



General Board Meeting - September 23, 2021

Present:

Barbara Abramson (2*)	Lew Gantwerk (2)	Lauren Neufeld (1)
Shari Allen (2*)	David Greenberg (2)	Naomi Richman-Neumann (2)
Brad Bailey (1)	Linda Grenis (2)	Rabbi Andrea Merow
Alexandra Bar-Cohen (2)	Diane Guvenis (2*)	Adam Scheer (2)
Joel Berger	Samantha Hirschberg (1)	Sarah Schwarz (1)
Jeremy Black (1)	Helaine Isaacs (1)	Jesse Treu (1)
Randy Brett (2)	Edye Kamenir (2)	Tom Will (2*)
Gabrielle Cayton-Hodges (2)	Judy Kutin (1)	Claude Winn (1)
Abbye Cornfield (1)	Nancy Lewis (2)	Nir Yakoby (2*)
Martin Ettenberg (2*)	Moshe Margolin (1)	
Susan Falcon (2)	Dana Molina (1)	
	Fredi Perlmutter (1)	

Note: Numbers shown in parentheses are the number of votes each member has according to TJC By-Laws. Executive Committee Members have 2 votes, as well as Committee Chairs who do not have a Co-Chair or whose Co-Chair is not present (indicated by 2*). All Committee Co-Chairs whose Co-Chair is present have one vote each. Number subject to change based on attendance status of Committee Co-Chairs. The President has adopted the practice of not voting, except in the event of a tie.

Minutes:

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:03PM and was held via video conference.
2. **President's Welcome** - Alexandra Bar-Cohen welcomed everyone to the Board meeting. She referenced a video she had circulated earlier in the day about how the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone National Park was actually able to change the health of the rivers in the area. Deer had overrun the park, because there had been no natural predator, so allowing wolves to roam the area created a regenerative effect on the ecosystem. The mere presence of wolves created multiple downstream effects: rivers meandered less, and so there was less pooling. The wolves stabilized the river banks. This one thing - the introduction of a small number of wolves - actually changed the physical geography of the park. Alexandra invited the Board to reflect on why she shared that video with us. Lauren Neufeld offered the explanation that we need to identify the real needs of the community. Jesse Treu posited that it is the little things that count. Susan Falcon reflected that the smallest change can have an impact over time. Alexandra wrapped up the conversation by saying that she wants the Board to think about the ripple effects of our actions. For the committees planning events for TJC, she urges that they ask themselves three questions: 1) What other committee can I collaborate with? 2) How can I involve as many congregants as possible? (e.g. Can we provide babysitting or schedule during Religious School if it's not for kids, so parents can join?) 3) Have I looped in Joel Berger, as the central cog in the TJC wheel, and anyone else that needs to know? When we work together, we break down silos and are more able to create that ripple effect. That allows us to thrive, not just survive, as a community in an interconnected, systemic way. She would appreciate us asking

how our actions can create a TJC ripple effect eco-system. Alexandra then invited Edye Kamenir to give the D'var Torah.

3. **D'var Torah** was delivered by Edye Kamenir, who spoke about Sukkot as our Festival of Joy, and how we deal with having high expectations of joy at a time when many of us feel anything but joyful. A year ago, this is not how any of us imagined the Sukkot of 5782 would be. Didn't President Biden tell us we were free of the virus back on Independence Day? We find ourselves in this surreal liminal state caught between anticipation of joy and disappointment over how much more difficult or fraught re-entry to pre-pandemic life is.

In this week's parshah for Shabbat Chol HaMoed Sukkot, we read about Moses receiving the second set of tablets from Adonai. While she imagines that moment as a moment filled with joy to have that reconciliation between G-d and Moses and G-d and the Hebrew people, that moment was not a moment of pure, unadulterated joy - it came after the grave episode of idolatry that prompted Moses to shatter the first set of tablets in a fit of rage in the first place.

