

President's Address Rosh Hashanah 5777 (Zach Gilstein)

L'Shanah Tovah

It is always wonderful to see so many people here at Monmouth Reform Temple on the holidays. And it was wonderful to have over 160 members of our community join us for our Welcome Back Shabbat a few weeks ago.

I wanted to take a few minutes to review the state of our Temple and some of our future directions. Last year I shared that my wife gave me a 5 minute target. I think I spoke for 7 or 8. This year, since I can actually claim to have done something, I may take a minute or two longer.

I attended a Bar Mitzvah here this past Saturday. After the service, I wished another attendee Shabbat Shalom. He said, "Shabbat Shalom. There's a really good feeling here." I said, "Thanks, where are you from?" He said "Florida, but if I lived here, I'd definitely join this Temple."

I think it says a lot about the Welcoming Community we have developed, when someone can feel our warmth by just spending a couple of hours with us.

At the head of the list of accomplishments, I would have to put the initiative to overhaul our Religious School curriculum.

As I said last year, I believe there is nothing more sacred than educating our children to lead meaningful, engaged Jewish lives.

Under the leadership of our Principal Stephanie Fields and Rabbi Marc Kline, along with all of the teachers, staff, and Religious Education Committee, we have rewritten much of the curriculum and have introduced a new approach to learning on Wednesdays. As we roll out these new approaches, we will gain feedback and continue to hone our curricula and learning modalities.

The really great thing is that we have envisioned something better, have outlined a 3 year plan to achieve it, and have taken real action to make it reality.

We confirmed 5 young adults and have such a large group of 8th and 9th graders in Mitzvah Academy that we have had to split the class.

I personally believe that the post B’Nai Mitzvah years are the most valuable and formative in educating our children because they have the maturity to learn much about the depth of our Jewish culture and values and to gain insight into the Jewish perspective on social justice, community service, Israel, and challenges they may face as they go on to college.

Spiritually we made a major technological leap forward with Live Streaming of our services. The Board resolved many technology, privacy, and legal issues to realize this initiative. We are grateful to Cantor Clissold for her generous donation to enable implementation. The response has been overwhelmingly positive and has enabled many who cannot join us in person to share in our services and community.

Lifelong Jewish Learning has also been a bright light this past year. We created numerous opportunities to learn and share with other members of our community. including a Memoir Writing Session, Tuesday morning study with the Rabbi, 2 Remarkable Holocaust Films of redemption, Introduction to Judaism course, Shabbat Kallah, the Health Fair, and more.

Last May, nearly 200 members of our community came together for Mitzvah Day, a day focused on Tikkun Olam, one of the cornerstones of our Mission. That was great, but our Social Action initiatives are more than just Mitzvah Day. To name a few - we support Family Promise to house families working to get back on their feet, our Gan Mazon has contributed over 1100 pounds of vegetables to local food banks, Shine a Light provided bike lights for nearly 100 Red Bank residents who use a bicycle as there standard mode of transportation.

In my bulletin articles, I have written about a number of vision statements of how we would like to be in 3-5 years. One of them states that we will

Actively broaden our commitment to and demonstration of Tikun Olam

Abraham Joshua Heschel said “A Jew is asked to take a leap of **Action** rather than a leap of Faith.” Living our Judaism requires us to build a better world. This year I would like to experience Mitzvah month rather than Mitzvah Day and to engage more families in Tikun Olam on a quarterly or even monthly basis so that we can share together in this mitzvah.

On the Social side, Sisterhood, Men’s Club, and SMARTY, our Sr. MRT Youth group, offered many events that enabled folks to connect with others with similar interests. Whether it was the Sisterhood Book Club, the Men’s Club Beerfest, the Purim Carnival, or a shul-in at the Temple, to name just a few, we had many opportunities to build friendships and connections.

Our Marketing Committee has made great strides in advancing the face of MRT. We had a highly energetic and interactive group at the Red Bank street fairs in April and September. We have been featured in a number of articles in local papers and the New Jersey Jewish News. We have made several upgrades to our web site and to our social network presence.

I am pleased to report that this year we were financially sound. In the middle of the year, when it was clear that we were not on target to meet our revenue goal, I made an appeal for our members to make an extra contribution beyond what they had pledged. On behalf of the community, I want to thank the 49 families that contributed nearly \$42,000. This, along with a focus on containing costs below the anticipated levels, enabled us to run approximately \$25,000 in the black.

Exclusive of Religious School, it costs a little over \$2200 per family to sustain our Mission. Giving Pledges average 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.

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 5777, 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. We value everyone's contribution. I am hopeful that with your generosity this Fall, we will not need to have a special appeal later in the year.

Sustaining our Mission or spirituality, lifelong Jewish learning, Social Action, and Socialization is important to enabling us to flourish and fully realize our MRT Vision of Nurturing Meaning in Our Lives.

To further strengthen us financially, last spring we initiated a Life and Legacy program to help sustain our congregation for the next 60 or 600 years through legacy giving. MRT is blessed to have the Rabbi Sally Priesand and Wachtel Endowment funds with approximately \$1.3M in assets.

But what more could we achieve if we could double or triple this number.

I am pleased to report that we already have 12 charter members of our Legacy Giving Circle who have pledged a legacy gift.

As I said above, there is nothing more important to sustain our heritage and build a better world than to educate our children to lead meaningful Jewish lives. We will be forming an Endowment specifically for sustaining our Religious School.

I look forward to a time when the cost of educating our children will be fully covered by an Endowment, and religious education will be a blessing of membership.

We have done wonderful things this past year, but I look forward to an even better 5777!

Now I would certainly be remiss if I did not offer everyone a stretch break and acknowledge all the people who make 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 any service, initiative, activity or other event sponsored by MRT including today's Rosh Hashanah service, please stand.

I thank you all for making me part of something exceptional.

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

Zach Gilstein October 3, 2016