

President's Report and Remarks For FY 2019-20

I am extremely honored to have served as Temple Isaiah's president this year and am now looking ahead to next year. It is understatement to say that our community has experienced two divergent realities over the past 12 months— one of joy, fulfillment and accomplishment, but unfortunately another one of upheaval, fear and concern. #beingisaian is the community thread that has held us together and I believe strengthened us during this difficult time. I am confident it will continue to do so next year and well into the future.

As we gather together virtually for our congregational meeting, a first for Temple Isaiah, I hope you will take a few minutes to read the reports of our Vice Presidents that provide summaries of their activities and accomplishments. I know that the budget report prepared by our Treasurer, Allie Samek, will be particularly significant this year and we will allocate sufficient time at the upcoming congregational meeting for a discussion of how COVID-19 affected our financial position this year and how it is likely to affect us in future years.

While the last three months have been very challenging for all of us individually and for our community collectively, I do want to highlight three key events:

- Each fall our congregation gathers for the High Holy Days to celebrate, pray and reflect together. This past year's services led by our Senior Rabbi Dara Frimmer, along with our wonderful clergy team, foreshadowed many of our current conflicts. In her Rosh Hashanah sermon, Rabbi Dara focused on anti-Semitism and our experiences as a minority and an oppressed people, but her words had a universal message for us as Jews:

Good news. Deep discomfort, internal conflict...that's our sweet spot. If anyone can teach America how to deal with it, it's us.

We know when Jews make a decision based on fear, we diminish who we are and who we can be. And we don't want to write that story. Neither for ourselves nor for our nation.

America is changing. Some say the country we hoped to pass on to our children may be gone forever. I do not believe that. I believe it is time to take back authorship of America's narrative.

Similarly, Rabbi Zoe reminded us of the importance of focusing on the potential in each one of us. She noted, *"It is hard to do, sometimes nearly impossible. But if how we see people can change people, and ourselves, it is worth exploring,"* and gave us examples of how to move from anger and confusion to embrace. Advice we all need as we enter this new year.

- In early December, we completed the purchase of Isaiah-East, a property we had been hoping to acquire for many years. This acquisition gives us both the opportunity and challenge to carefully consider the highest and best use

of the property, not only now but over the coming decades. Although somewhat slowed by the COVID-19 crisis, Beth Raanan and David Snow, working with an excellent group of congregants and lay leaders, are exploring different ideas for specific uses of Isaiah-East. Our goal is to make Isaiah-East a tangible representation of our vision of *Being your home at the intersection of tradition and innovation*.

- Our Purim carnival was a fun community gathering, which in retrospect turned out to be one of the last events we were able to enjoy in person. I did not even mind getting dunked a few times!

Of course, so much of our lives changed in early March when COVID-19 forced us to close our building, suspending all in-person gatherings including Shabbat services, celebrations and our schools. We quickly pivoted to virtual and on-line gatherings and activities that have served us well over the last three months. Our clergy have been extraordinary in their ability to meet our community's many spiritual and personal needs, ranging from life cycle events to our weekly Shabbat services. Of course, during this time we have developed an ambivalent relationship with Zoom! While we are all anxious to return to our building, we have learned much from our experiences that will enable us to reach more of our congregants in new and different ways. For example, Reuben Posner, our Senior Director for K-12 Education and Engagement, has worked with the Board of

Trustees, the clergy and a dedicated group of lay leaders to revamp our religious education, including revising current programs and developing new ones, some of which will be virtual.

Our task now is to prepare for the reopening of our building, restarting our schools, in-person programs and activities, and take the lessons learned from the past few months to strengthen our community and build support for each other through #beingisaian. A colleague of mine, the President of Drexel University reflecting on managing through a crisis remarked, *“I learned that anything I thought couldn’t happen seemed to keep eventually happening.”* The COVID-19 pandemic and the recent tragic death of George Floyd with the ensuing civil unrest makes this point very clear. Rabbi Dara concluded her Rosh Hashanah sermon last year by reminding us, *“We are not stuck in a story of hate. We are the authors of the most ancient and inspiring story of liberation. A story that reminds us that transformation is possible. That slaves can become liberators. That weakness is a touchpoint for strength.”*

Throughout its almost 75year history, Temple Isaiah has been at the forefront of social justice issues within our community, our city, our state and our nation.

Today let us recommit to these efforts.

I ended last year's congregational message with the story of Moses which is worth repeating now:

Our role as lay leaders is complicated as we confront issues and challenges that require us to listen to one another, be open to new ideas and to work together. Throughout Moses journey he experienced frustration and enough anger to smash the first set of the Ten Commandments. Of course, I know we will not reach that level of exasperation, but with all of us working together -- the Board, the Clergy, staff and of course congregants and our great custodial and security crew, I expect we will achieve great things for Temple Isaiah.

As we begin this new fiscal year and prepare for the Jewish year 5781, I look forward to serving another year as the president of our temple as we continue to work together to recover and to strengthen our Isaiah community. Thank you for your support and vote of confidence.