



State of Our Congregation July 2020

At this moment, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, all of us have many questions about how the Birmingham Temple Congregation for Humanistic Judaism is coping while preparing for reopening. Perhaps one of the most disconcerting aspects of the shutdown which began last March is that making any kind of accurate predictions is impossible. Constantly evolving conditions dictate critical decisions that our congregation can only make at some point in an undetermined future.

This State of Our Congregation has been prepared to give you insights into where we are now and what we can foresee. There are no guarantees implied here, but you should take comfort knowing that our staff and a core group of volunteers are focused on managing us through this most challenging time.

When will the Temple open? The 2020/21 budget approved at the Annual Meeting is based on reopening January 1. While it was essential to choose a date to create the budget, the date will likely change.

Our Home. All essential interior building maintenance tasks are being performed. Our Executive Director is the only staff person who is in the building every day. She manages these tasks. Many expenses have been cut. A group of volunteers has been working all summer to maintain the grounds and landscaping with weeding, cutting back forest overgrowth, trimming bushes and more.

We are looking into renting our newly renovated kitchen to as many as four new part-time renters who can be scheduled around our regular catering business renter. They will only work in the kitchen. A number of candidates have expressed interest and we have emphasized that it will be their responsibilities to maintain sanitation. The Temple and these businesses require special licenses for us to operate this way. Fortunately, a Temple member who is a professional commercial real estate rental executive who studies the various codes and requirements is guiding us through these processes while working to attract viable tenants.

Our Finances. This year the congregation introduced a new membership model. Extensive details about this new model will be enclosed in your membership packet.

A significant percentage of our congregation's revenues is derived from rentals. These were lost to us with the pandemic outbreak. Due to the work of our staff, the congregation secured a Federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) forgivable loan of \$52,000 to help cover a portion of staff salaries and some administrative and building expenses. Some staff who are not currently working have received assistance provided by the Pandemic Unemployment Act (PUA).

Our Education Programs. Until we can do otherwise the **Spinoza Youth Education Program** will be held in a live, distance learning mode, using the regular curriculum. Classes will begin with an assembly and continue with breakout rooms for additional age-level learning. Family participation will be encouraged to the greatest extent possible while the children are doing their activities. Rabbi Falick will continue to provide guidance to the teachers who are responsible for developing their individual lesson plans.

All **adult education programs** will continue to be available online as they have been since March.

Our Programming. **Rosh Hashana** and **Yom Kippur** services will be prerecorded and posted online for viewing at any time. There will be one service for each of the two holidays that will feature congregational participation, professionally prepared musical selections, rabbinical commentary, and – a highlight – Jennifer Grodsky’s sounding of the shofar. On Yom Kippur afternoon we will offer a live Zoom **Memorial Service** inclusive of the dedication of new names engraved on our memorial wall. **Children’s Holiday Programming** will take place as part of the Spinoza Program.

Shabbat Services will continue on YouTube. To date, response has been good. Typical live feed weekly logins have averaged about 45 (with multiple viewers per many logins). Another 90-100 additional logins occur at some point during the week. As we do when coming together in person, the focus of these services continues to be on gathering as a community while exploring important topics and issues.

Our Leaders. Both the Executive Board and the Board of Trustees continue to meet online regularly to review, plan, project, and determine the best processes and procedures to keep our congregation functioning. Working cooperatively, contributing their professional skills and personal opinions, each board member remains dedicated to leading our community into a future with many unknowable characteristics.

In summary the State of The Birmingham Temple Congregation for Humanistic Judaism **is strong and thoughtful, fully committed** to managing our community through these challenging times.

Sincerely,

*Paul Caradonna, President
Ned Greenberg, Treasurer*

*Elaine Fieldman, Vice-President
Cathy Radner, Secretary*