

President's Address Rosh Hashanah 5776

L'Shanah Tovah

It is wonderful to see so many people here this morning. It is certainly a testament to the vibrancy of our community and the strength of our 4000 year old heritage.

I wanted to take a few minutes to review the state of our Temple and some of our future directions. My wife promised to drag me off with a hook if I went beyond 5 minutes, so I will do my best to keep this short.

At the head of the list I would have to put welcoming our new Rabbi Marc Kline and his family to our community. Rabbi Kline has certainly brought tremendous energy and intent to building our MRT Jewish community and strengthening our relationships with the outside community.

He blesses us with an interesting commentary on the Torah each week and, along with Cantor Clissold, leads engaging services. When he is able to join our Saturday morning Torah study sessions, he shares an understanding of multiple perspectives that greatly strengthens the depth of the conversation about the weekly reading. I know more good things are in store from Rabbi Kline this year, including an 8 week Introduction to Judaism course.

At the same time, I think the Temple has done well to integrate Rabbi Kline and his family into our community and help them settle effectively in the newness of New Jersey.

This last May we reinitiated Mitzvah Day, a day focused on Tikkun Olam, one of the cornerstones of our Mission. Under great leadership and an enthusiastic committee, we engaged more than 200 members of our Temple in social action projects such as students cutting patterns for shoes for kids in Uganda, working in our Gan Mazon, giving blood, painting a house being rebuilt after the ravages of Hurricane Sandy with Habitat for Humanity, cleaning up

the Henry Hudson Trail, or swabbing for bone marrow donations. It was truly a community engagement both for us as a Temple and with the broader community we live in. We are seeking to build on this momentum as we plan our Social Action projects for the coming year.

Our spirituality has grown in multiple ways. The First Friday gatherings have drawn crowds of over 100. It is heartening to see so many young people engaged in worship, eating, and socializing together. We have broadened our Seeds of Spirituality visual T'Filah services. These services bring a unique sense of closeness as we worship without books and let the imagery enhance the feeling of Shabbat peace. This year we have 5 Seeds of Spirituality services planned, each with a particular theme.

Religious School and Adult Jewish Learning are central to our Mission. Religious School graduated 8 Confirmands this past year. This was a good accomplishment. I hope we will do even better this year and in the future. The years after B'Nai Mitzvah are the time in our youth's lives where they have the maturity to learn much about the depth of our Jewish culture complex, to gain insight into the world in which we live, and the Jewish perspective on social justice, community service, Israel, and challenges they may face as they go on to college.

This year we are welcoming a new Religious School Principal, Stephanie Fields, who brings with her an understanding of the recent trends in Jewish learning, means of engaging our students, and an approach to preparing our students to live enriched Jewish lives. I know that our Rabbi, Cantor, and Stephanie are engaged in enhancing our Religious school curriculum and approach to ensure that we are doing the very best for our children.

Adult Education prospered this year with an excellent Shabbat Kallah with Rabbi Amy Scheinerman, the start of a Sunday evening discussion group focusing on the topic of Jewish Belief & The Meaning of Life: Why Am I Jewish? And continuing a program of 92nd St Y broadcasts. Lifelong Learning remains a key focus for connecting our community, and we will continue and expand on these programs.

On the Social side, Sisterhood and Men's Club offered many events that enabled folks to connect with others with similar interests. Whether it was the Sisterhood Book Club, baking Hamentashen, the Men's Club poker group having a friendly game every few weeks, or the Temple wide Purim Social or Beerfest, we had many opportunities to build friendships and connections. This year I look forward to more social engagements that will attract a broader set of our Temple community.

We also had many other successes. Just to mention a few –

- We initiated our MRT Leadership Training Program and graduated over 20 members.
- Our Gan Mazon has produced nearly 900 pounds of produce that has been contributed to local food banks.
- Our Library Task Force initiated an overhaul of our library that will create a more modern and functional learning and study space in our Temple.
- Our Rummage sale raised \$9000 and provided a valuable service to the community.

One area where we did not fare so well is the part of our Mission where we state that we are all stewards of MRT's financial resources. Unfortunately, we needed to borrow \$57,000 to cover our expenses last year.

Exclusive of Religious School, it costs a little over \$2200 per family to sustain our Mission. Giving Pledges average only around \$1700 per family leaving us with a sizable gap to close with fund raising activities such as the High Holy Day Campaign, income from our endowments, and other fund raisers.

We are a Fair Share Temple, where we ask each member family to give according to their means.

The High Holy Day Campaign is our biggest fund raising effort after the regular Annual Giving Pledge.

I hope that as you think about starting a great 5776, if it is within your means, you make a contribution that will enable you to reach the

Sustaining Level or beyond. If not, please give something. This is our Connected Jewish Community. We value everyone's contribution.

Sustaining our Mission is important to enabling us to flourish and fully realize our MRT Vision of Nurturing Meaning in Our Lives.

Now I would certainly be remiss, if I did not acknowledge the people who make all of these things and more happen here at Monmouth Reform Temple.

I would like to start by acknowledging our clergy- Rabbi Kline, Cantor Clissold, Rabbi Emerita Priesand, Our Religious School Principal Stephanie Fields, our Office Staff Helene Messer and Mindy Gorowitz, and the current and previous Board Of Trustees. Could you please stand and remain standing until all are recognized.

If you head another Temple committee, Task Force, or Teach a Class please stand.

Those who serve or served on a committee, participated in a Task Force, acted as a Class Parent, or worked on a special project please stand.

Those who participated in Mitzvah Day last May, please stand.

Those who attended a service sometime between last Rosh Hashanah up to today, please stand.

This is our community. I thank you all for making me feel part of something exceptional.

L'Shanah Tovah - May you have a happy, healthy, and meaningful New Year!

Congratulate and thank someone standing near you for the great year we've had!

Zach Gilstein September 14, 2015