

LRW ROSH HASHANAH 5778

L'shana Tovah! I'm delighted to have one more opportunity to greet you on Rosh Hashanah eve and check in as your Board President. So, here's my check-in: I need professional help. Although we joke that, as a congregation we probably have the greatest number of therapists, activists, and "helpers" than other synagogues in the Twin Cities, this is not, in fact, a solicitation from the bimah for myself. I'm just asking for a friend... 😊

As an individual, I need professional help to keep pursuing my spiritual growth, learning, and bringing my Jewish self into the world. I get that help here, through Shir Tikvah, where we are blessed to have an incredibly strong clergy team – Rabbi Michael Latz, Rabbi Debra Rappaport, and this Rosh Hashanah, we welcome Rabbi Arielle Rosenberg as well. We are so grateful for the gifts you bring and share with us.

And of course, alongside our clergy team, we benefit from the professional help and support of five other staff members: Forrest, Sara, Crystal, Armando, and our executive director, John Humleker. A mighty team of eight in total – providing the kind of professional help that we need to be able to gather in spaces like this, at times like this, so that we can continue to grow into our best selves – and do the kind of work in the world that we believe needs doing.

Over the last two years, you've heard me speak about our congregational growth and our evolution from a small, sometimes scrappy group of agitators, to a larger organization that works to model disruptive leadership – bringing the kind of voice that promotes tikkun olam within and throughout our communities. I've spoken to you about our intersecting priorities and needing to pursue our work together with intention, patience, and persistence. Tonight, I want to share with you some progress on those priorities and ask for your engagement to go further.

As a congregation, we have been pursuing an agenda for racial justice now on several fronts. Looking inward, our Racial Justice Task Force has done an excellent job assessing where we can strengthen our own understanding and actions within Shir Tikvah; and, we have trained several dozen congregants through Beloved Conversations to look inward *and* externally to bring greater awareness and action which we so desperately need. We are also well along the path to becoming a Sanctuary congregation – able to provide temporary shelter to individuals at risk of immoral and unwarranted deportation proceedings. I am tremendously proud of the impact we've already had through all these efforts and I know that there are many of you tonight who are engaged in some aspect of this work; and still more who will become engaged. It's part of the deep and important work we feel called to do; and we wouldn't be doing it without you. Thank you.

We have made a focused effort in the last two years to infuse our education and learning opportunities with our social and racial justice work; and, to look carefully at other ways to create a little more *shleima* "wholeness" between our youth education (Hebrew and religious school) and the rest of the congregation's life. Rabbi Rappaport and Forrest Yesnes have

engaged a number of congregants in several ways...and we are already seeing the fruits of that labor in some new curriculum, new programming, and stronger youth-adult connections on a couple of fronts. This work makes us stronger as a congregation and – most importantly – reminds us that educating ourselves and our kids is one of our core tasks. Just a few weeks ago, we started religious school with 223 students. That is an increase of 14 percent over just the year before. So, consider that if our Religious School was an investment portfolio, we would have outperformed the S&P500 and the Nasdaq! Who says Judaism isn't flourishing...?

Our religious school growth segues nicely to our third intersecting priority. As you know, we have been asking the question, *"What facilities do we need to do our work in the world?"* It's a good question, and we've recently made some progress in answering it. With deep thanks to our President-elect Bruce Manning, Amy Funk, Kay Harris, Eli Kramer, Greg Leder and Judy Hollander, these lay leaders – convened as the Facilities Assessment Group – have looked carefully at our current use of space, likely future use of space, and have given us some options to consider. They've done excellent work. Just a few weeks ago, your Board of Trustees accepted their report and voted to keep us moving forward – and to do so – returning to my theme -- we're going to get some professional help!

First, there are several options outlined in the Facilities Assessment report and we're going to pursue them concurrently. We'll engage some professional expertise to explore options for improving/expanding our current space; as well as looking for new space. We'll also look at how we might partner with other faith communities, starting with our friends here at First U.

Second, with your help and partnership, we're going to do some strategic engagement over the next several months. Part of answering the question about *"What facilities do we need to do our work in the world?"* inevitably means that we have to be clear about what our work in the world is! Clearly, we remain committed to working on racial justice on several fronts; and, obviously, we'll continue to teach, pray, and learn together. Still, we're going to take a moment beginning this winter to talk together, probably through a few smaller congregational conversations, and affirm these priorities; as well as talking about some of the specifics of our facilities and staffing needs.

These will be modest investments and can be covered through the Caryl Barnett Vision Fund. For those of you who may not have known our beloved congregant Caryl Barnett – she left a legacy to Shir Tikvah – a fund in her name to help us live into the vision we have for ourselves as a congregation. Her fund will allow us to engage some professional help through this next year. With gratitude to Caryl, and her family and friends, we have this beautiful opportunity to have a sort of downpayment toward the commitments we'll be making in the future.

The good news remains: we are a growing and thriving community. And, we will continue to need professional help to guide and support our growth. I've got a great therapist – a really great therapist – and he pushes me to reflect on my goals and guide my actions so that I can live my life fully. We'll take this opportunity collectively to get a little extra professional help so we can do the same as a congregation. We're just beginning this process. After the holidays,

you'll find the Facilities Assessment report on the website, and you'll be hearing more from us through the fall about how the strategic engagement work will roll out, concurrent with exploration around facilities. I want to offer a particular shout-out to my colleagues on the Board of Trustees who have really moved us forward as an organization in these past two years. And, I am confident that Bruce Manning, when he greets you next year from the bimah will have even more progress to share. I also want to thank you all of you now, in advance, for the time and energy you'll put into our congregational work before we gather again next Rosh Hashanah. There is a palpable affection and appreciation within our community – I think we're going to enjoy this next phase of working together.

Having already acknowledged the critical importance of our professional team, I also want to thank our lay leaders – choir, musicians, readers, schleppers, shofar blowers, youth programmers, and others who make these high holidays happen so beautifully. And, to our friends here at First U who graciously host us – we say thank you.

As for me, I'll keep getting my own professional help – and I'm happy to talk one-on-one about my progress with that... 😊 Collectively, we'll keep drawing on the talents within our community, and we'll get a little help as we need it to move through this next phase of our congregational evolution. And of course, the whole point of being in community is to move together toward whatever is next – the other side of the Red Sea...and all that. Wishing each of us a healthy and meaningful New Year, L'Shana Tovah.