Also in this week's parshah, we are commanded to celebrate the three pilgrim festivals, including Sukkot, which, in this parshah, is called "the festival of the ingathering." Alexandra speaks frequently of this holiday season starting with Rosh Hashanah being the "ingathering of TJC's virtual exiles." Anyone who has been back on campus over the last few weeks can no doubt feel the buzz of joy and optimism at our new beginning here at TJC, with our awesome new Rabbi, Rabbi Merow; our gorgeous, newly accessible Bimah, and refreshed sanctuary; the dedication and flexibility of our clergy and staff; and our leadership's commitment to meeting people where they are based on their varying comfort levels.

She is sure we all had a vision back in January or February of how this month of Tishrei would play out; and she's also sure how it has actually played out is nothing like what any of us imagined. But, for us as leaders of TJC, that's exactly the point of Sukkot. It might rain on our Sukkah, but we're still going to do as Adonai commands and celebrate. There might be a historic flood from Tropical Storm Ida five days before Rosh Hashanah, but we're still going to pull off the three-ring circus (in honor of all of our glorious tents) to celebrate the new year and welcome our congregants back to the campus.

During this "festival of joy", this "ingathering of our virtual exiles" Edye commends our clergy, Rabbi Merow, Cantor Warschauer; our staff led by the unflappable Joel Berger; our Religious School led by Sharon Diamondstein; and our leadership team led by Alexandra; on setting the tone of the season, namely: making the best of every situation, choosing optimism in the face of uncertainty, and, in many ways, creating what she calls a "willful joy," which, in the end, forges those high and often unreasonable expectations we start with into a much more joyful reality. Chag Sukkot Sameach!

Alexandra thanked Edye for her inspiring D'var Torah.

4. **Approval of Minutes**

- The minutes of the August 19, 2021, Board Meeting were circulated prior to the meeting for review and were approved unanimously in a motion made by Naomi Richman-Neumann and seconded by Moshe Margolin.
- See www.thejewishcenter.org/Resources/Board-Minutes.aspx.

5. Fundraising Update - Diane Guvenis

- Diane reported that \$89,517 has been collected as of today for the Annual Fund. We have until 12/31 to reach goal of \$250K.
- As of today, we are at 50% Board participation. She challenged the Board to try to get to 100% Board participation by tonight, as it would be a meaningful talking point when annual fund calls start tomorrow, and there will be a phone-a-thon next Wednesday evening at Alexandra's house. Please consider both donating and participating in making calls.

6. Finance Report - Judy Kutin

- Dane Dickler, VP of Finance, could not be here this evening, so Judy, Finance Committee Co-Chair, shared the monthly dashboard.
- The Payroll Protection Program (PPP) loan has now officially turned into a grant in the amount of \$156,050 for the first draw loan.
- Dues are tracking well: as of August 31, we were at \$570,660 vs. Budget of \$350K.
- Religious School revenue is also tracking in a positive direction at \$63,274 relative to its goal. She reviewed the enrollment numbers in Religious School, which have also increased.
- She also showed a mid-month update of dues collection that shows that we have nearly rebounded to pre-pandemic levels.
- Alexandra highlighted that we added 10 new families this season. Naomi Richman-Neumann said that we still have members signing up for Religious School even as recently as today.

7. Institutional Memory - Alexandra Bar-Cohen

- Alexandra gave the Board an orientation to the E-binder that sits on Google Drive as the repository for all of the resources the Board needs. She highlighted the Board Covenant that outlines how we interact with each other, serving as that "ripple effect" we talked about earlier. She showed where the Board calendar, TJC Faces, a resource page, social media links, and TJC's Mission and Core Values documents reside on the site. If you have issues finding it, let Alexandra know.
- Alexandra then shared that she created folders for every committee, and she would like everyone to start uploading relevant documents to those folders in order to pass along institutional knowledge to new Committee Members and to our relatively new staff and clergy. She reminded everyone to upload their Committee Goals to the appropriate folder.
- Shari Allen asked if the contact list for the Board was up to date? Yes - it is.
- Claude Winn said that she doesn't think she has access to change/update her information. Alexandra said that she will allow access to all who don't have access currently.

