

TAS AGM REPORT 2021

Rabbi Jordan D. Cohen

September 26, 2021

There was a sage in the Talmud who was known as *Nachum Ish Gamzu*. He had that name because of his favourite saying, *Gam zu l'tova* – “This too is for the good.” No matter what was happening, no matter how hard things became, for Nachum, he would always say, *Gam zu l'tova* – “This too is for the good.” And when he said that, and when he really believed it, things always turned out that way, for the good (Talmud, Taanit, 21a).

Well, another year has passed, and I don't that, at last year's online AGM, we would have ever thought that this year we would still be struggling with a pandemic and having to consider carefully each step we make as we begin to regather, regroup and reunite as a community. As we gather at this year's AGM to attend to the business of this sacred congregation, some of us here in-person and some of us online, we need to recognize that, for the most part, we are fortunate to have had the strength of community to survive what we have been through for the past year and a half, and the resilience and resources to reconvene and reimagine what the future is going to look like for Temple Anshe Sholom. We can say, *Gam zu l'tova* – “This too is for the good” and express our gratitude not only for the efforts of our leadership over the past few years, but also for the opportunities that are available to us moving forward. This too is for the good.

We know that this past year has not been a normal one, by any measure, having effectively moved all of synagogue life online. Since last year's AGM, which was held in August, we have celebrated two wonderful High Holy Day seasons, this year engaging with almost 200 membership households and guests through both in-person and online events. Our online attendance at Shabbat services continues to exceed our pre-pandemic numbers, and we offered an expanded program of Adult Ed courses and year-round Breakfast Club, Weekly Healing Services during the worst COVID outbreaks and increased virtual programming around all of our holiday and festivals, all of which created meaningful points of engagement for our members and others throughout the lockdowns and periods of isolation. It is really thrilling to note that, thanks to the efforts of our Membership Working Group, during this last year we have welcomed 20 new member households into the congregation, with more still to come, many of whom have never actually stepped foot in the Temple building but came to know us from our online events. We so look forward to welcoming all these new members in-person and showing them around our spiritual home. Dora-Ann will go into more detail, but our religious school continued to be an important and meaningful presence in the lives of our young people throughout the past year and had a wonderfully successful in-person reopening yesterday for the new school year. The primary task ahead is to “pivot” once again, this time trying to figure out the most effective means to safely regather in-person, while maintaining our strong online presence. Thanks to a very generous gift from Rabbi Baskin, we will soon be purchasing dedicated streaming equipment for our Rabbi Bernard Baskin Sanctuary. The Sanctuary, the largest space in our Temple building, is often the least utilized. But that is going to change with the installation of this new equipment, when it will, once again, become our

main space worship and celebrations throughout the year. *Gam zu l'tova* – all of this is for the good.

At our AGM two years ago, when we voted in our first Board under our new governance model, we knew it was going to be a challenging term, but we had no idea. They were charged with pioneering a brand-new governance model and establishing a new system of working groups and task forces as well as tending to the day-to-day business of the Temple. It became clear early on that our financial situation was worrisome and our admirative structure required some serious attention. But then came the pandemic, with all its associated challenges for members and staff, the talks with Beth Jacob about increased cooperation and cohabitation, previously unidentified issues with the cemetery and a whole range of other trials and tribulations that could not have been foreseen. How could this possibly be for the good? And while we have seen growth through new membership, including the addition of many young families and Jews by Choice to our congregation, and while we have celebrated pandemic weddings and Britot and B'nei Mitzvah, we must also acknowledge that this has been a year of unprecedented loss. At our Yizkor service on Yom Kippur afternoon, we read the names of 44 Temple and family members who died during the past year. This number is fully double that of any other year in recent memory.

And yet, despite all this distress, our community and leaders have risen to the challenge, with a deep level of commitment and dedication. I want to express my appreciation to our President, Mark Levine, our Vice-Presidents, Marla Frank-Davis and Yves Apel, our Treasurer, Liora Malka, our Secretary and the Chair of our Reopening Task Force, Gillian Berman, and all of our incredibly dedicated Board of Trustees for their incredible efforts during this extraordinary year. Everyone worked so hard in so many unexpected ways. For those who are continuing on the Board, or who are joining our Board, I look forward to working together in partnership to bring blessing to the members of this sacred community. For those who have or will be stepping done – Haim Goldstein, Yves Apel and Joshua Rochwerger - you have our gratitude and respect for your efforts and, while you may no longer be on the Board, we value your continuing commitment and involvement.

I also want to express my deep gratitude to all the chairs and volunteers of our many working groups and task forces for all of their hard work and commitment to community during this difficult time. It is your time and efforts that make this place work. *Gam zu l'tova* –this is very much for the good.

To my dear colleagues, our tireless and deeply committed Director of Religious Education, Dora-Ann Cohen Ellison and our endlessly creative and equally committed Cantor and Program Director, Paula Baruch, I want to thank you for your depth of spirit, thoughtfulness, and diligence on behalf of our community. We are blessed by your efforts. And to our Temple staff, Shelby Frank-Davis, Terry Nyp and Joe Pavao, we thank you for all your dedicated labours on our behalf. I look forward to actually seeing you much more often and working side by side to bring our Temple community back home to our Temple building. This will be good.

I also want to acknowledge our community partners, with whom we have worked so close over this difficult period for the betterment of our congregation and the entire community: the Hamilton Jewish Federation, the Hamilton Jewish Family Services, Shalom Village, Temple Playhouse, the Kehila Heschel School and Les Petite Pommés. Together we have been able to do great things, and that is always good.

There is no going back to what was, and I know that, looking ahead into 5782, we really have no idea what to expect. It will be yet another different year. But this is not necessarily a bad thing. With strong leadership in place, and a community that remains vital and meaningful and connected even through the most challenging of times, I remain confident that during its 172nd year, we are going to build on our strengths and emerge as a Temple Anshe Sholom that is accessible to all and reasserts our values in new, creative, and profoundly meaningful ways. That will be for the good.

Thank you and chag sameach.