

TAS AGM REPORT 2020

Rabbi Jordan D. Cohen

August 30, 2020

Another year has passed, and we gather again at an AGM to attend to the business of this sacred congregation, reflecting on the last year and forging our path into the next. But this year has not be a normal one by any measure. In considering what we have accomplished since last year's AGM, I found it difficult to even remember what went on before March. I know last year we had a wonderful High Holy Days, our religious school continued to be a joy for all who participated, and we worshiped and learned and celebrated together right up until our *Back to the 80s* Purim Shpiel in early March. To think back and realize we were so naïve to have crowed together even then. Since the second week in March, our building has been shut down, and we have migrated all of Temple life online.

At our last AGM we knew it was going to be a challenging year, but we really had no idea. We knew we were voting in a completely new Board of Trustees who were not only tasked with the day to day operations of the Temple, and address what we knew was a worrying financial situation, but would also have to pioneer a brand new governance model and establish a new system of working groups and task forces with clearly articulated terms of references. Little did we know what was to come, not only with the pandemic, but talks with Beth Jacob about increased cooperation and cohabitation, and greater administrative and economic issues than had be previously identified. With the pandemic came the difficult decisions to furlough staff, the challenges of mastering Zoom for meetings, services, programs, and life cycle events, and providing for the care and well-being of a community that could no longer be together in person; the challenge of keeping our congregation connected and Jewishly engaged through an unprecedented time for which no one was prepared.

Our community has risen to the challenge. Our lay leadership, staff and volunteers have all borne this heavy burden of leadership, guiding our community with a deep level of commitment, dedication, thoughtfulness and exhausting effort, touching on the lives of our members as never before. We have worked shoulder to shoulder with our community partners and neighbours, the Hamilton Jewish Federation, the Hamilton Jewish Family Services, Shalom Village, Temple Playhouse, the Kehila Heschel School and Les Petite Pommés, to make sure we are there for our members and our whole community in new and critical ways. And we have been deeply immersed with our colleagues and our rabbinic, cantorial and congregational organizations to maximize the resources and technologies that are available to us and to create new best practices where none existed before. I must say, with some pride and humility, that your team here at Temple Anshe Sholom have been at the forefront of this new reality of Jewish life, pivoting literally overnight to online services, programs and learning and leading initiatives of greater cooperation such as our Passover Essentials program, the National Canadian Reform Tikkun Leil Shavuot and the upcoming National Reform S'lichot program. In this new and challenging reality of Jewish life, we have maintained our Temple's key values and mission and created new models that I believe will serve us well into the future, however that future may be.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to our Co-Presidents, Mark Levine and Yves Apel and our entire Board of Trustees for their true partnership and titanic efforts during this unprecedented year. I also want to express my deep appreciation to all the chairs and volunteers of our many working groups and task forces for all their good works on behalf of our Temple community during this difficult time. I especially want to highlight the continuing activities of our Kehila and Bikkur Cholim Working Group and our *Minyan Menschen* who devoted themselves over these past 6 months to making sure that we reach out and provide support to every member of our congregation. Your work is an inspiration.

To my dear colleagues, Dora-Ann Cohen Ellison and Cantor Paula Baruch, I want to thank you for your depth of commitment and seemingly tireless labours on behalf of our community. You are the strength and backbone of this congregation and you carry us forward in untold ways. We are blessed by your efforts.

And to our continuing support staff, Brenda McAlpine and Joe Pavaio, we thank you for all your increased labours on our behalf. And to those who, sadly, have had to be furloughed or laid-off during this period of pandemic, Jo-Anne Brown, Doug Collins and Karen Arnold, we miss you. Please know that you have our deepest appreciation and respect for your years of commitment to our community.

With this coming New Year, we move ahead into uncharted waters. But that is not unprecedented for us as Jews. Like Moses and our people at the Sea of Reeds, we muster our strength and forge ahead into the unknown, taking this journey together as a people of faith and action. We don't rely on miracles, but a little one now and then doesn't hurt.

I wish everyone a *shana tova u'm'tukah* – a happy, healthy and enriching new year that brings us, God willing, closer together.