

All,

It is with sadness that I tell you that at the July 16 Board meeting, Rabbi Latz, Alison Olig and I proposed that **our building will remain generally closed through December 31, 2020** and the Board gave its unanimous support.

We are confident that this is the right decision. The confidence comes from [data](#) and science. Sometimes numbers are abstract and slippery, so I will share that leadership is also thinking of a physician congregant telling us they are breaking under the weight of pronouncing COVID victims dead, medically isolated and thus without family to care for or comfort them in their dying. Masks work, physical distancing works, minimizing contact works, but you need only glance at the headlines to see that too many Americans are not caring for themselves or their fellows.

We take our obligation to your safety incredibly seriously. We also take our obligation to our community's safety incredibly seriously. The Babylonian Talmud guides us: "Whoever destroys a single life is considered to have destroyed the whole world, and whoever saves a single life is considered to have saved the whole world." Of course, we aren't insisting on a risk-free world, but we do insist on one where real risks can be sensibly mitigated. Our country's leaders have failed to contain COVID-19 and we are all bearing the costs of that malign incompetence.

With no intention to minimize 150,000 dead—and the pain felt by those who loved them—and the uncounted thousands with life-altering long-term health effects and the millions suffering significant economic disruption, I also know that the decision to keep our building shuttered causes great sadness. I am sad myself. There's plenty of loss to go around, unfortunately, and we can both mourn the most catastrophic effects (and practice and organize and vote for mitigation) and also be hurt because we can't sing together in person, because we can't hug, because we can't look into the eyes of a fellow congregant and feel seen and held and in physical community.

I want to be clear that "social distancing" is an important public health principle but it is mislabeled: it is "physical distancing." This public health strategy does not mean practicing emotional, spiritual, or communal distance. We are not distant. We are right here in our *kehillah kedosha* that has now extended to your dining room table, your couch, your front steps.

We are making do, we are getting by, because we always have, because our Judaism comes from such a deep spring within us. And, yes, we have discovered a few novel benefits (*shalom*, out-of-state congregants!) and, yes, we have had surprising warmth and engagement, but there's no erasing the fact that—and pardon the language, please—COVID sucks. And—pardon the tantrum, please—being responsible humans, as we are called to be, also sometimes sucks. But responsible we are and responsible we will remain.

The rabbis have been in contact with those whose planned *simchas* (celebrations) will be altered by the continued building closure. If this is you and you have not heard from someone, or you had something you were hoping to launch this fall, please reach out to [Rabbi Latz](#), [Rabbi Rappaport](#), or [Rabbi Lekach-Rosenberg](#). If you need to talk through how this decision lands for you, please reach out to the rabbis.

Alongside the COVID-19 pandemic, our hearts are breaking open over how isolation and loneliness are also contagious and sometimes become (or exacerbate) mental illness. If you are concerned about your or a loved one's mental health, please consider reaching out to [Jewish Family and Children's Services](#), [NAMI-MN](#), or call the national suicide prevention hotline for immediate support at 1-800-273-TALK.

We will continue to gather and worship on Zoom. We will continue to follow the guidelines of the Minnesota Rabbinical Association when it comes to funerals, guidelines which, since their March iteration, have loosened somewhat in favor of minimal gathering. We have developed, and will soon roll out, an array of different modalities of engagement for the High Holy Days and for religious school. We will continue to look for ways to support small, distanced gathering among congregants. And we will change course if it seems wise to do so.

Thank you and announcements of new chairs

Shir Tikvah has been blessed to have the services of two amazing people: Bonnie Westlin, not only on the Board (where she continues), but as the co-chair of the Caring Community Committee (from which she is retiring), and Robin Miller, not only on the Board (where she just wrapped up a term) but as co-chair of the Caring Community Committee (where she will be continuing as a member). They've been workhorses of love for our whole community. What's causing them to step back a bit? *Bonnie Westlin for State Senate*, where Bonnie is the candidate and Robin the campaign manager. Thank you, Bonnie and Robin, for all you do and have done for Shir Tikvah. If you'd like to get involved in the critical work of this committee (food, *shiva*, visiting), please contact our new co-chairs, [Caroline Schultz](#) and [Rondi Atkin](#).

Tamar Ghidalia was a leader of the Racial Justice Task Force since its inception five years ago. She recruited support, taught, cajoled, coaxed, studied, modeled, and lifted up this work for many years and we have been incredibly grateful for her efforts. She played a critical role in the soon-to-be-completed Assessment and will see that work through to its completion. She has decided to rest a spell, well earned, and I extend my deepest gratitude to her. Tamar was on the board when I joined it and from her reports to her questions to her beautiful voice closing our meetings in song, she's always been (and will continue to be) one of my teachers. Thank you to Jim Rubenstein for his continued work as a co-chair, and to Gayle Zoffer for her work as Board liaison to the RJTF. We will be working with members and congregants to move forward in our ever-critical racial justice work.

Learn!

Here's a thing I didn't know: Black American Jewish Cantors from a hundred years ago. Really. Click the [link](#). Thank you to my friend and Executive Committee colleague Lyonel Norris, whose reading and knowledge is wide, for sharing the story.

Youth Education

Our new Academy for Jewish Moral Imagination is about to open registration. There will be learning opportunities for students, adults, and families together. Watch your email for registration information from Forrest!

High Holy Days

In the next two months, our calendar brings us loving rebuke, requests and work for forgiveness, and, ultimately, the uplifting idea that we have another day to do better than we did the day before. Information about the High Holy Days is coming your way in a mailing in the next week or so. We will be launching a new website specifically for the High Holy Days, so you'll have all you need in a convenient place.

As always, feel free to [contact me](#).

Bruce

