

High Holy Day Address – Ina Horn - September 16, 2021, Yom Kippur

Shana Tova!

Good morning. My name is Ina Horn, and it is my honor and privilege to address you as the president of Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple. Whether you are members or guests, with us in person or connecting with us virtually, we are so pleased that you are able to join us today in observance of Yom Kippur.

This year, we celebrate the High Holy Days at the intersection of tradition and innovation. We re-imagined our services by combining the creativity we used to approach last year's virtual experience with our time-honored High Holy Days in-person programming that we are now able to do, with safety protocols in place. Some of us are worshipping here in the sanctuary while others are connecting from a distance, and as we welcome 5782, our commitment to being together safely as a multi-access community is unwavering.

During the past year and a half, we have been through some frightening and frustrating times. And yet, we pulled together as a Temple community to persevere through our new reality. We have had an extraordinary year celebrating the joys of life as well as mourning losses, mostly all from a distance. We learned in new ways and prayed and connected with our community in both familiar and innovative settings.

Throughout history, times of crisis have always increased the opportunity for bringing out the best in us. This pandemic is no exception and has enabled us to re-imagine our Temple experience, finding creative ways to maintain what's best about synagogue life - including focus on family, community, and compassion for those in need. Certainly, the pandemic challenged us, but it didn't break us, and in the process, we have learned the importance of remaining flexible, agile, and creative. The biggest mistake we could make is to go back to the way things used to be and not learn from the experiences of this past year. Yom Kippur gives us **that** opportunity for reflection and inspires us to make a difference in the new year.

So, what does Temple life look like now in the shadow of the pandemic....

- This past June, we welcomed our temple family back to in-person Shabbat services, after being forced to be away for well over a year. And while we continue to look forward to having our congregation back in the sanctuary, our weekly services will still be available through a variety of multi-access platforms that will complement our in-person opportunities.
- I'm proud to say that the Temple is in good financial health. We successfully received PPP loan forgiveness, kept our staff employed, and finished our fiscal year with a balanced budget and a surplus. With the continued support of our membership, we intend to maintain this level of financial security.
- To better serve all members of our congregation, and to better engage with people inside and outside the building, we have made and will continue to make key improvements in our technology. Some of the upgrades include a new streaming service, new high-definition cameras, and the fine tuning of our audio system. In addition, we have installed these large format display screens right here in the sanctuary to enhance our in-person and virtual experiences. All of these advancements enable us to expand our audience beyond geographical limitations and we will be able to benefit from these innovations for years to come.
- At a time when many synagogues have lost members and are closing their doors, we have maintained our membership numbers and have welcomed many new congregants. Improved technology has created additional access points through Livestream, Facebook, and YouTube for potential members to decide if Anshe Emeth is the place for them. Just this past week, we received a beautiful note from a **new** congregant living out of state that said how after listening to both the Rabbi and the Cantor virtually on Rosh Hashanah, she was sure that her decision to move to Anshe Emeth was the right one!
- We are going beyond transcending the traditional boundaries of engagement. We found new ways to do life cycle events, we connected with you through Zoom conferencing, communicated with you at Town Hall meetings,

laughed with you at our Taste of Anshe Emeth social events, cried with you at Zoom Shivas, welcomed you at temple parking lot drive-thrus, and offered delicious food at our Shabba-Qs, and sweet treats at our onegs-to-go.

- Anshe Emeth welcomes all people. Our membership is dedicated to the core principles of inclusion and equity. We celebrate the rich diversity of our Anshe Emeth Community and do not limit our membership nor participation by age, race, ethnicity, faith, gender, sex, marital status, disability/ability, nor any of the characteristics used to judge and separate people. The reality is that Jews exist in all these categories and more, and they are far more likely to involve themselves in Jewish communities like ours that make the effort to welcome them and see their full identities.
- We continue to educate our kids. After a year of mostly on-line learning and in-person classes at Eagles Landing Day Camp, we are thrilled to welcome our Religious School students back in our Temple classrooms once again under the leadership of Matt Vogel, Director of Education and Engagement. Our learning programs help students form a positive Jewish identity that will enable them to interact in the current world, proud of their Jewish heritage.
- In July, we welcomed Melissa Reilley-Grecco to the Gan as the new Director of Early Childhood Education. Melissa brings many years of experience and in the short time she has been with us she has begun to build on the Gan's strong tradition of education, nurturing and love of children. Along with a new curriculum and improved tech tools, we look forward to her taking the Gan to new heights.
- We found new ways to help our community in response to COVID-19. Working with Elijah's Promise, volunteers, led by Jay Goldberg, mobilized to make lunches here at Anshe Emeth to dispense to those facing food insecurities. I know that Rabbi Bazeley reported this on Rosh Hashanah, but it bears repeating: To date, over 34,000 sandwiches have been made and distributed!

