



## CONGREGATIONAL MEETING MINUTES June 13, 2021—Via Zoom

**Opening and Welcome, Mike Diamond, President:** Mike opened the meeting at 4:00pm with presenters streaming live from the Joan and Ephraim Sales Community Center, noting that this is a day of celebration and a full agenda, including updates and important votes on the 2021-2022 budget, the revised Bylaws, and the officers and new members of the Board of Trustees. He stated that the special meeting to review the new budget and the Bylaws was well attended. A video highlight of 2020-2021 followed with Cantor Tifani Coyot providing the background music.

**D'var Torah, Rabbi Dara Frimmer:** Rabbi Dara shared a story from the LA Times about a herd of elephants approaching a heavily populated city in China and creating panic after traveling 300 miles from a nature reserve. An Asian elephant expert explained about the longest migration ever recorded that "It's possible their leader lacked experience and led the whole group astray." To be a leader, especially a Jewish leader in unusual times is difficult: In this week's Torah portion, Moses, having suffered a bad week, learns that a leader is not the sum total but rather it's the community members who continue the hard work of completing the journey. Similarly, we at Temple Isaiah have walked miles into spaces we did not recognize but soon discovered all that we had, especially each other. The most important acknowledgement is the role each congregant played in supporting and protecting Temple Isaiah as we made our way.

**Approval of Minutes from the Annual Congregational Meeting June 13, 2020:** A motion was made for approval of the minutes by Eileen Lewis and seconded by Peter Davidson. The minutes were approved with 47 voting yes and 4 abstaining.

**Awards Presentation (Part One), Jessica Dabney, Executive Vice President:** One of the many ways we acknowledge leadership is by giving awards. Jessica, on behalf of Rabbi Jaclyn Cohen, presented the Youth Award to Ella Harel and Rafe Mori, ITY co-presidents, who have demonstrated poise, creativity and resilience this past year. Mike Diamond presented the Staff Award, given every two years, to Chris Falone who was integral to the process of refurbishing the Sales Community Center, who oversaw the CDC protocols for preschool, and who played an instrumental role in hiring Centurion Security and making our custodial staff in-house. Rabbi Dara presented the Emerging Leaders Award to Brittany Finney and James Conlon who arrived in Los Angeles, found Temple Isaiah and Shabbat services, joined committees and Torah study; James created many of the panels presented through Civics in the Synagogue and Britt joined the Board. Rabbi Dara introduced Carly Rosenstein and Rabbi Jim Rogozen from BJE who presented Tamar Andrews, Director of Early Childhood Education and Engagement, with the Lainer Distinguished Educator Award.

**Presentation on Bylaws, Mike Diamond:** Mike said that he built upon the work of David Leichenger and Jessica Dabney and moved it forward to do a complete revision. The purpose was to bring the Bylaws into alignment with the CA Code and reflect our priorities as a temple. The companion document is the Operating Procedures and Policies Manual which can easily be changed and updated by the Board annually. Susan Bartholomew and Jon Cohen headed the project. The major changes were retitling the VP of Administration to VP of Personnel; identifying the roles of Finance and Endowment Committees; calling virtual meetings as appropriate; reducing the number of standing committees to 6 (others are in the Operating Manual); presidential term will be one two-year term; composition of the Board will include all past presidents and elected officers and trustees with the appointed positions removed (PAC, IW president, ITY president). A motion to approve the new Bylaws was made by Wendy Plottel, seconded by Suzanne Solig. The motion was approved with 49 voting yes and 2 abstaining.

**Memorial Remembrance for Michelle Heller:** Rabbi Dara Frimmer said that the tradition of honoring a loved one and her/his legacy is one done with intention. A video with the voice of Susan Bartholomew highlighted Michelle's journey starting with her joining the temple in 2001, sitting on the Board in 2006, and in 2009 taking the position of secretary for the next eight years.

**Awards Presentation (Part Two), Jessica Dabney:** Just as Michelle gave so much to Temple Isaiah, so have the next recipients. Rabbi Dara gave the Social Justice Award to Idelle Davidson for working on voter engagement and the Civics in the Synagogue series, demonstrating endurance and careful planning. In her remarks, Idelle noted that before COVID she had gathered small groups to register new voters; during COVID she engaged congregants to work on the "Every Voice, Every Vote" post card campaign with the result that Temple Isaiah wrote 20,000 post cards (second in the country) and participated in phone banks. Mike Diamond presented Jessica Dabney with the Hineinu Award for her dedication and positive energy. Rabbi Dara Frimmer presented Elaine Diamond with the Woman of Valor Award for her leading Daughters of Torah, anchoring the Caring Community, singing in HaSharim, being a dedicated learner and a pursuer of justice.

