

**Lisa Hills' President's Report  
Annual Congregational Meeting  
Wednesday, May 20, 2015**

Good Evening. It's such a pleasure to welcome you to our Annual Congregational meeting. It has been a quick three years for me and, as my tenure draws to a close, it's been a chance for me to reflect on some of the highlights.

At the start of my Presidency, our leadership team focused on the theme of meaningful and personal connections. We sought to engage more members of our congregation by identifying personal interests, and reaching out to build deeper and more meaningful relationships. Two new officers, Danny Mandeau and Joanne Kazarian, were charged with creating opportunities to forge these personal connections and developing strategic initiatives that would both broaden and deepen community involvement.

A communications task force that included Rick Sands, Liz Goldstein, Jim Cohen, Kim Creem, David Bunis and Stuart Cole, designed a new publication that would tell the stories of our congregants, and Rachel Miller and Ruth Tepper quickly stepped up to be our *From the Gates* editors.

We made our space more inviting, adding the beautiful greeting table in the Leventhal-Sidman Community Court and the lovely conversational-seating areas. Thanks to Mindy Peckler's deft eye and creativity, our community court has featured everything from our children's "Chagall's", to photos from Sisterhood and Brotherhood events, to the beautiful and symbolic Passover cloth created by Leslie Bornstein-Stacks.

Rabbi Robinson and Joyce Bohnen initiated a new Family Rosh Hashanah service, a highlight of our High Holidays. And our Hazzan Rosemberg, continued to elevate our prayer through music, adding a cellist to set the somber tone for Kol Nidre and enhancing our Yom Kippur services with instruments. We welcomed a new Executive Director, the very dedicated Carrie Lavoie, we re-defined the role of the Ritual Committee and with Nate Birnbaum as the chair, our Religious Life Committee has initiated Challah Baking, Shabbat Kits for hospital visits, created "how-to's" for lifecycle events and brought honey and words of healing for Rosh Hashanah to those who suffered recent losses.

Eugenia Gerstein launched *iGenesis*, we welcomed Joe Kennedy, took the Ice Bucket Challenge, stood together for Israel, served together in Newton, we donated blood, hosted the Martin Luther King celebration, traveled together to Israel and sent impressive delegations to AIPAC.

We also mourned the loss of many treasured members of our congregation, perhaps, most profoundly, the loss of our beloved Rabbi Chiel.

This past year, another record-breaking one for us, kicked-off as usual with our Community Barbeque, and Rob Finkel, took it to new heights with our Teen Zone and featured Dunk Tank. And, we initiated a new Temple Emanuel tradition, the Annual Community Seder—250 people joining together inspired by the vision of our beloved Hazzan Rosemberg, joined by our

incredible Rabbi Robinson. And perhaps most significantly, we searched for, and hired, a third rabbi, Rabbi Evelyn Baz. And my thanks to our Search Co-Chairs, Stuart Cole and David Pemstein, as well as to all of the members of the Search Committee.

As we close this fiscal year, I'm very pleased to report that our membership stands strong at 1225 and our Annual Appeal is at an all-time high eclipsing \$1.1 million dollars.

But these numbers, tell only part of the story. We are all acutely aware of the realities of Conservative Judaism and the challenging landscape that has strained many of the synagogues in this area. Fortunately, we are paying great attention to these challenges and are investing significant time planning for our future.

In particular, our Board of Directors, joined by our professional colleagues, went off-site in November to learn from thought leaders, to surface critical issues, and to begin to create a sustainable vision for our community. Our retreat taught us about transitioning from the synagogue as "fortress" to a synagogue as "sea sponge"—a fluid, living organism, open, dynamic. It taught us about creating "thick" experiences for our teens, experiences that are substantive, meaningful. And it taught us that we must be-unafraid to re-consider our mental models and find new definitions for inclusive, warm and welcoming, definitions that speak to the young, the unaffiliated, the disinterested.

I particularly want to thank, our Board Chair, David Bunis and our Vice Chair, Jeff Goodman, for their exemplary design of the retreat and for guiding our post-retreat task forces, each charged with focusing on a specific issue ranging from membership to social action to ritual life to governance to youth to education. These task forces have enabled every board member to help generate responses that will significantly impact our community moving forward.

For me, I see these challenges as opportunities. Opportunities for rigorous self-assessment. Opportunities to re-interpret our programs and services as we re-imagine our future. Opportunities for creative and innovative solutions. And we have already begun to implement many of the ideas that have emerged these past few months.

For example, the challenge of our Nursery School enrollment has prompted us to launch initiatives such as the Gift of Early Education, providing meaningful financial support to families who choose to send their children to our Nursery School. While our Refer-a-Friend program incents our members to encourage their peers to join Temple Emanuel.

Our newly invigorated *D'or Chadash* program, under the talented leadership of Shoshana Jacob, has spawned wonderful activities targeted to young couples with infants and toddlers. From Taste of Shabbat to Stroller Walks, Shoshana has creatively thought about how to reach young families and has offered programs that speak directly to their needs and interests. And our new voluntary dues category, Next Generation, for those under 36, is another welcoming message to attract young members.

