

***My synagogue is open. It's open every day. Because my synagogue is not a building. It is the people who are helping each other and their community. It is the prayers for those who are struggling medically, financially, and emotionally. My synagogue never closed. It just opened in every home.
(author unknown)***

My Fellow Congregants:

This is an update on what your Board has decided regarding services in the Sanctuary. First, though, please reflect on the words above, brought to my attention by Joel Berger. As we've endured the social isolation and spiritual void created by the necessity of closing our buildings to help contain the coronavirus, some (perhaps many) of us have wondered if The Jewish Center can survive as an institution. I want to state firmly and without reservation that not only have we survived but we will continue to thrive despite the ongoing pandemic. Our Synagogue is open...in our hearts, through our actions, and by participation in on-line services and programs. For as long as we continue to support each other and our community through the many contributions of time, talent, energy and financial resources of our members, we will remain open, although the doors may be physically closed.

High Holidays

On Sunday, your Board of Directors made an exceedingly difficult but necessary decision. After considering the medical data, guidance from local and state governments, as well as information received from other area synagogues and the United Synagogues of Conservative Judaism (USCJ), the Board has decided that all High Holiday services will be virtual this year. This decision was not made lightly. So much is still unknown about the coronavirus. We cannot accommodate more than a small fraction of our membership in the main building while maintaining social distancing. The Princeton School District has not made a final decision, but it seems unlikely that Riverside School will be available to us this year. Like many other synagogues throughout New Jersey, the Board decided that remaining virtual for the High Holidays was both prudent and equitable.

Over the next few weeks, you will receive more detailed information regarding the High Holiday. We are developing plans and programs to

make services spiritually meaningful and visually engaging through the use of technology. Our educators are developing educational programs for our school children and applying creativity to engage our youngest members throughout the High Holiday season. We are putting together a High Holiday package to enable celebrating the holidays at home using our current machzor and a new Book of Remembrance. As we have done for many years, we will be conducting our annual drive to combat food insecurity, with both Arm-in-Arm and Jewish Family and Children's Services benefiting from your generosity. From "check-in" calls to developing approaches to strengthen our community during this critical time, many people are working hard to compensate for our inability to gather physically by ensuring that we can be together emotionally and spiritually.

Services Over The Summer

After considerable discussion, the Board adopted the Safety Committee's recommended protocols and we are beginning the process of physically reopening for other than the High Holidays. This will be a slow, deliberate, and cautious process, guided by the protocols and the principle of *pikuach nefesh* (the saving of life). A small committee is working to codify who can participate in services and under what conditions. I must stress, however, that we are only in "Phase 1" of the reopening process. We hope to move to "Phase 2" shortly and will do so if the data indicate we can remain safe. You will receive detailed information regarding what this all means just as soon as decisions are made, and the materials prepared.

I'd like to close with this observation, shared with me by Adam Scheer. Our current travails need to be seen through the lens of history. Our people have endured multiple tragedies over the centuries, but we always return to the joys of life. That is the lesson for these trying times. While we cannot make light of our difficulties, we must also never lose sight of our opportunities. To the best of our ability, we must look forward to the future. It is no accident that the Israeli national anthem is titled *Hatikvah - The Hope*. We deal with the realities of our present but hope that with G-d's help, we will move to a brighter future.

B'shalom,

Randy Brett