**Treasurer's Report, Allie Samek:** Instead of the \$1.4 million projected loss for 2020-2021, we ended the year with a projected surplus of \$257,386, due to an increase in contribution from the preschool, annual giving more than doubling what was projected, and membership dues not falling as predicted. We struggled on the camp-front and K-12 because of COVID and zoom fatigue. We received two PPP forgivable loans of \$2.1 million and were able to give "gratitude" payments of \$92,225 to staff and teachers. The Joan and Ephraim Sales' gift of \$1.4 million allowed us to use \$1 million to pay down the mortgage on the adjacent building named in their memory.

Highlights of the Fiscal Year Budget 2021-2022:

- Revenue is based on the following projections: Membership will increase by approximately \$200,000 over last year even with no increase in dues and is projected to be \$2.1 million. Religious School projected revenue will increase by \$219,000 as K-12 returns to in-person programming with \$390,000 as projected revenue. Annual Giving is projected to be \$600,000 (last year's \$1 million likely had a number of one-time gifts). Preschool with a maximum of 300 students, 5 days per week, is projected to bring in \$4 million.
- Expenses: All salaries were reinstated to prior levels. The personnel committee authorized a 2% cost of living increase but are remaining prudent with spending as we

see how the impact of COVID plays out. Reduction in URJ dues amounts to \$37,500. Chai Village LA will receive \$30,000 each year for the next three years.

- Takeaway: We are in a strong cash position. If that continues, the Budget Committee recommends that this spring would be an appropriate time to use some of the funds for a moderate capital project (\$200-500,000). A Facilities Committee will be formed with a broad scope of members to evaluate and prioritize what project(s) this money should be used for.

Allie concluded with her thoughts as Treasurer:

- What will our Annual Giving and Membership revenue contribute now that the crisis of COVID is behind us? Will the level of commitment continue?
- We rely on our preschool for its contribution to membership as well as the revenue it produces. Many of these families are transactional. What does a less transactional and more relational preschool look like in the future?
- While we have cash to protect us from the next crisis and are mindful of setting most of it aside, we need to look at some long over-due capital improvements.
- Our Clergy and staff are our most valued asset. How do we ensure that we retain and attract top talent while not feeling burdened by increasing salaries?

**Congregational Report, Rabbi Dara Frimmer:** Acknowledging gratitude for the musical and spiritual gifts that Cantor Tifani Coyot has given this congregation, she said that the search for a cantor will begin after the high holy days with a start date of July 1, 2022. Rabbi Jaclyn Cohen will begin a full-time role as Associate Rabbi, overseeing the ritual department, pastoral care, and K-12. She will be on maternity leave July-October but has prerecorded high holiday music. Rabbi Dara is working with Cantor Evan Kent to headline an artist-in-residence weekend in 2022. Rabbi Zoe Klein Miles has been at Temple Isaiah for 21 years and Rabbi Dara has been here 15 years as of July 1, 2021.

**Clergy Contracts, Mike Diamond:** The contracts have been approved by the Personnel Committee and the Board of Trustees. The Bylaws (Article 7.C) set the discussion: The compensation and terms shall be approved by a majority vote of those present at the congregational meeting if "the salary and terms exceed the average salary/total compensation set forth in the most current information on rabbinical compensation published by the Central Conference of American Rabbi and Union for Reform Judaism ... and/or the Personnel Committee and/or the Board determines it is in the best interest of the Congregation to do so." While two contracts do not exceed the salaries and terms, Rabbi Dara's does, and in the interest of transparency, the other clergy contracts are also referenced here. Rabbi Dara's contract is 5 years with a salary of \$263,000 for the first year (this exceeds URJ's by \$3-4000) with a 4% annual raise. Rabbi Zoe's contract is 3 years with a salary of \$229,500, and Rabbi Jaclyn's is one year with a \$135,000 salary. Jessica Dabney moved to approve Rabbi Dara's contract and Brittany Finney seconded the motion. The vote: yes-41, no-0, abstention-3. Beth Braen moved to approve Rabbi Zoe's contract and Idelle Davidson seconded the motion. The vote: yes-41, no-0, abstention-1. Wendy Plottel moved to approve Rabbi Jaclyn's contract and Brittany Finney seconded the motion: The vote: yes-41, no-0, abstention-0. All three contracts are approved.

**Vote to Approve the FY Budget 2021-2022:** Harris Smith made the motion to approve the budget and Jessica Dabney seconded the motion: The vote: yes-38, no-0, abstention-2.

**Presentation and Slate of Officers and Trustees 2021-2022:** David Leichenger, Immediate Past President and Co-Chair of the Nominating Committee, commended the outgoing president for an outstanding job during such a challenging year. He summarized the nominating process, thanked his committee, and presented the slate of nominees.