7. Good and Welfare - Alexandra Bar-Cohen

Alexandra shared with the Board that she would like to prioritize Good and Welfare in order to highlight the covenantal ethos we are creating and to deepen our connections with one another. She invited Board members to please share some good news or news of a "ripple effect" you're already planning for in the future:

- Susan Falcon shared that her son is getting married in the backyard in a few weeks. Please send good thoughts for great weather on the weekend of 10/10!
- Linda Grenis shared that the Programming Committee is exciting and is meeting together to contemporize our programming, while keeping the best of our traditions. Programming will start full speed in November.
- Rabbi Andrea Merow shared we will have cocktails tomorrow night for Sukkot for Board Members. We have two b'nai mitzvah celebrations this weekend, and there is a Sukkah Hop through the Sukkah Village, plus there will be a TJC Young Family event here from 12-3. Sunday afternoon there will be Israeli singing in the sukkot at 4. Simchat Torah and Shemini Azeret are next week. Please join us for all of these great celebrations!
- Nir Yakoby announced a change in the name of the Israeli Affairs Committee to Israel and Us Committee in order to have the name reflect more inclusiveness and descriptiveness of the things that are being planned. Everyone is welcome to the Israeli singing on Sunday at 4PM.
- Naomi Richman-Neumann said that we have name tags to help Rabbi Merow learn names, but we hope to keep using them, so we get to know each other, too. We should keep doing it long after Rabbi Merow knows all of our names. Alexandra said that wearing name tags is one of those things that creates ripple effects in the community.
- Lew Gantwerk thanked Edye Kamenir for recording the minutes. He said that Edye makes us sound so intelligent, and we look like great orators. Edye thanked Lew for actually reading the minutes and making her work worthwhile!
- Nancy Lewis thanked everyone for being greeters on Shabbat morning. It's great to have people welcoming new people to the community. Nancy also requested people sign up for the upcoming b'nai mitzvah presentations. If you'd like to be a greeter, please let Nancy know.
- Dana Molina reminded that Board about the JFCS Wheels for Meals bike ride on October, and that we have a TJC team riding. You can join us or donate to help the cause. Helaine Isaacs said that people have reached out to say that they don't have a bike rack to get their bikes to Mercer County Community Park. If that is the case, you can ride in your neighborhood to participate.

8. High Holidays Discussion - Break-Out Groups

- Alexandra invited the Board to break out into groups to share reflections on the strengths and opportunity areas of the High Holidays in order to learn and build on those findings for next year.
- Each group of approximately 5-6 Board members met to discuss these topics for approximately 15 minutes before reporting back their observations.
 - Group Reporter Susan Falcon - This group highlighted the strong representation of offerings across the campus, as well as much positive feedback on the Family Service, but questioned the role of the Young Family service going forward,

considering there was very low attendance. Everyone thought the communication around the High Holidays could be streamlined focusing on the most salient points to avoid confusion or tuning out lengthy communications altogether. They noted confusion about where the Riverside service was located and who could attend. They observed that the level of security was appropriate. They also observed that the Main Sanctuary was very quiet, and the usual High Holiday ruach was missing, because everyone was wearing masks. People thought Delta news coverage gave people a pass for not attending in person.

- Group Reporter Linda Grenis - This group shared positive feedback on how beautiful the new Bimah and sanctuary looked, on how wonderful and accessible Rabbi Merow's teaching and service leading were; and how Alexandra rocked her Kol Nidre speech. Many in their group were surprised it was so much less crowded than expected. They noted that the addition of a TV monitor in the Social Hall area was a great addition. They also remarked on when Mark Pollard and Ruth Fath having aliyot were great moments for the community. They felt that masks and safety measures taken were appropriate. The areas they felt could be tweaked included the fact that having the Riverside Service on the Nassau Street side of the property contributed a great deal of road noise, so we might reconsider location if we're in the same position next year. It also would have been nice to have clarification on whether families could have attended the outdoor Riverside Service with masks. There was also a desire to see how we can better manage flow on campus between services. They also added that having Greeters, in addition to Security, ushers and ticket checkers, was a warm a welcoming touch.
- Group Reporter Randy Brett - This group first noted the great energy Rabbi Merow brought to the High Holiday services and how well she has integrated into the synagogue community - it feels like she has been here for a long time, she was able to "go with the flow" when unexpected things came up, and she has just brought a lot of energy in the space. They thought it was great having everyone on the campus at the same time with the Riverside Service outside instead of off-campus at the Riverside Elementary School. It was a great way to welcome everyone back after this time apart. They felt that it was wonderful that the weather cooperated to allow all of the events to be outdoors that were planned to be outdoors. It was wonderful that we were able to continue with our traditions as much as we could, even with COVID precautions. In addition, the check-in process felt more welcoming than in 2019, when we first instituted the Safety precautions post-Pittsburgh. They also added having monitors outside for those who felt safer doing that was a nice touch. It was wonderful and gratifying for the community to have High Holidays honors going to members who couldn't be on the Bimah before it became accessible (including Barry Ableman, Jonathan Gross, Mark Pollard, and others). This group noted that if we need to do this type of services arrangement for High Holidays again, it would be great to ensure that if clergy leaves the sanctuary and are no longer present on LiveStream (for instance, to go out to visit people in another area, like the tents this year), that someone in the sanctuary take the lead to formally end the services for people on the LiveStream. Another opportunity for next year would be to add some ways to have new members meet others and feel more welcome. They also felt that the schedule stretched Rabbi Merow rather thin, and we need to find ways to help her survive the holidays a little better.

