

Cantor Vera Broekhuysen

Annual Report

Temple Emanu-El

Haverhill, MA

May 3rd, 2020

Dear chevre,

This has been a year of wonderful growth for our Temple life, interrupted by tumult and separation - which has also led to great innovation. These past 12 months together have been a rollercoaster ride.

First, the growth: so much that was new! Let me lead you back through the unfolding of this year. Rabbinical Intern Jen Stevens became part of our Temple life this summer, and immediately began leading beautiful services and making beautiful connections in our community. Maya Elkind, Dayton Fisher and Angelina Lucia all celebrated becoming b'nei mitzvah – mazal tov to you and your families, and nakhes, happy pride, to us all. Our Temple joined with three other Reform synagogues to offer a very successful Introduction to Judaism class that ran throughout the fall and winter, with two dozen students. We celebrated Sukkot together in a beautiful new sukkah the colour of the sands our people wandered in (thank you Bob and Barbara Berman!). Our teens attended the ADL forum on antisemitism, “The Good Fight,” in October on the anniversary of Pittsburgh. We hosted Kristallnacht, a deeply meaningful commemoration of the Sho’ah, in a service developed by the Center for the Study of Jewish-Christian-Muslim Relations at Merrimack College; and Gerda Kallman shared her own incredible story of survival with us. A Music Committee formed, with the leadership of Rachel Hanson, and brought Rabbi Or Zohar of the Galilee to us for a wonderful weekend of music and spiritual teachings, in collaboration with Bashert of CBI and sacred drummer Mitch Gordon. Rabbi Zohar’s visit came just two weeks before a very well-attended Martin Luther King, Jr. Shabbat service, at which Sheila Upchurch brought the beauty of liturgical dance into our sanctuary for the first time. We continued our support of immigrants among us, including asylum seeker Marius. We deepened our understanding of why people come to the US seeking refuge. After I returned in February from a week in Guatemala as a Global Justice Fellow with American Jewish World Service, we heard directly as a congregation from a young woman, a Guatemalan national and Lawrence resident whose told us, juggling her infant daughter, about the crippling poverty and gender-based violence from which she’d fled. We celebrated our first communal, all-ages Tu BiShvat seder and tasted spring’s sweetness amid winter’s cold. And then came a raucous, dazzling Purim, with our high schoolers’ sidesplitting shpiel.

Four days later, our Temple space was physically closed, and our 7th graders led our very first Zoomed Shabbat service.

Coronavirus has defined a time of loss, for us. In-person education and, for some, work, suddenly became impossible. Events and celebrations and medical procedures long-planned have had to be postponed or canceled. Public physical distancing has often resulted in no personal space, physical or mental, at home. Some of us have lost needed income and the security that came with it. And every one of us has someone, I think, who your arms are aching to hug. We move our bodies less yet feel more tired as we concentrated hard on screens that help make the connections we crave, without all of the other surrounding elements – spatial relationship, smell, touch – that informs our in-person interactions.

Quarantine is hard.

Quarantine has also brought out a truly amazing amount of creativity and nimbleness in our community. Our religious school teachers pivoted on a dime, learned a new platform, and started offering Zoomed sessions on March 22nd. Attendance and participation in our weekly virtual Shabbat

evening, Shabbat morning and Havdalah services is significantly higher than before. (Help **that** effect endure!) We held our first community seder – by Zoom! – with more than 25 households participating. Our Yom HaSho'ah service on April 17th drew an online crowd of 63 households as speaker Helen Epstein shared her mother Franci's compelling story of surviving Nazi rule of Hungary and multiple concentration camps. Our Chesed Committee and the full Board of Directors sprang into action, calling all of our members to check on each person and make sure their needs don't go unmet. We've connected with our neighbours too through the Haverhill 3-1-1 switchboard, and brought donations to Emmaus House so that the extremely vulnerable homeless population continues to get our support when they need it most.

Uncertainty doesn't feel great. But we may not know for quite some time, exactly when and how it will be safe for us to gather together again in the Temple. And when we do, we'll likely not be all able to gather in the same numbers we used to. So a big question for me is, if things are not "back to normal" in September, how can we work together to create a meaningful and satisfying experience of the Yamim Nora'im, the Days of Awe for our community with some physical distancing still in place?

In the coming weeks, I and other community members will be reaching out to you to hear from you about what matters most to you in your High Holy Day observances, as we begin to plan for different models of what may be possible in the fall. What is the moment, or piece of liturgy, that resonates the most for you in those holy days? How important are familiar elements of our services the way we've done them – the visuals of the sanctuary, the traditional machzor we use, the older melodies? What are the ways in which you look forward to connecting with other members during these services? Are there elements of your own personal, home practice for the Yamim Nora'im that the Temple can help support, or adapt to share? Start to think about these questions, and please let me and our High Holy Day Committee know your thoughts.

We need to thank one another, in this time, publicly, for public service. So, we say Todah rabbah – a great big thank you, Robin Zaremba, who has finally stepped down after 13 years of creating our Temple Bulletins. Robin, we have so appreciated and benefited from your beautiful work!

And many more thanks are due.

To our Committee Chairs: David Belsky of Social Action, Lisa Desberg of the PTO, Laura Flieder and Rona Gofstein of Youth, Andi Hannula of Religious School, Rachel Hanson of our new Music Committee, Sandra Kassin-Deardorff of Religious Practices, Jenn Lampron of Membership, Kevin Miller of Dues, Judd Nathan of Budget & Investment, Karen Newborn of Adult Ed, Sharyn Russell of Chesed, Eva Valentine of House.

To our choir: Teresa Brugman, Sandra Deardorff, Josh Flieder, Rachel Hanson, Jay Harris, Amy Moldoff, Phil Platcow, Tirzah Shalek, Sue Shwom, Joy Silvey, Betsy Webb, and collaborative pianist David Collins.

To our incredible Religious School teachers: Kimberly Breen Callan, Susan Gold, Rachel Hanson, Eunice Miller, and Trudy Zakin.

To Joy Silvey for providing IT support and helping our members get set up with Zoom.

To my colleagues, our professional staff: Nancy LaFleur, Debbi Levasseur, Cheryl Hill, Sheila Brown and Don Kumis, as well as to Paula Breger, our volunteer Communications Director & Librarian.

To our fantastic rabbinical intern Jen Stevens, who's shared humour and warmth, new Torah and new tunes, a beautiful voice and neshama (soul) with us all year. We will miss you greatly!

To our dedicated and talented Board of Directors, led by Temple President Loren Goldstein and Vice President Jenn Lampron.

And to each and every one of you, who make our Temple community the kind, vigorous, intellectually curious, holy place it is. You will continue to create Temple Emanu-El's future. And if we're quarantined, dear ones, there's no place I'd rather be than right here with you.

Temple Emanu-El is our spiritual home. Let's keep those home fires burning and build them up.

Bivracha, in blessing,

- Cantor Vera