

All,

Shir Tikvah's original roots are in St. Paul, at Mt. Zion, and although our founders [grafted](#) a branch of Mt. Zion onto new rootstock and Shir Tikvah blooms as its own [tree of life](#) now, it is always a pleasure for me to make a return visit to Mt. Zion where, like some of you, I was a member for many years before joining Shir Tikvah. Mt. Zion's president invited the presidents or presidents-elect of other Minnesota Reform-affiliated congregations to meet with Mt. Zion's board and lay leaders as part of their thinking about the future of their congregation. From Michael Kuehne (Mt. Zion), Phil Ecker (Bet Shalom), Mark Weitz (Temple Israel, Duluth), Jed Stillman (Temple Israel), and Deb Newman (B'nai Israel, Rochester, who was not able to join us in person), I learned that our shuls face similar challenges: weaving the whole community together and inviting people in, security, supporting our hard-working staff, deepening our commitments to anti-racism work—the list goes on. Still, we are a diverse orchard of congregations and it is a pleasure to share with a group of other leaders all the things we're doing so well and to hear of their successes too.



I really hope you clicked on the [tree of life](#) link; it will take you to an instrumental jazz-inflected performance of *Etz Chaim Hi* (literally, the “tree of life”) as interpreted by African-American pianist Warren Byrd and Jewish-American bassist David Chevan. Their latest album also features their larger band, [the Afro-Semetic Experience](#). The albums are available [here](#) and, as my kids would say, they [slap](#). (Warning on that link: parts of the Urban Dictionary are quite vulgar.)

Coronavirus

Last week we sent an email to the whole congregation about the virus and Shir Tikvah's current plans. Please email executive director [Alison Olig](#) if you would like to see it anew or have other related questions.

Safety & Security

We held three open meetings for the congregation in the past month about Safety & Security; thank you to those who attended for sharing their thoughts and listening. A thank you as well to Tom Cytron-Hysom, who is joining Jeremy Kalin as co-chair of the Safety & Security Committee and to those members who have recently joined those efforts. We will update you on this work periodically.

Board Updates

Thank you to board member MJ Gilbert for her willingness to serve on the Executive Committee. MJ joined the Exec in January. Our Board priorities for the year, as [I've written before](#), include the three central questions that have long guided us and four new areas. I'll provide some snippets here on a few of them to track our work thus far this year.

1. Lifting up Life-long Learning and providing additional infrastructure for it. Click [here](#) for the list of current opportunities (and see the last item on this email for an interesting event Shir Tikvah is hosting).
2. The Racial and Social Justice task force presented to the Board this month on their ongoing work and you'll be hearing more from them soon with an important email and assessment. Last month, I wrote you about their Video and Book Club and I hope you will get involved.
3. What Facilities Do We Need to Do Our Work in the World? Lay leaders and staff continue to meet (now monthly) with our brokers at Cushman & Wakefield to explore the local real estate market. We have also begun talking once more with the fine folks at [LSE Architects](#) about our own space. As recent services have shown, our building continues to be a challenge for us for worship and for access for those with limited movement.
4. Deepening member engagement. Congratulations to Alison Olig, Sara Lahyani and Amira Cohen for their hard work in moving through member applications. Shir Tikvah has about 550 member households right now, a net gain of about 175 in the last ten years. Talk to [Rachel Orzoff](#) if you'd like to participate in [our museum project](#).
5. Strategic visioning for youth education. Rabbi Latz, Forrest Yesnes, and a committee of lay leaders continue more than a year's work on this project. Look for congregational communications and updates from that team in the next few weeks.
6. Improve member communications. We are making a concerted effort to improve the ways in which you hear from us. If you have skills (as a writer, graphic designer) or energy for this project, or printing services or the like to donate, please email [Alison Olig](#).
7. Strengthen Shir Tikvah's financial foundations. This has remained at the very core of the work Alison Olig has been doing. Our amazing growth as a synagogue has brought with it an invigorating but challenging expansion of the many things this covenantal community hopes to have and make for itself. Your continued support makes possible the many dozens of pastoral meetings our clergy have with congregants each month, to pick one of a long list of examples.

An invitation

I hope that you will consider attending this lecture hosted at Shir Tikvah by the U of M's Center for Jewish Studies on March 24th at 7:30 pm. Mohsen Goudarzi is Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Minnesota's Classical and Near Eastern Studies Department and will teach about the relationship between the Prophet Muhammad's movement and West Arabian Jewish communities. The first part will briefly survey some pertinent information about the presence and status of Jewish communities across the Arabian Peninsula in the sixth and seventh centuries. The second part will focus on the Qur'an, highlighting the diverse approaches that the Islamic scripture adopts towards Muhammad's Jewish contemporaries.

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

In hope,
Bruce