

August 28, 2017 / 6 Elul 5777

Dear Fellow Congregants,

September and the High Holidays are fast approaching, and back-to-school preparation is well underway. I hope that you and your loved ones are enjoying the end of a wonderful summer.

As many of you (I hope) recall, we placed inflatable Beth Emet cushions on everyone's seats during Rosh HaShanah last fall, as our way of informally announcing the start of a Capital Campaign designed to raise funds for improved seats and other needed renovations to our building and facilities. This Campaign will also provide Beth Emet with some additional financial security by increasing the size of our endowment. I am writing today with a brief, one-year update on the status of those efforts.

Fundraising Update

I am pleased to report that T'RUMAH, the Capital Campaign we officially launched this past March, is progressing steadily. To date, we have received pledges from over 120 Beth Emet households, reflecting a total pledged amount of more than \$3.6 million. This means we are more than halfway to our goal of raising at least \$6.13 million.

I am really encouraged by this early support for the Capital Campaign, which comes from every part of our community—young and old, new and long-standing members, families with children, and individual adult households. These pledges not only reflect support from Beth Emet's diverse and multi-generational community, they show the tremendous importance our members place on keeping Beth Emet's learning, worship, music, social action, pastoral care, and other programs and endeavors thriving for current and future generations.

There are two other aspects of the Capital Campaign that I think also bode well for our future.

One is that while pledges to the Campaign can be made over three years, we already have received fulfilled pledges—meaning money in the bank—of more than \$1.5 million. These funds, provided by generous Beth Emet supporters, have allowed us to advance our early renovation and repair planning and our work with outside professionals without incurring the cost of any external financing. It also allows us to receive the benefits that come from increasing our endowment and generating income to help pay for programs and other operating expenses of the synagogue.

The second aspect is that Beth Emet applied for and received a \$50,000 funding grant from the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago to assist our ongoing renovation efforts around security enhancement. This is important because I believe that successfully applying for and receiving grants from Jewish organizations and other sources of funds are going to become increasingly important as Beth Emet moves forward. We are developing real expertise in this area under Executive Director Bekki Kaplan and Development Director Wendi Kromash—expertise that I think will generate near and long-term returns for Beth Emet. This grant award also serves as a kind of affirmation, showing us that outsiders to Beth Emet support and have confidence in our strategy and the work we are undertaking. The grant requires a match of \$100,000 within the next 12 months, a challenge we welcome and are confident we can accomplish.

Our Capital Campaign is led by an exceptional group of Beth Emet members, including Patti and Mel Gerbie, Lizzie and David Graham, Shari and Stephen Reiches, Ariel Goldfarb, Stopher Bartol, and Jeff Mann. They have given passionately and tirelessly to this effort, and received extraordinary support from numerous others in our community.

Beth Emet currently has about 720-member households. That means there are still about 600 households left to reach out to and ask for their support of the Capital Campaign and Beth Emet's future. That is the Capital Campaign Committee's plan—to connect over the next year or so, in some way, with every Beth Emet member. I encourage you to be proactive by stepping up, submitting a

pledge, and volunteering your support. Every pledge matters. We ask only that you do so from the heart and be as generous as your circumstances permit.

The success of the campaign depends on the participation of each of us in the Beth Emet community. We are always available to meet with you individually to answer your questions or to discuss your involvement. Contact Wendi Kromash through the Beth Emet office and she will be happy to make those arrangements or arrange a meeting.

Renovation Update

I'm also pleased to report that we have significantly advanced our building repair and renovation plans over the last year, but not quickly enough to calm my *shpilkes* personality as much as I would like. I had hoped to develop a program that would allow us to undertake construction work in phases, designed around Beth Emet's less busy times, such as over the winter holiday break and during the summer. That seemed to me to be an approach that was both prudent and would minimize disruptions. And then I got some professional advice.

The contractors and other experts with whom I consulted were uniformly negative about my plan, for a variety of reasons. Some expressed concern about the inevitable delays in the building timeline, something I suspect everyone who has undertaken a home renovation has experienced firsthand. Others noted that doing construction in a series of phases might lead to more, rather than less disruption, or a synagogue that appeared to be perpetually under repair.

Most important, we learned from various contractor bids that we could potentially achieve savings of at least \$250,000 if we undertook all the major renovation and repair work concurrently, rather than separately. That sum was too great to ignore, and after due consultation with members of the Building and Renovation Committee (Lee Weintraub, Sharon Ephraim, Bob Render, Steve Galler, and Brad White), our Project Manager, Eric Eichler, and the *Klei Kodesh* (Senior Staff), we made the decision to hold off on work this year in favor of starting and finishing all the construction work and improvements next summer.

Which means . . . that you still need your inflatable seat cushion at services for the upcoming High Holidays. We have extras, and we'll have them available in the lobby. Or call Bekki.

This also means that, in the fall of 2018, you will celebrate Rosh HaShanah in a Beth Emet building with safer, more secure and accessible entrances; a modern, comfortable, light-filled gathering area outside the Sanctuary and Crown Room; a Sanctuary with new seats and acoustical improvements brought about through specialized technology; updated restrooms; new chillers to cool and heat the building more efficiently and cost-effectively, and other improvements throughout our facility.

We are living in what feels to me to be increasingly turbulent and uncertain times. For this reason as well, I think that a strong Beth Emet matters even more—for what it teaches, inspires, nourishes, and stands for. Your support of the Capital Campaign will help ensure that Beth Emet can continue as a vanguard for Reform *shuls* (synagogues) everywhere, and as a beacon of justice, hope, and inspiration for both members of our community, and people of all faiths and backgrounds.

I am looking forward to seeing and greeting you and your loved ones at the High Holidays. In the meantime, on behalf of my wife Nina and our entire family, my very best wishes for a happy, healthy, peaceful, and prosperous 5778.

L'Shalom,



Ross Bricker
President

PS: If you ever need inspiration about why Beth Emet matters, watch the video on the home page of our website: www.bethemet.org/