

**Update to the Congregation**  
**May 4, 2021**

Title: Staff Changes, Building Reopening and Let My Steeple Go! An Executive Director Update

Dear Friends,

This has been quite a year for us as individuals and as a community; we have faced numerous challenges and responded as we do at Kehilla, by building community, caring for each other and working for justice. We organized Mishpacha Groups, honored our members who died and their families despite the pandemic, provided supplies to folks living on the streets, offered housing to refugees in need and engaged our congregation in an Arc of Change racial justice initiative.

I am writing to inform you about the work of the Kehilla board and staff on a number of important institutional issues and initiatives that impact you. We will be expanding on some of them at our Annual Community Meeting on Monday, May 10 at 7:00 p.m. and in future articles.

**Finances & Membership**

As the gravity of the pandemic presented itself, the future was uncertain for individuals in our community and for Kehilla. We prepared for the worst: re-working the budget and eliminating many of the things we had hoped to do in the coming year. In the end, our community, through its commitment and love of Kehilla, came through and we have ended the year in good stead.

Our membership grew from 504 to 546 households, including a remarkable 80 *new* member households. In addition to the many hundreds of Kehilla members who attended our virtual High Holy Day services, we were joined by 900 non-member households. We instituted a Sustaining Dues framework which indicated to members the average cost per household per year to sustainably run Kehilla, and invited members to help meet that amount. And you did, making significant dues pledges and on top of that, giving generous donations. We were able to pay all of our bills this year and have taken steps to address significant unmet needs for our building, accessibility, technology upgrades for streaming, and others.

**Staffing**

Even before the pandemic, it had become clear that we needed to increase our staff capacity to serve our continually growing congregation. Unfortunately, initiatives towards this end were postponed last Spring. Those needs still exist, and given our growth and the increasing demands on our staff due to working under COVID, we are committed to addressing this need for staff in several ways:

- We are increasing our clergy staffing - see the "Exciting Spiritual Leadership Updates for 2021-22" article on this same web page for details.
- We are increasing our financial capacity by hiring a bookkeeper to work considerable more hours than we currently have. Our bookkeeper, Molly Melamed, will direct the training and transition and then stay on as a bookkeeping consultant. We owe Molly an incredible debt of gratitude for her work over the past eight years, creating financial

systems that have allowed us to continue to function well through this major period of growth.

- Former Kehilla Program and Communications Manager, Maya Joshua and our last year's High Holy Day Project Manager, Maggie Grabmeier, will both be working part-time to support our programming this year.
- Hazzan Shulamit and Rabbi Dev have each been working for Kehilla for over 10 years, and the Kehilla Board of Trustees, for the first time, approved six-month sabbaticals for each of them. These sabbaticals, which will be taken over a two year period, will be important to ensuring the long-term sustainability of their roles as our primary spiritual leaders. More details about how the sabbaticals will work will be shared soon.

### **Where Oh Where Will Our Steeple Go?**

Even though we have been closed for the past year, our Grand Avenue home has been in need of attention, and I am excited to say that we are beginning to remedy some of the major issues. We have had a significant leak from the steeple area of the roof for years, and in the next couple of months, we will be removing the steeple, patching the roof and repairing the water damage below. We are also sealing leaks in the front stairs and eliminating the mold below in the Custodial Closet.

We have recently contracted with an experienced facilities manager to work over the next eight months to identify, cost out, and prioritize all capital improvements, repairs and renovations that are needed to maintain Kehilla's building as a safe and well-functioning facility.

### **Returning to the Building and In-person Gatherings**

As pandemic conditions continue to change and more people are vaccinated, we are considering when and how to begin our return to the building and in-person gathering. Our Public Health Task Force, guided by sound public health advice, will make these decisions, as we have throughout the pandemic, guided by the values of connection, accessibility, equity, and health and safety.

We know some things at this juncture:

- Our main High Holy Day services will again be on Zoom. We hope that our Bima Team will be able to be together in our sanctuary, and we're planning ways to support you to gather as smaller communities of prayer in homes and backyards.
- We're planning to bring back our Mishpacha Groups (small groups organized around a theme, affinity, or geographical location), so stay tuned for a call for proposals shortly and the opportunity to sign up for a group later in the summer. We also plan to do one or two outdoor community gatherings like Tashlich, along with other ways to keep building our community and sense of connection.
- When we're able to have Shabbat services in person again, we will use a hybrid model (in-person + Zoom) to maintain accessibility for people who aren't able to be physically present.

We'll stay in touch as things become clearer, and we'll be inviting you to help build these hubs of community and connection. More details will come soon after the Annual Community Meeting.

**Annual Kehilla Community Meeting**

If you would like to hear more about these issues and others, join us at the **Annual Kehilla Community Meeting, Monday, May 10, 7:00-9:00pm.** [Please register in advance.](#)

I am excited for this upcoming fiscal year and the opportunity to engage with more and more of you.

B'shalom,

Michael Saxe-Taller  
Executive Director