RABBI ARI LUCAS

Rabbi Ari Lucas
הרב אהרין משה לוקאס



Shanah Tovah —

As we begin 5782, we want to take the opportunity to reflect on the accomplishments that our community has achieved over the past year, during a time of unimaginable and frequently changing challenges. We

attained our collective goals by upholding CAI's mission and core values, as well as by clearly demonstrating that our congregation is exceptionally caring, supportive, creative, devoted and resilient.

While we can all take pride in our shared accomplishments throughout the pandemic, we must express our sincere gratitude to the extraordinary team of clergy, professionals and volunteers whose commitment and flexibility are limitless. Rabbi Lucas, Rabbi Silverstein, Cantor Caplan, Susan Werk, Deb Lurie and Geula Zamist, we truly appreciate your leadership and dedication to every member of the CAI community.

We are also blessed with a fantastic, hard working team of administrative professionals: Rosalie Felberbaum, Allison Robinson, Melissa Steb, Jacey Gluska and Jessica Pablo. We are grateful for the time and energy that you dedicate to helping Congregation Agudath Israel each day, especially over the past year!

The strong level of volunteerism at our synagogue has always inspired us, but since March 2020, we have been genuinely moved by the thoughtful and enthusiastic

commitment of every CAI volunteer, especially the members of our Board of Trustees and our ECC Board. Together, these two hard working groups represent a wide range of ideas and perspectives from every age and stage of our congregation, and we are so fortunate that they proudly serve as ambassadors of our synagogue.

This High Holiday season, as we embark on our synagogue's 100th anniversary, we are also marking the beginning of a new chapter in the history of CAI, as Rabbi Lucas takes on the role as our Senior Rabbi and Rabbi Silverstein becomes our Senior Rabbi Emeritus. With all of the exciting transitions in our community for 5782, along with the frequently changing public health parameters, we ask for your partnership and your patience as we move forward together into our 100th year.

We are certain that together, Congregation Agudath Israel is destined to go from strength to strength!

Shanah Tovah to you and your families.

SHANI DROGIN, PRESIDENT

**GAYLE WIESENECK,
IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT**

"I will forever be grateful for my family's time at the ECC. Year after year the incredible faculty fostered and encouraged my children's natural curiosity and creativity. When my daughter returned to school in September there was never a doubt in my mind that Geula and her team were doing everything in their power to keep our children safe, healthy and happy. The teachers took the new regulations in stride and I was always impressed how nimble everyone was with the changes that happened throughout the year.

- LIZA AMIR

OUR IMPACT THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

From the very beginning of the lock down, in March 2020, CAI was able to adapt with agility and creativity to continue its strong support of our entire community through the pandemic. We leveraged technology as well as the tenacity of our leadership, staff and volunteers to best serve our diverse congregants in myriad ways:

OFFERING MEANINGFUL AND INSPIRATIONAL VIRTUAL RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

- Maintained twice daily virtual minyan services to provide continuity of observance, and the ability to say Kaddish, for **20-30 people** at each service.
- Held virtual Shabbat services throughout the pandemic attended by an average of **200 households**.
- Created rituals around the many lifecycle experiences we share together in our community, including **18 baby naming/Simchat Bat/Brit Milah; 56 B'nai Mitzvah; 5 Weddings and 25 Funerals**.
- Held spirited high holiday services for our entire congregation that were viewed by over **1860 people**.

EDUCATING EVERY AGE AND EVERY STAGE

- Offered the only fully virtual Jewish class for three- and four-year-old's in the NY metropolitan area during the 2020-2021 school year.
- Created a new ECC Outdoor Classroom to ensure **59 students** were able to learn outside.
- Combined virtual learning with in-person events to keep our **161 Religious School children** and families engaged.



"Losing a parent is always difficult. Losing a parent during the pandemic added an inordinate amount of complication which added to our grief. We couldn't have imagined getting through the loss of Andy's Dad without the warmth, wisdom and loving support that Rabbi Lucas shared with our family this past September. It is such a reassuring feeling knowing that Rabbi Lucas will be a part of our lives...both for the wonderful moments as well as the difficult ones. We are eternally grateful!"

-AMI AND ANDY TALKOW



- Led by our CAI Teen Youth (CAITY) board, **25 teens** spent the past year planning virtual events for 9th-12th graders, from trivia nights to candy pizza Passover seders.
- Provided classes, films, discussions and book groups focused on Jewish themes and content for **hundreds of adult members** to enjoy.

STAYING CONNECTED TO OUR MEMBERS AND NEIGHBORS

- Created a volunteer-led initiative to keep in touch with our senior congregants— **150 member units** received weekly calls and, because the response has been overwhelmingly positive, these calls continue on a regular basis.
- Spearheaded various social action and community-oriented programs, from organizing food and necessity drives to promoting eco-friendly living to participating in the first virtual Israel Walk-a-Thon.
- Led **50 weekly virtual "Coping With Quarantining" sessions**, each with an average of 9 attendees, to help provide strategies and space for processing challenges created by the pandemic.
- Led **20 Bereavement Group sessions** so that mourners could continue to be supported.

