

August 3, 2020

Dear Beth Sholom Temple Community:

Shalom! I am Cantor Wendy Shermet, and have the privilege of sharing our *Yanim Noraim*, Days of Awe, with you in Fredericksburg this September.

I am the Cantor Emerita of Temple Israel in Omaha, Nebraska, having served there for 18 years. We lived on a small acreage with our son Sam, who is now a marine biologist, and a variety of horses, dogs, cats, goats, sheep and birds of all descriptions. My husband Len Burrell is a woodworker, and we moved to New Hampshire last fall. I was raised in Maryland, so serving a synagogue in Virginia is like coming home. It is wonderful to be able to continue utilizing my love and knowledge of Judaism and Jewish music, and am delighted to have this opportunity with you.

The BST High Holiday committee was diligently preparing even before Covid-19 became the threat we know it to be today. We have had regular online communication to formulate services that will speak to us and be meaningful despite the challenges all are facing. We can and will celebrate the beauty of this season, and share with each other as much as safely possible.

Synagogues of all dominations are grappling with this health crisis, and each Jewish movement has had regular webinars and Zoom classes to help rabbis, cantors and educators prepare for this unprecedented task. Each synagogue according to its size, means and focus will present what is important for its own community, and we at BST will do the same.

To that end, we have decided to hold all High Holiday services online via Zoom. I will be in the sanctuary for the entirety, along with the pianist, Jim Javinsky (providing tech support), and small handful of others who will help present the services. Additionally, those with ritual honors who choose to do so will sit in the pews wearing masks, and come up at the appropriate time. While the honorees are on the Bima, I will wear a mask. Otherwise these very few congregants will sit well away from the Bima. Honorees, including Torah readers, who do not feel comfortable being in the building can be taped in advance, and this will be shown as part of the service.

There will be moments, especially at the beginnings of services, for you to be unmuted. We will share candle lighting and Kiddush, and give all of you a moment to greet each other virtually and give online "hugs". BST volunteers will make sure that all congregants have a copy of *Mishkan Hanefesh* for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. The committee has decided that the beauty of text and readings is best experienced directly in your hands, rather than on a screen. More information about the distribution of texts will follow soon.

For the month of Elul, which precedes Rosh Hashana and begins the evening of Thursday, August 20, I have prepared a list of music which is accessible on YouTube. The music has been chosen from a variety of sources, cantors and composers, to help you aurally prepare for the season. Additionally there is a list of CD's that are either available online, or for purchase should you choose to go that route. I suggest starting on the first day of Elul and listening to at least one piece of music per day. The list, with appropriate YouTube links, will soon be available on the BST home page. Also, BST *Ba'al T'kiah* (shofar blower) extraordinaire Mike Haas will share a video

explaining the shofar calls, and do the ritual blowing of *T'kiah* once each day. These too will be linked from the BST web site.

For millennia, Jews have adapted to extraordinary circumstances. Reform Judaism is itself a response to the forces of Enlightenment and modernity. We evolve as events unfold while keeping *Torah, mitzvot* and *g'milut chasadim* at our core. Conservative Judaism was likewise an answer to challenges faced by European Jews arriving in America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Judaism is never stagnant, as we know by continuing responsa, involvement in our larger communities, and fresh melodies for settled texts.

I am grateful and excited to be a part of the Beth Sholom family, and pray that in the near future we can meet personally.

Health and peace,

Cantor Shermet