And, perhaps most importantly, our search for a third rabbi enabled us to engage our entire community in a wonderful dialogue about the importance of a rabbinic presence devoted to our teens. Including our teens in this process was a wonderful way to hear their voices and to ensure they will be central to all of our future endeavors.

As a thriving synagogue, I believe we have a responsibility to **lead** the Conservative movement. While many of our neighbors struggle with their short-term viability, we have the luxury and the opportunity to think boldly about our future.

**It is our restlessness, our lack of complacency, our ability to take risks and to ask ourselves hard questions, to strive for excellence in all aspects of our synagogue life, that keeps us thriving.**

I am **proud of us for responding** to the changing needs and interests of our community, re-thinking how we educate our children and re-imagining how to engage our teens.

I am proud of us for having conversations on topics that are sometimes uncomfortable like our perspectives on Israel or our feelings about Shabbat morning services.

And, I am proud that we have begun a meaningful dialogue on Interfaith marriage, and in doing so, we are leading the Conservative movement and we are working hard to be truly inclusive and welcoming.

And our high standards, our striving for excellence, starts at the top, it starts with the vision of our senior rabbi and the high bar Rabbi Gardenswartz sets for all of us.

Wes, I remember very clearly, that snowy morning in January, several years ago. It was a blizzard, schools closed, parking bans in effect, I was making my way down Ward Street, and, of course, the only other person out walking, was you. There we were, walking through the snow, on our way to one of our favorite things, *minyan*.

After *minyan*, we sat together in your study. You asked me about becoming President. My answer to you was quite simple, "I love this place." But, it was then, that moment in your study, that I felt the entire weight of the congregation, and what it would mean to assume this important leadership role. Would I be an able partner for you, keeping up with your tireless efforts, sufficiently supporting your vision, your zeal, your commitment to excellence? And, it pretty quickly became clear to me the answer would be "no." But I certainly would try.

Wes, we have logged many miles together, two trips to New York (both in snowstorms) to interview Rabbis, countless community events, hospital visits, *shiva* calls and, of course, standing side-by-side through many, many Shabbat services, *minyanim* and *chagim*. I hope in some small way I have provided you with the support and comfort you provide me, and our entire community. You are my advisor, my thought partner, my teacher, my rabbi, my friend. Thank you!

Of course, there has been another incredible source of comfort and wisdom to me these past few years. Joan, my dear friend, my partner in crime, my go-to and my source of great counsel, thank you for everything you have done to help me to navigate these past few years and thank you for the quiet strength and support you provide to countless members of our community.

There's no way I could adequately begin to thank everyone who has been so supportive and so wonderful to work with these past few years. At a dinner earlier this evening, I had the chance to thank and acknowledge the amazing members of our Board of Directors and our incredible staff. Some of you I have known a long time, like Carol, who has the distinction of having taught each of our four kids, or Wayne who was brave enough to travel to Israel on our trip of 200 or Ilene who partnered with me to reshape our Religious School. When we were without an Executive Director, I was so grateful that Tom, Jill, Devorah and Rich all stepped up and continue to be wonderful partners.

My participation in weekly senior staff meetings with Wes, Michelle, Elias, Dan, Carrie, Terri, Ilene, Wayne, Carol, Gil and Shoshana are a constant reminder of how lucky we are to have such a devoted and talented staff. And, finally, the highlight of my week is Shabbat and what an honor to share the bima with Wes, Michelle, Elias, Dan and, Stuart, and of course, the good-humored Rick Thau along with Danny Mandeau (and I'm sorry that Danny couldn't be here tonight) ensure that every Shabbat is so special. Rick, I would be remiss if I did not give you special mention. *[informal comments thanking Rick]*

*[Please note: Lisa acknowledged and thanked the many people who have been a wonderful source of support and have partnered with her these past three years.]*

### **Recognition of Leadership Transitions**

Tonight, our congregation voted on our new Slate of Officers and our incoming Board of Directors and Board of Trustees. And what a fabulous and talented group of lay leaders! I know you will thoughtfully guide us through this next chapter. ***[Please note: outgoing Officers, Directors and Trustees were acknowledged and thanked earlier on the agenda as part of the Nominating/Governance process and the election of new lay leaders. David Bunis, Chair of the Board and Jeff Goodman, Vice Chair of the Board were also given special recognition.]***

Now, Stuart, my wonderful friend, my bima buddy and my fellow synagogue leader and partner these past three years: You are going to be a great President! You have all of the qualities and requisite skills: vast experience with budget, finance, operations, you have sat through countless board meetings, you know how to create a fabulous agenda, you are well-versed in bima protocol and Kiddush conversation. *[Lisa made informal remarks providing Stuart with "insider information" and some essential "tools" to jumpstart his presidency.]*

Finally, apparently my closing "Much Love" has become a signature of my presidency. You will find your own signature, your hallmark. But, Stuart, at the heart of serving as our President is love. It's what differentiates serving as a synagogue president and what defines the strength, the connectedness, the passion of this community. And I know that you will bring your love for "all things Temple Emanuel" to your presidency and I am equally certain that you will be touched by the love that you will feel in turn as president.

May we all go together from strength to strength. Thank you for the privilege of serving.