- Group Reporter David Greenberg - This group mentioned that the system of High Holiday honors Nancy Lewis and Barbara Abramson came up with was very organized and kept a good flow at the Bimah, which was an improvement on past years. They suggested perhaps having a hybrid of this year's approach versus past years' going forward. Having so much going on on the campus was a highlight of this year's High Holidays as it helps demonstrate the extent of variety of service offerings, which was a positive to many members of the group. It was great to have Rabbi Merow part of the energy of the Family Service. Rabbi Baird's Kol Nidre Forum was excellent with his review of Jonah. Finally, Rabbi Merow's experiential services were a bonus, providing alternate spiritual experiences to all who were interested. There were also positive reviews of the Bimah and the Sanctuary refresh. In terms of opportunity areas, the location of tents contributed to noise issues. Perhaps we might consider moving the tents to the back of the property in the future. This groups noted the technical issues on Kol Nidre, which led to the observation of the lack of professionalism on the technical side and the opportunity to make sure Live Stream can hear and feel part of the service. They also posed the question of how might we present Kol Nidre with more energy and ruach in the future?
- Group Presenter Edye Kamenir - This group had strong representation of families with children too young to be vaccinated, and, therefore, their children were not permitted in the building, so they provided a unique perspective. In general, this group felt that things went very smoothly for the Family Services in the tent. The great weather helped make it successful. Having clergy participate in the Family Services on Rosh Hashanah Day 1 and on Yom Kippur was very meaningful for this group. The name tags were also a resounding success, even for people who have been part of TJC for a longer period of time. Several members of this group had served as greeters, and they enjoyed their experiences in that role due to the opportunity to connect and interact with our members, but found it difficult to be the people who had to enforce the rules around limiting access to the building/bathrooms, mask-wearing, etc. It was described as being a little nerve-racking. Members of this group wished the optics of the situation had been more welcoming to families. Since they were the group that had no main building access and the only restrooms children could use were in the Religious School, communication could have been more clear and could have been handled with understanding and delicacy. There was also confusion around tickets and access to different services, specifically, Riverside, since it was moved outside, so families with children under 12 thought may have been open to them, but was not; and Neilah, which had been communicated as an inside service but was moved outside. So this group noted the need for better communication around these things with families, better signage about restroom facilities, and the need for strong representation of families on the High Holidays Planning Committees, since some of these issues could have been foreseen and addressed in advance if seen through the eyes of those impacted by these decisions.
- Group Presenter Barbara Abramson - This group noted the overall positive response to the High Holidays this year and the great ruach that was felt by all. The group uniformly praised the services and the fantastic sermons. Having the alternative services and the new formats were appreciated. They also liked having ushers, greeters, and name tags. The group raised the point that security was felt

to be clustered around the building, while behind the building was left more open. Perhaps security efforts would be more effective at the perimeter. They also thought that there could have been some sort of identifier to indicate someone is a greeter.

9. Adjournment

9.1 The meeting went into Executive Session at 8:38PM

9.2 The meeting was adjourned at 8:43PM in a motion made by Moshe Margolin and seconded by Randy Brett.

Minutes recorded by Edye Kamenir