

Shana Tova.

As the President of SSTTE, it is my pleasure to welcome everyone. I especially want to welcome those spending their first Yom Kippur with us, our new members, visiting families, and all of our guests. I take great pride in recognizing the dedicated work of our clergy, professionals, lay leaders and the volunteerism of members too numerous to name that contributed to the high level success of the past year and a trajectory for future achievements that, I believe, may surpass all prior periods of our rich history.

Like any family, our community has had its celebrations and challenges. We are a family with a shared history, with depth to our relationships, characterized by the commitment and dedication of our leadership, our members, and our staff. We are truly blessed to have clergy that bring to us their intellect, intelligence, warmth, commitment to personal relationships, leading us in promoting inclusivity, lifelong learning, and support for a strong State of Israel.

While I am optimistic about our future, it is no secret that the demographics of this community have changed and we must be nimble and adaptive to those changes. But Reform Judaism, and specifically our brand here at SSTTE, is a meaningful and rewarding expression of Jewish identity, whose core values are deep personal relationships and friendship, inclusivity, lifelong learning, a commitment to charity and tikun olum, caring for others, respect for our planet and people of other religions, and support for a strong State of Israel. To address the engagement and demographic

issues that are challenges for all synagogues, we seek to focus carefully upon our personal relationships, seek to attract unaffiliated families, develop programming to involve young families in synagogue life and seek to implement principles of “audacious hospitality.” What a splendid thought! But, this is not the synagogue world of our parents or grandparents, where membership was sustained by having excellent clergy and programming, with open the doors and the members shall enter. And just as I have challenged our clergy and professional leaders to bear responsibility for leading the unaffiliated into our house and not assume that their GPSs will lead them here on auto-pilot, I ask each of you to serve as member ambassadors and do the same, inviting the unaffiliated that you know to share in our worship opportunities and sample our superb adult learning opportunities. While there are many ways to do this, they include referring names of new neighbors and friends to the Membership Chair, Scott Rothstein, or our Executive Director, Roberta Aronovitch, or suggesting SSTTE when hearing the stories of friends or neighbors no longer enamored by their current synagogue affiliation. I hope that this is not too Chabad- like for you. But, I can tell you that it really works and driving new membership is a key agenda item.

The achievements of the past year are numerous, punctuated by Rabbi Jeffrey Brown’s grace and leadership, prioritizing relationship building and inclusivity and broadly leading the entire professional staff. His confidence and mentoring support for Rabbi Glickman created and fostered an atmosphere that benefitted us all, as Rabbi Glickman demonstrated how capable she is, with her very personal and energetic style and deep knowledge of Jewish education. Under Rabbi Glickman’s direction, our Religious

School is gaining special recognition and notoriety, especially with its launch of *Kulanu (All of Us)*, engaging all students, meeting them where they are. We are witnessing a collaborative partnership between the Religious School and our Early Childhood Education Program, *Mazel Tots*, led by our very capable, Jody Glassman, strengthening the outreach to our younger families, together with an expansive program of youth engagement, led by Sarah Metzger. And, of course, our beloved, Cantor Becker, leads us with *tefillah*, her remarkable ability to touch us with song, leading through her teaching, and providing comfort and pastoral care.

During the past year we implemented major changes in governance, creating opportunities and doorways for Members becoming more involved in influencing synagogue life. We imagine a community where congregants not only speak about shared ownership and responsibility for one another, empowered by ideas, energy and resources, but feel and experience those pathways. Adoption of the pledge commitment financial model embraced an unwavering commitment to becoming an even more inclusive community in which everyone feels valued and relationships are of paramount importance. I remind you that our synagogue claims a remarkable legacy around these core values, under the former direction by our Rabbi Emeritus Stephen A. Klein, who led in courageously imagining how a synagogue could warmly welcome families where one partner was not Jewish, or, as we welcome members of the LGBT community. Isaiah famously proclaimed, “My house shall be a house of prayer for all people.” Is that not what we are truly all about?

And, in furtherance of exploratory conversations that your clergy and lay leadership facilitated last year, with an acknowledgment of the need to actualize our vision of inclusivity and accessibility in our Sanctuary, the Board of Trustees last month, with the unqualified endorsement of Rabbi Jeffrey Brown and Rabbi Emeritus Stephen A. Klein, approved funding for the engagement of Landau/Zinder, well-regarded synagogue architects, to develop a concept design and master plan for the re-imagining of our sacred spaces and building, with the full intention of bridging yesterday to today, with respect for our rich history and valued traditions.

Ah, so why do I speak of all the accomplishments of the year ending, with opportunities abound? Well, while it is still too soon to report definitively, the results of your pledge commitments, which are approximating sums in the vicinity of historical dues, as supplemented by regular revenue fee sources, still leaves approximately 35-40% of the operating budget, including required funding of deficits, to be filled by your further generosity.

One of the most stirring elements of the High Holiday services is the Jewish liturgical tradition of the piyyut (poem), Unetanneh Tokef. It speaks of how the outcome of your year is determined. It provides the tools to take the matter of our verdict into our own hands. “Repentance (teshuva), prayer (tefillah) and charity (tzedakah), tzedakah being an obligation of the highest order. As I pondered the tzedakah piece of this poem and my “ask” for this year’s Kol Nidre appeal, my attention was diverted by an article written by Rabbi Louis Feldstein, a member of the URJ faculty, who provided training to

incoming temple Presidents, entitled “The One + Three Simple Rules That Helped Raise a Billion Dollars”. Even with my sights not that high, Rabbi Feldman sure got my attention. He writes, “engaged donors want to be excited by what you are accomplishing. They want to know that their partnership is critical to your impact. Donors want imagination, excitement and vision.” We are a partnership and the SSTTE clergy, professional staff and lay leadership believe that we have presented what Rabbi Feldstein describes as the essentials for creating that culture of giving, which is our second agenda item. And, so we ask you to act now!

Friends, I suggest to you that it is time to consider entering into a philanthropic relationship with SSTTE, making SSTTE your most important charity. This is not only for the Member sitting near you or those that you believe more financially capable. You may wish to give publicly, inspiring others, lending credibility or simply feeling good about the recognition, or you may wish to give anonymously, for what may be a variety of personal reasons. Consider legacy giving, and speaking with your professional advisors when updating estate plans. But, I have good news and bad news for you. The good news is we have all the money we need to insure SSTTE’s future and balance our budget. The bad news is that too many are relying upon others, and need to consider that philanthropic relationship that I am urging. Deuteronomy Rabbah 1:10- “A community is too heavy for anyone to carry alone.”

The High Holidays provides a sacred oasis of time, when we can pause and think about big questions and challenges and I challenge you to consider how you personally can

affect the future of SSTTE and promote a culture of giving. If you have already made a Kol Nidre pledge, thank you. The opportunity to pledge or even increase your pledge continues now and throughout the year.

So, I will leave you with a story, recently shared by Cantor Becker, at the first of the adult learning Shorashim classes, that I highly recommend: It was a Hassidic tale-

“When I was young, an ardent love of God burning inside me, I thought I could reform the world. Realizing that this was too ambitious, I resolved to change the citizens of my town. But the town was large and varied and resistant to change. Soon I realized that I’d better just concentrate on the Jews of my city. But the Jews were happy with the way they were, so when I failed in that I turned to correct the conduct of my family. But, by then my children were grown and had their own views, so I gave up on that too. Now I am getting old and finally realized I must begin by changing myself.”

Change starts with you and I ask that you commit today in creating and cultivating a culture of giving.

From my family to yours, may 5777 be a year of health, happiness, peace and fulfillment.

Cain Yehi ratzon.

Be it God’s will.