- The Anshe Emeth Community Development Corporation has also, for more than 20 years, reached out to the community through its Central Jersey Diaper Bank providing not only diapers, but also a full array of other essential baby items at no cost to young families in Middlesex County. When families could not come in to receive supplies, Temple members, in response to the pandemic constraints, stepped up to form Delivery Squads making sure that the diapers and other baby items were able to reach those who needed them.
- If you haven't already, soon you will receive pledge cards for our Annual Appeal. As you consider your contribution, please reflect on all the Temple provides to each one of our members and consider as generous a pledge as is comfortable for you and your family. Gratefully, many of you have already generously increased your giving which enables us to offer activities for those who cannot afford the cost of membership.
- Your support and dedication help to ensure we can continue to offer everything you value at Anshe Emeth: dynamic worshiping, inspiring music programs, innovative educational programming and above all, a warm and welcoming community.

At the outbreak of COVID-19 our clergy, educators, professional staff, and our Temple community sprang into action. I am humbled to work alongside such a dedicated crew and appreciate their continued commitment to serve our Temple community.

- Rabbi Bazeley you have been a rock. You have had to lead through the challenges of the pandemic while helping congregants feel safe and spiritually connected throughout. I am in awe of the creativity and nimbleness you exhibited in reacting to the everchanging climate while at the same time planning for the future. Your positive attitude during these exceptional times has been nothing short of inspiring.
- Cantor Stanton you came to Anshe Emeth just as the world shut down but that didn't stop you from connecting with our congregants by providing a

pathway to spirituality and uplifting us with your beautiful voice. I am so pleased that many can hear you in-person on these High Holy Days and we look forward to your long overdue formal installation and celebration in November.

- I want to thank our Rabbi Emeritus, Bennet Miller. Rabbi Miller, we go back a long way, and I would not be standing here on this bimah today if it were not for your advice, friendship, and never-ending support.
- Thank you to our Cantor Emerita, Anna Ott who leaves a legacy of music excellence here at Anshe Emeth.
- I want to thank our student rabbis Ezra Leventhal and Sienna Lotenberg for joining our Temple family. We look forward to hearing from, and seeing more, of them throughout the coming year.
- I want to thank our Executive Director, Heather Kibel, for her tireless efforts. Her hard work, commitment, energy, and devotion, continues to help Anshe Emeth flourish.
- I want to thank our Administrative and Custodial Staff. They are our hardworking yet unsung heroes.
- I want to thank our Director of Education and Engagement, Matt Vogel, and our Director of Early Childhood Education, Melissa Reilly-Grecco as well as all of our teachers for preparing our youth to be good people and guardians of our tradition by using the wisdom of the past.
- I want to thank our Collaborative Keyboard Artist, Dave Schlossberg. Dave, we appreciate your musical gifts; your talent fills our hearts and souls with joy.
- I want to express my appreciation to the Temple Officers, Board of Trustees, all committee members, and volunteers and to let you know how important your involvement and dedication is.

- I want to thank all our Past Presidents as we depend on them now, just as we did in the past, for their advice and guidance.
- Most importantly I want to thank you, our congregants, and supporters as well as those who came before us for preserving a synagogue that we can truly call home.

As this new year begins, we are so excited to turn the page to Anshe Emeth's next chapter together, bringing meaning and connection to our congregation wherever we are.

As president, my goals for the coming year are to continue to help to safeguard our Temple's fiscal health, to form an engagement team to further our commitment to promote inclusivity, to keep current with technology so that our members never miss an opportunity for worship, learning or engagement and most importantly, to safely sharing in each other's lives.

While we may not know for sure what the future holds, we do know, this past year has proven that, by working together and supporting each other, we can handle anything that comes our way just as we have for the past 162 years!

AS THE WORLD CHANGES SO DOES ANSHE EMETH!

We are Reform Jews and are committed to changing and adapting to the needs of the times all while being guided by the enduring history and tradition of our people. Global pandemic aside, as Reform Jews, this has always been our practice; straddling between the old and the new; maintaining and respecting our history and roots while at the same time adjusting to the rhythms of modern life.

It seems as though change is the constant in our lives, but change will not deter us from the integrity of our mission and vision.

WE ARE ANSHE EMETH.... Always evolving, always moving forward and always here for you.

Ken yi ratzon