AN OPEN LETTER OF COMMUNAL THANKS TO ALL OUR LEADERS ON THIS PASSOVER HOLIDAY

As we approach Passover, it's unbelievable to think that it has been over a year of COVID, two Passover holidays and all that it's brought with it. The multifaceted member organizations of the Westchester Jewish Council have each responded in their own way to confront the unique challenges this pandemic has presented. COVID has kept us apart and brought great loss with it. But our strength and blessing have been the bonds of community that medical and physical barriers could not break. And we will be stronger for it.

Whether you're a member of a synagogue or an advocacy group, or volunteer at a food pantry or seniors program, you have witnessed the enormous burden that this last year has placed on all of us, none more so than our Clergy, Executive Directors and staff , Presidents and Board Chairs, our courageous leaders, who have confronted unprecedented circumstances with creativity, commitment and passion. But as leaders of our community, they have borne the double burdens of the community they lovingly serve and deeply want to support and shepherd through this crisis, as well as their personal struggle to care for their own families and themselves. They have had to learn new skills and terminology they never anticipated dealing with in their professional lives. How many clergy have studied Zoom and screen sharing or immunology at their seminary or did practicums with the Department of Health focusing on epidemiology? How many Presidents, Executive Directors and Board Chairs imagined themselves weighing whether to cancel programs. services or close their doors to the public altogether not just due to financial hardships but because of a worldwide pandemic?

Could any of us have imagined virtual seders, graduations, and other celebrations before March of 2020? And how many of us would've thought we'd still be planning for those same virtual events a year later? Yet through all the hours of work, sleepless nights and endless stress, our leaders have persevered with grace and compassion and a smile. Even if inside they themselves were suffering, they have been there for us and stood strong to support our needs.

As vaccines become more available and we move towards a return to some form of normalcy, we must be mindful that this will not happen overnight and our leaders will continue to work tirelessly to navigate the road ahead. As much as we turn to them and need their help, we must remember their humanity and need for our support. They are individuals suffering the stress of COVID and its ramifications for our community, the world at large and their own families. They want to hug their extended family members and find moments of relaxation and escape from it all.

They need our patience and support.

Take a moment before hitting send on an email complaining about a particular program, lack of service, or technical glitch with Zoom or live streaming.

Let's express our thanks and appreciation when things go well (and even more so when they don't).

Let's manage our expectations and accept that circumstances and human condition may mean we accept "less than" or "different" for a while longer.

Let's find meaning and blessing in what our leaders have been able to and will continue to provide, and be thankful that we are fortunate to be part of a community that has still provided so much during these difficult times.

Our leaders need our understanding and support as much as we need theirs.

Let's all practice love and generosity of spirit and kindness and give our leaders a virtual hug until we can share the real thing. We know they'll be waiting for us with open arms just as they have embraced us all over the last year.