

## Appeal from the Board of Directors

*Git Yontiff.* Normally the Kol Nidre Appeal message is presented by the President of the Congregation. However, at the moment, we have no President. This is just one of numerous problems we currently face that I will review with you this evening. I am here representing the men and women of your Board of Directors, its Committees, the Congregational Officers and staff and I want to acknowledge tonight all their hard work in these trying times.

We have had a difficult year. We still have Covid, we still have not fully recovered from the burst pipe, we have no Program Director and as I just mentioned, we have no President.

Last year for the High Holidays we were either sitting in front of our devices at home, in front of a screen in the courtyard or in a mostly empty Sarah Lechter Hall because of a Pandemic that the country hadn't seen in over a century and a burst pipe in the new shul's basement equipment room that caused so much damage that the building is still unusable 15 months later.

On the bright side, we now have Covid vaccines, and more and more people are taking them. We are now experts at social distancing and Zoom. We are now used to wearing masks in many kinds of settings without being told. We have mostly gotten beyond the massive quarantines and public lockdowns so that we can now see our families, friends and loved ones in person after not doing so for many, many months. I have recently returned from a weeklong trip to Seattle where I finally got to see my son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren for the first time in 22 months.

So, things are improving. We had hoped to be able to have High Holiday services in the main sanctuary, and we came very, very close. As we are slowly bringing the building's systems and equipment back online, we keep discovering problems that have caused us to incur additional costs and delays. Currently we are looking at a reopening that may still be several months away.

As most of you know, even with all the above misfortunes, we have managed to function reasonably well with a monthly calendar filled with activities, primarily via Zoom. We have daily minyanim, Torah readings, lectures, and classes. We held Passover Seders, Yizkor Services, and restarted Shabbat morning services. We also devised the hybrid High Holiday format that we used last year, as well as this year,

whereby we are all together -- but in three separate ways: at home on Zoom; in the Sarah Lechter Hall and outside in the Friedman courtyard. Despite our separation, we are united as a community and as a congregation we are bound by our prayers and our love for one another.

However, in spite of this, I feel that we will soon be reaching an existential moment for our shul. Why do I say this? There are several reasons.

First, those of you who attended the annual meeting were shown a graph of the synagogue membership. It has been on a steady decline for over a decade, due to our aging population, the departure of many older members and the lack of newer, younger members.

Second, we have a lack of participation by the existing membership in the synagogue. This itself is evidenced by the difficulties we have in making a minyan for our Zoom services, getting volunteers for the Board of Directors and its committees and ultimately by the fact that we still do not have anyone who has stepped up to be president, several months after the departure of Ethan Goldrich.

Finally, we have had financial difficulties for years, even before the Pandemic. We have run consistent deficits, and prior Boards have determined that if we lowered our overhead and expenses, we would have a good chance at breaking even. That is why we have embarked on the development project which hopefully will come to fruition over the next couple of years.

This year, our expenses have been lower because we have only been operating one building and some of our programming costs have been lower. But we also have had no Bingo income since March 2020 and probably won't until the Covid situation abates. We have also had only modest rental income since the Pandemic began from the School and Yad Yehuda. Like last year, we have not been able to sell seats for guests or visitors on the High Holidays. Yes, our expenses have not been as high as they normally are, but the drop in income has been way more than the drop in expenses.

But all is not lost! These are the High Holidays, where we say that "Repentance, Prayer and Charity can avert the severe decree!" All these things are correctable with your help.

With the reopening of the new building, we can start with a fresh coat of paint. We will be planning for the synagogue expansion; we will soon be hiring a new Program

Director and can anticipate a new cycle of programming. We have a membership committee that has been working very hard on ways to reach out and retain our current members while simultaneously attracting new members.

To accomplish these things, however, your participation is needed more than ever. So, my appeal to you on this Kol Nidre night is not only for your money but for your time as well. We have many committees that need help: Membership, Rites and Rituals, and Security to name a few. When we get into the synagogue expansion, we will need additional help. You can recruit your friends and neighbors to join the shul. You can even volunteer to be president and lead the charge out of the hole we are in so that we emerge stronger than ever!

Like last year, we hope that this year you can give more than in a normal year. As you can see, we are still not back to normal and don't anticipate normality for at least several months. I am defining normality here as being back in the new building and being done with all the repair and reconstruction. We cannot fully revive and recover if we do not have your generous help at this moment.

This year, when the High Holidays are over, you will be receiving a paper pledge card that we mailed to your home. Please, take a moment and show your support by mailing back the pledge card in the envelope we provided. You can also show your support instantly, by donating online on our website. We provided an electronic link in the Yom Kippur email that was sent Tuesday. Simply click on the link to donate on our website. Either way, please show your support. I am asking that you consider pledging at least twice what you would have pledged in a normal year, depending upon your resources. That will not come close to replacing the loss of our Bingo and other income, but it will certainly help.

One easy way to volunteer your time, besides calling the office, is to go to the HTAA website, click on Support tab at the top, and in the drop-down list you will find a link to Volunteer. Join the Sisterhood, or the Men's Club and participate in services. Our morning and evening weekday services are online via Zoom and we frequently cannot make a minyan in the morning and occasionally cannot in the evening. What you will get back from your volunteering is an unequal source of comfort in unquestionably uncertain times.

By the way, in the same place on the website you can elect to sponsor a Kiddush, Weekly Announcements, an Aliyah and numerous other things. You can also write in and allocate your pledge to any of these activities.

We have much to look forward to in the coming year. After the reopening of the new building, we anticipate signing contracts to proceed with the development program that we have been talking about which, on our end, will involve a small expansion and improvement to the new building. We will keep you updated periodically in the coming weeks and months.

I know that you will all give generously in whatever way that you can. As we begin the year 5782, we should be guided by our Sages' dictum in *Pirkei Avot*: "You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it."

Let me conclude by wishing you all an Easy Fast, a *Gmar Chatima Tova* for yourselves, for your families and for Congregation Har Tzeon Agudath Achim.

*Chag Sameach,*

**John Bleiweis, for the HTAA Board of Directors**