

8.11.2023

From my professional experience, I know how critical communication is. I work hard to make sure everyone is on the same page and that we are as transparent as possible. I also think consistency in messaging is important so that we don't have an unintended game of Telephone – you know, that childhood game where someone whispers a message in your ear, like “I like ice cream” and 15 people down the line, it gets translated erroneously into “I ate an alligator.” I also believe in the timeliness of communication and that for communication to work at all, someone has to receive the message. We pump out a LOT of stuff at Temple – website material, emails, letters, post cards, social media posts, and yes, Friday announcements. It's unclear how much our members actually “catch” let alone process in this age of mass communication. So I'm going to break one of my own best practices tonight, the one about consistency, and share some things with you that the rest of the congregation doesn't know about or doesn't know about quite yet. Why? Because you're here, and I'm the President. There's another “upside” to coming to Shabbat – you get some Temple scoop along with a beautiful shabbat experience.

First, this morning we submitted our application for a new cantor with the American Conference of Cantors. Thanks to our congregation for participating in surveys, focus groups, and town halls. You provided the necessary input. Thanks to Brandon Henson, Elaine Kovner, and the committee for managing the process and building a remarkable application. We are officially in the game. Now the fun begins!

Earlier this month, the Board of Trustees soundly passed Temple Beth-El's inaugural Ethics Policy, crafted by a committee led by Rob Eichelbaum. The drafting of this document was NOT based on any current event or concern at Temple, but rather it was built because it's the right and proper thing to do. It is also in line with work being done by fellow Reform congregations and other organizations under the URJ umbrella. We are working on a formal rollout and publication of this material for the entire congregation, so stay tuned.

Finally, this weekend, the Board, the rabbis, Eric Ryniker and I will be participating in a board retreat. We'll focus on leadership development – that is, how do we function more effectively and powerfully as a board, and on helping our congregation develop a culture of philanthropy. Neither of these topics is what I consider light weekend reading, so I want to publicly thank the trustees, clergy, and staff for their significant investment. I'm optimistic you'll see some of the results of this retreat in the not-so-distant future.

While I'm about to say “here's what's going on at Temple,” I just shared what *else* is going on at Temple. In case you are wondering, you are free to share this information with fellow congregants. I just ask that you accurately repeat “ice cream” and not “alligators” when you retell any of the messages.

8.18.2023

Today many of us received our first Elul message, marking the formal start of our reflective and sacred season. Over the next few weeks, we will talk and think quite a lot about self-reflection, the Book of Life, hopes and dreams, repentance, and forgiveness. Tonight, however, I wanted to focus on what we likely **won't** think much about – all the support, background preparation, planning and consideration that went into helping us to, as we say, reach this season. Specifically, I want to thank the 23 men and women employed by our congregation for bringing our high holy day season to life: Rabbi Nathan, Rabbi Yergin, Cantor Kohn, Eric Ryniker, Ellen Barshop, Dollie Closna, Michael Ringel, Judy Reyes, Sara Planto, Edith Vanderverter, Eleanor Gossen, Billy Bloomberg, Ross Halfant, Erin McAdams, Mike Kung, Sonny Coronado, Alan Johnson, Daniel Escamilla, Janie Gonzales, Janie Perez, Bert Reyna, and Priscilla Segovia.

Preparations for the High Holy Days begin in mid-July because the number of details this small, but mighty staff think through are inordinate. As participants, we often take them for granted. But the cellist on kol nidre doesn't just show up. The Torah readers, pulpit occupants, and shofar blowers don't simply happen to know their respective roles. Even things like security, membership cards, and the Book of Remembrance all require significant attention long before they reach us, the members. And isn't it amazing that somehow the right prayer books, candles, and white torah covers happen to appear just in time. It's not magic. It's our people. Our clergy work quadruple time in preparation for the Days of Awe. Shabbat keeps happening, life cycle events keep occurring (despite some of our wishes), and the darn president has been known to schedule a weekend board retreat in the middle of it all that requires their presence! Yet high holy days sermons don't write themselves. Special music doesn't arrange or learn itself, and it certainly doesn't get transmitted to others through osmosis. And isn't it amazing that somehow during this season we are left pondering a question, debating an issue, or humming a special melody that we let dance in our head for bit. It's not magic. It's our people. Some may argue that this what these folks signed up for; it's their job. Perhaps. But that doesn't make appreciating what they do on our behalf – to make sure we have an incredible, impactful, Jewish experience – any less valid. As you can imagine I've gotten to know most of the staff pretty well over the last 16 months. I am personally grateful not only for the work they do, but for the sacrifices that they make for Temple and each one of us. We are Temple Beth-El because of and with them.

As the High Holy Days unfold, please take a moment to notice all the little things that add to the enjoyment of your celebration. Know that one or more of these 23 people had a hand in making it happen. And if something is a little off, I ask for your grace. If God could go with "very good" vs. "perfect" when creating the world, that seems like a reasonable benchmark for our worship experience.