

TBC President's Report, 5/28/2020 - Cindy Baulsir

Welcome to the Annual Meeting of the Congregation! Tonight I will deliver my last President's Report or more accurately my last Congregational Report as President. We will discuss our new clergy model, and vote on Cantor Dunkerley as our new Sr. Clergy. We will also review and vote on the annual budget recommended by the Board of Trustees, and finally we will close with a vote on our proposed slate for July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021.

I've dreamt about this meeting for quite some time. I dreamt about things that I would share; the events we could reflect upon, the joys we've celebrated together such as b'nai mitzvahs, holidays in the school and the Shabbat Services, confirmation services, Board meetings, EC meetings- just to name a few. I thought about how we would discuss the sorrows we've endured together- such as the passing of our loved ones, the illnesses within our community and what seems like an endless stream of sadness lately in the news. But, I never, in my wildest dreams thought I would be delivering it to you over Zoom so that we can ensure that we are all safe in our homes during a pandemic.

The journey to tonight's meeting began over 12 years ago and before tonight I took the opportunity to reflect upon them and to share with you some of the highlights. I

started in leadership roles at TBC as the Education Chair. Day one involved a very nervous parent anxiously imploring me to update our policy on food allergies and to reduce the risk to their child. This was a very real challenge in how we serve our community. I knew from that point on, my life would be forever changed. That day was the start of my learning to be more empathetic, to listen to both sides of a discussion-sometimes an argument, to consider what was best for the congregation and that I was really in leadership at TBC- to serve. I have since tried on, I think, all the VP roles. When I took over as President from Dina Gumins, we had a relatively new Rabbi, had our first year of membership growth in more than 4+ years and we were in the midst of strategic planning -with potential for significant growth. Unfortunately, not everything goes according to plan.

Every year of the 4 years as my being President has had its challenges, rewards and lessons learned. One of the biggest challenges was navigating the loss of our prior Cantor and its impact on our community. That was not just a public challenge but a personal one- one of loss and compassion. I had to learn how to effectively articulate the decisions of the Board of Trustees while navigating the emotional journeys that others were also experiencing. I learned to lead by example, along with trying to

understand that not everyone says what they mean, some will not share their thoughts and some will over share- and as a leader you just have to keep asking questions, try to remain calm under pressure, and to say thank you to everyone who supports me and the community.

Within the last 2-2.5 years we pivoted our staffing model to include a Director of Lifelong Learning and a Student Cantor. This was mostly positive, but it challenged us to evolve and to learn to adapt. I learned that no matter what the change, some will approve and some will disapprove and that you usually only hear about the negative ones. I learned to lead with resilience and try really hard to not take criticism personally. I learned to be present in the community- to show up at as many events as possible, to meet and greet and to be patient and every day is an opportunity to make congregational life better, of course with the support of amazing executive committees and board of trustees.

We as a community have been challenged by so many things, including increasingly visible signs of anti-semitism and symbols of hatred. In 2018, the mass shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh was a punctuation point for all of us. This was a reminder that Temples may not always be the security blankets that we

want to be shrouded in. We had to learn what level of security we had to implement to feel secure, while managing our responsibilities to the community. We utilized our security task force to understand what we needed to do versus what we had to do. These exercises were extremely stressful to some of the community and consumed a lot energy from many people. Those emotional and practical interactions, with the Rabbi and the EC, proved to be some of the most impactful to me as President. I learned a lot about our community, how our styles impact our communications with each other, to truly listen and what it takes to effectively be heard.

Last year, we focussed on building- telling our story and began to try to change our external community perception-trying to re-focus on member attraction and retention. Rabbi Bearman, Karin Beitel, June Mara and I began participating in more Jewish Federation programs to raise our visibility and to attract new congregants, our Communications committee reached out to different media outlets to publicize our programs and successes. Sisterhood and the Men's Club tried out new programs. All of our committees met multiple times last summer to calendar events, so we could ensure that we were focussed on the right things, together. We tried to bring along as many TBC constituencies as possible - some

were met with success, others not so much- but our momentum was changing, finally, to be more positive. While all of that work was going on - we've been closely monitoring our expenses and Deb Case (our Treasurer) has continued to beat the drum about the urgent need to be fiscally responsible. In December we formed the Finance Task force - that included Deb, Rudy Escalante, David Abraham, David Marceau and David Lewson. Their mandate was to explore opportunities for us to do things differently and came back to the EC and BOT with potential savings and financial opportunities. The task force challenged us to be creative and to explore so many options that I - and I think I can speak for the EC and BOT, that we're confident that our staffing model may lead us to a path of sustainability and give us the option to attract more new members.