CENTENNIAL CAMPAIGN DONOR LIST

CAI's Centennial Campaign celebrates the congregation's 100th anniversary and our historic rabbinic leadership transition. The incredible support of our congregants during the initial phase of the campaign has enabled us to nearly achieve our initial goal of \$3 million, which will enable us to achieve a long-time goal of reducing our building's mortgage. The cost savings generated from reducing the mortgage will be directed towards the inclusive engagement and innovative programming at the heart of CAI's mission.

We sincerely thank those who have pledged their support of this effort. Listed below are donors who contributed \$1,000 or more. For a full list of contributors to the commemorative journal, please see: <https://www.wizevents.com/cai2021>



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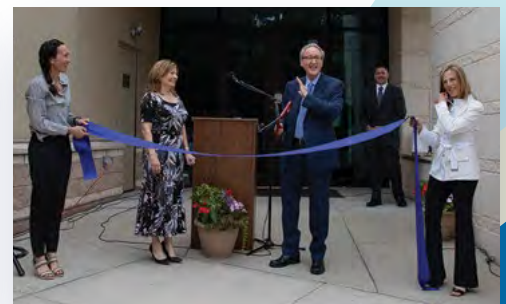
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HONORING RABBI SILVERSTEIN'S LEGACY

In June 2021 Rabbi Alan Silverstein completed his transformative four-decade career at Congregation Agudath Israel. Rabbi Silverstein has been a visionary spiritual leader at CAI, touching the lives of generations of members through their lifecycle milestones, while also serving as a thought-leader for the greater Jewish community. We celebrated this landmark event in our communal history and paid tribute to Rabbi Silverstein's legacy over the weekend of June 11-13, 2021.

As part of our community wide celebration, we dedicated the The Rabbi Alan Silverstein Center for Prayer, Jewish Life and Learning and created a Virtual Journal, which drew the support of 250+ congregants and community members. Both of these initiatives supported CAI's Centennial Campaign, which strengthens our financial sustainability as we begin our next century.



2020-21 CAI ANNUAL FUND DONOR LIST

"We express heartfelt gratitude to the following congregants and friends who contributed to the 2020-21 Annual Fund Campaign and provided vital support for CAI's programs and services during a particularly challenging year."

— JORDAN SHUMOFSKY, VICE PRESIDENT & ANNUAL FUND CHAIR



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FINANCIAL SUMMARY 2020-2021

Like most synagogues, CAI's traditional revenue model, which includes membership dues, ECC and Religious School tuition and Annual Fund donations, was challenged by the COVID crisis. While membership statistics and fundraising participation were consistent with previous years, ECC and Religious School tuition was negatively impacted due to lower enrollment related to the pandemic. Although fundraising support for the synagogue remained strong, particularly through the Centennial Campaign, the actual dollars raised from our Annual Fund decreased the prior fiscal year.

CAI's Clergy, Staff and Lay Leaders worked together to create a proactive strategy to ensure the synagogue's financial sustainability beyond the pandemic by implementing the following initiatives:



Applying for and receiving \$378K in a PPP loan which covered salaries, health insurance and administrative expenses for The Lerner ECC and Religious School staff. This enabled us to keep our schools open throughout March 2020, when Covid hit, and the following year.



Raising \$2.9MM through our Centennial Campaign, which included Major Gifts as well as the Honorary Journal for Rabbi Silverstein's retirement. All of the proceeds from this phase of the campaign are earmarked to pay down CAI's mortgage. To date, we have already been able to reduce this loan by \$1MM, resulting in an annual savings of approximately \$60,000 in debt services.



Recruiting 21 new membership units over the last year to help offset the decline in membership revenue as a result of the request for additional dues assistance and slightly higher than normal membership attrition.

"It was so nice and uplifting to receive phone calls from a member of CAI during the early months of the pandemic. To have somebody from the temple, who isn't a friend, reach out to see how I was doing was terrific. I so enjoyed my phone calls with her and when this is all over, I am going to take her to lunch. I also so appreciated the person who went shopping for me in those early days. It is a really beautiful thing that our temple was behind all of that caring."

-BEVERLY HECHT (update: they finally met and had a breakfast date in July!)



LOOKING AHEAD

Our community is at a unique crossroads. For the remainder of the year, we will celebrate the congregation's 100th anniversary and honor Rabbi Lucas as he assumes the mantle of CAI's rabbinic leadership. These exciting milestones coincide with the need to enhance our engagement opportunities and recoup some of the loss of earned revenue experienced during the pandemic.

It is therefore more important than ever that CAI maintains its vital role in the lives of its congregants, by reaffirming their spiritual and social connections and providing support for its members.

Rabbi Lucas' conceptual spiritual framework for building on CAI's core values and traditions complement our synagogue's warm and welcoming culture. This strategy will truly enable CAI to enhance the experience of its broad membership base, as we move forward into this exciting next chapter in our congregation's history.

We look forward to continuing this journey together in 2021-22 and are more grateful than ever for your support and participation.

CONTACT US

**WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR
PHILANTHROPIC OPPORTUNITIES?**

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(973) 226-3600
development@agudath.org