

Yom Kippur Address – Allison Warzala
Monday, September 25, 2023

Shanah Tovah.

My name is Allison Warzala and it is my honor and privilege to address you this morning 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.

Ours is one of the few households that receives a print New York Times. Martin reads it religiously, cover to cover, every single day and has become my personal clipping service. When I go to pack my bag to head into the office there are actual articles, cut from the paper, sitting on the kitchen table. These are usually cancer related as I head out the door to the Rutgers Cancer Institute, others focus on exercise and health, and sometimes there are interesting recipes. Over the past six months there have been a number related to mental health. As I read these, they gave me a lot to think about as they go to the heart of why Anshe Emeth is a critical piece of our lives and has been since we moved to this community 34 years ago. Community and connection are the recurring, bottom line themes.

Dr. Vivek Murthy, Surgeon General of the United States suggested that at any moment, about one out of every two Americans is experiencing measurable levels of loneliness. Nearly everyone experiences it at some point, and it has grave consequences for our mental health, physical health and collective well-being.

Loneliness and isolation hurt whole communities. Social disconnection is associated with many things including diminished civic engagement, so we are less able to pull together to face the challenges that we cannot solve alone.

Dr. Murthy emphasizes that rebuilding social connections after the pandemic must be a top public health priority which requires reorienting ourselves, our communities, and our institutions to prioritize human connection and healthy relationships. Social connection is a basic need.

Why is this of interest to us? Because Anshe Emeth brings people together and increases the sense of belonging that is so important to keeping people healthy and connected.

Many of you may know, my mother just passed away. This community has supported me unconditionally over the last few weeks and I'm not sure how I would have gotten through

this without them – some are my closest friends, others are board members, clergy and staff, but some are acquaintances from Anshe Emeth who have reached out in incredibly meaningful ways. I share this as an example of how important your connection to this community is.

Where are we today? Those of us in the Sanctuary are enjoying the new speaker system installed over the summer. We have beautiful new laminate floors in Littman and Reitman Halls.

The Central Jersey Prep Charter School is back again, with an expanded footprint.

Safety continues to be critically important to us. We again received a Homeland Security Grant. We are working with our security consultant to help utilize these funds most effectively, applying them so they enhance the security upgrades we have already put in place.

There are always membership challenges in the current climate. Demographics are changing and young Jewish families are not affiliating with synagogues as they have in the past.

At a time when many synagogues have lost members and have closed their doors or merged with other congregations, we have maintained our membership numbers and have welcomed many new congregants. The reason we continue to thrive in a time when other religious institutions struggle is because we never stop questioning everything we do, we never stop reinventing ourselves. Improved technology has created additional access points, which we continue to offer even as we have moved back to in-person events. This allows prospective members to check us out online and we can maintain membership with those who have moved from the local area or keep those who don't want to drive at night engaged.

Anshe Emeth offers programming and worship in many forms to meet the needs of our entire congregation. There is something here for everyone, and if there isn't we will help to build it.

In any given week our building is bursting at the seams with people praying, learning, attending programs and doing committee work, with others participating virtually. This year's program book is filled with more activities than ever - classes, concerts, youth programming, and holiday celebrations just to name a few. I encourage you to pore over the book and mark your calendars for events of interest to you, attend as many as you can, get out of your comfort zone and try something new. Just a look through our program

book tells you a lot about us and what we stand for. Anshe Emeth truly is a Beit Tefillah, Beit Hamidrah and Beit Knesset – a house of prayer, a house of study and a house of gathering.

Anshe Emeth is in good financial health. We finished our fiscal year with a balanced budget and with the continued support of our membership, we intend to maintain this level of financial security. Your support and dedication help to ensure we can continue to offer everything you value at Anshe Emeth: dynamic worship, inspiring music programs, innovative educational programming and above all, a warm and welcoming community.

To keep all of this a reality, our generous members donate over \$100,000 to the annual appeal each year to bridge the gap between our due's revenue and our operating expenses. I am proud to say that this year, our Annual Appeal pledges and donations already total 53% of our goal. Let's continue to build on the momentum. If you have not yet made your pledge to the annual appeal, please join Martin and me, all of the Officers and Trustees and many of your fellow congregants and make your pledge for this year. 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 full cost of membership.

Anshe Emeth welcomes all people. We offer the community the Surgeon General has suggested that everyone needs. 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 or participation in any way. We not only recognize the complex fabric of Jewish life, we celebrate it and want to lift up all of those who were once on the periphery. The truth is that Jews exist in all categories 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. To connect with this broader community, we must start to meet people where they are today so we can thrive tomorrow.

Continued work to strengthen our membership numbers is critical and Rabbi Lotenberg will be actively reaching out to unaffiliated young families and young singles. Our focus on the safety and security of our congregants will not wane. And we will continue to inspire our youth to become proud and active Jewish adults.

The involvement and dedication of all our committee members and volunteers is so important. Anshe Emeth runs on volunteer power and to all our volunteers, thank you. Opportunities abound to cultivate more volunteer leaders who will take us into the next phase of our Temple's life. If you are not currently volunteering, I encourage you to find

a committee whose work sparks an interest inside you. I think you will find it extremely satisfying to be part of this important work.

Social action, tzedakah and social justice will continue to be at the forefront of what we do. We will be looking to consolidate some of the committees and task forces that operate in this space and provide clarity on the roles of the different groups. I hope this will offer the opportunity for each of you to find where your passions lie so you can volunteer in those areas.

Coming back to the theme of community, you have the opportunity to help create the type of community you want to be a part of.

In keeping with this focus, our Rummage Sale returned this summer for the first time since the pandemic started, reenvisioned as a Clothing Sale. This is an important service to our local New Brunswick community and an opportunity for G'milut Chasidim, acts of loving kindness, while helping others and repairing the world through Tikkun Olam. It means someone can walk with their head held high because they have a new suit to wear for a new job, or new sneakers for the first day of school. The sale was wonderful this year as we watched our customers' excitement with the treasures they discovered. One young woman commented that she uses the sale to refresh her wardrobe each year and it made me proud of the service we are providing to our neighbors. But it takes a lot of work to pull this sale off, please consider volunteering next year, we need you.

I am honored to work alongside such a dedicated group of clergy, educators and staff and appreciate their continued commitment to serve our Temple community. We thank all of you – our rabbis, our cantors and all our staff who work incredibly hard to make Anshe Emeth the place it is. I also want to express my appreciation to the Temple Officers, Board of Trustees and Past Presidents for all they do.

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. Together we create a community of warmth and welcome, a community dedicated to the best of Jewish life and living.

Yom Kippur gives all of us the opportunity for reflection and inspires us to make a difference in the new year. As we look forward to a new year, I thank you all again for placing your trust in me as President of Anshe Emeth. Martin joins me in wishing you all a happy, healthy, and fulfilling year. Ken ya-he ratzon