Early January, Rabbi Bearman, Susan Farber and I began talking about building our leadership and committees and about what we can do to become more visible to the broader Jewish community and had planned an event for the end of March. It was clearly not meant to be.

Early in the year, Student Cantor Hamstra let me know that HUC was strongly encouraging her to go into placement so she would experience different types of

congregational life and see what it was like to be a part of a large team. She was reluctant to leave her oasis in the woods. But apparently, she was very much in demand. We quickly submitted an application and put together a search committee, interviewed candidates and unfortunately we didn't match with any of them. I can't speak for everyone but I was very sad to hear the news that she was leaving and to lose her as part of our team. It was all part of the letting go process and we are lucky to have had her for two years. News of Suzanne's leaving began the acceleration of the angst that I've experienced over the past 5 months. We quickly began having conversations with the ACC to discuss what types of candidates were available and who we could attract.

Following shortly after that news, Rabbi Bearman let me know that she would not be staying with us- I can honestly say I cried. I think I might have cried on and off for two weeks. I cried for the loss of our community's Rabbi, I cried because my friend was moving away and it would be more difficult to connect, I cried because it was another significant transition that the community would need to look forward to. As many of you know, I'm not really a crier- but I think after all of the things that we've all been through together while I've been President, this was one of those that touched both my emotions and skills. The

clock began ticking to get a lot of new, hard work done. We were past the traditional placement window for Rabbis and we had to talk to the CCAR, along with the ACC now. This all reinforced my learning to be patient and flexible with change- lots and lots of it, all at once.

We also kicked up the frequency of conversations with the financial task force to understand budget planning for next year. We arrived at numbers that would allow us to explore different staffing models. I'll share with you shortly how we got to our new clergy model but know that none of it was derived lightly and without hours of conversations with the Exec. Committee, BOT, congregants, URJ, CCAR and ACC. While this was also all going on, we were having conversations with Karin Beitel about her role at TBC, knowing that we had to do everything we could to support our education and b'nai mitzvah programs. Unfortunately we weren't able to sustain having the same level of staffing that we currently do and as you know Karin will be leaving TBC too at the end of June.

All the while, COVID was creeping upon us. We were discussing what we could do and keep our community safe. And had to make the weighty decision on March 11th to close our building and upend how we do everything at TBC. Those first two weeks that we were closed went by

in a blur. People called asking questions, the Rabbi transitioning our services, while setting up Zoom accounts and reformatted everything for the community to be able to participate remotely. Karin transitioned our school, reaching out to families and guiding our teachers in new technologies and giving them a new bag of tools. I know I'm not at all alone in saying that COVID has affected everything we do - I know that the past few months have been punctuated by before and after COVID. I know that the community has experienced so many changes and losses and have learned that I had to slow down to emotionally assimilate all of the impacts of it. I have learned or maybe re-learned to make time to pray, to be thankful for our community, for my families' and my health.

There are so many lessons that I've learned as President, and am forever blessed by so many strong memories. Being President of TBC has made me a kinder person. Its reinforced that I need to treat others the way I want to be treated, its taught me the value of prayer, patience and participation. Its been an endless labor of love, its strengthened my strong strong sense to always do the right thing and to serve. BUT I couldn't have done it without the support of my family through all of the highs and lows. They've been endlessly patient with my stories,

with the time that its taken away from them and all of the distractions, late nights and early mornings!

The executive committee has been sort of my second family and I'd like to tell you how extremely grateful I am to them and the Board of Trustees. In particular some past EC members including Michele Scruton, Brad Marcus and Jamie Kapel - our current EC including Stephen Davis, June Mara, Elise Serby, Deb Case, Dina Gumins and recently Susan Farber. I'd like to give a special note of gratitude to Dina Gumins. Next year, will be the first time that I'm on the Board, in those 12 years, that I will not be serving with Dina Gumins on the EC and Board. She has been a source of strength for me and I am extremely grateful for her leadership and friendship. Thank you. You've all made me a better person and leader.

On a final note, I am also so grateful to Rabbi Beaman and am looking forward to honoring you in a couple of weeks! AND I am very grateful for you all, for allowing me to serve you, and for you letting me be a part of your families! My hope for the community is in the coming years that you continue to show leadership the respect and caring that you've shown me, and I am looking forward to many more years of continued faith and worship together.

At this time we'd like to begin to share more details about our new Clergy Model.