Executive Committee: all officers are elected to 2-year terms

- President: Allison Samek
- Executive Vice President: Beth Raanan
- Vice President of Personnel: Sam Surloff
- Vice President of Development: Kristen Lonner
- Treasurer: Harris Smith
- Vice President of Education: Sharon DeMayo
- Vice President of Membership: David Snow
- Vice President of Social Justice: Janet Hirsch
- Secretary: Suzanne Solig

Board of Trustees:

- Katie Berman – 1-year term
- Tracy Cohen Shabsis - 3-year term
- Jessica Dabney – 3-year term
- Steve Fox – 3-year term
- Robert Kahn – 2-year term
- Richard Birnholz – 3-year term
- David Chiu – 3-year term

Two motions were made. Idelle Davidson moved to accept the slate for the Executive Committee Officers and Jessica Dabney seconded the motion. The vote: yes-43, no-0, abstention-1.

Eileen Lewis moved to accept the slate of the Board of Trustees and Kristen Lonner seconded the motion. The vote: yes-42, no-0, abstention-0.

Both motions passed.

**Remarks, Senior Rabbi Dara Frimmer:** Optimism and public health safety have driven the plans for High Holy Days: the services will be live-streamed from Temple Isaiah with every adult choosing one in-person service to attend. Prerecorded music videos from Rabbi Jaclyn Cohen and Cantor Evan Kent will air and the voices of Gabriel Mann, Danny Rubenstein and Rabbi Allenberg will be live. Martin Maksar will be the shofar blower. She said that an email would come out to the congregation about the High Holy Day services in the coming week; she encouraged “watch parties.”

**President’s Congregational Report and Remarks, Mike Diamond:** Reflecting on his time as president, Mike recalled the words of Rabbi Dara in last year’s Kol Nidre sermon when Moses asked for a miracle to save the Israelites at the edge of the Red Sea. God yells back, “Stop praying. Do something. Raise up your staff!” This community’s commitment to action and resilience is what stabilized our Temple and is reflected in this year’s accomplishments:

- Obtained two \$1,055,000 PPP loans (the first has been forgiven and the second will be soon) with thanks to Harris Smith
- Received a \$150,000 Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) and in process is a \$150,000 Nonprofit Security Grant for safety and security needs
- Will end the year with a small surplus instead of the anticipated million-dollar loss
- Received over one million dollars of financial support from the community
- Purchased the Joan and Ephraim Sales Community Center, received a gift from the Sales Family to reduce the mortgage by \$1 million, and received from David Levine and Sherrie Zacharias \$500,000 over a five-year period to refurbish the building
- Hired a new Executive Director, Deborah Moses, who will join us July 19<sup>th</sup>
- Thanked Michael Cantor for serving 7 years as Executive Director and wished him well in the next phase of his career
- Renewed the clergy contracts and that of Reuben Posner, Senior Director of K-12 Education and Engagement with thanks to Sam Surloff and the Personnel Committee
- Thanked and wished Cantor Tifani Coyot well after serving 8 years as our Cantor
- Brought custodial staff in-house as employees of Temple Isaiah
- Reinforced our security with the hiring of a new company, Centurion
- Began the process of reopening our campus and holding in-person Shabbat services on the Vollmer Deck
- Completed the two-year process of revising our Bylaws and creating an Operating Procedures and Policies for our Board with thanks to Jessica Dabney for starting the process, the co-chairs Susan Bartholomew and Jon Cohen and their committee
- Transitioned to a smaller, but highly successful preschool thanks to Tamar Andrews and her team
- Transitioned to a virtual environment for our rituals, our K-12 classes, and programming created by our clergy and lay leaders from Social Justice, the Green Team, Chai Village LA, and Isaiah Women

Mike concluded by saying that this has been a productive year in spite of COVID's challenges. Like Moses, all of us heard a call for action and acted resiliently and with hope together as a community to position Temple Isaiah well for a sustainable future. This temple is special with its incredible team of Clergy that led us through such a difficult time, with a staff who work behind scenes to sustain us, with the commitment of education directors and teachers, and with the lay leaders and congregants who never said no when asked to do something.

**Past President, Beth Braen:** She thanked Rabbi Dara and Mike Diamond, noting that their leadership and partnership was an inspiration to all. She read two letters of thanks from past presidents Barry Korn and Susan Needelman and presented videos from past presidents Steve Jamieson, Terry Pullan, David Leichenger and Honey Amado.

**Remarks, Incoming President, Allie Samek:** Like so many others, Allie joined Isaiah 15 years ago when her first-born son was 6 months old. She was involved in Tot Shabbat, was PAC Chair, participated in the Rabbinic Reorganization, was Vice President of Education and most recently treasurer. She stated that her priorities lie in two areas: 1) a year of stability and back to our roots of education and social justice and 2) fiscal sustainability with focus on membership, giving, education, and determining who we want to be. She thanked all of her mentors and closed the meeting at 6:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Suzanne Solig, Secretary