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# Temple Israel of Northern Westchester

## Year in Review — June 2017 to May 2018



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### President's Report

#### Glen Wolland

Two years down. One to go. Temple Israel is unique in my experience in that our Presidents can serve for three years instead of a more traditional two. What would be my final report at another synagogue is basically my midterm update here. So, at the risk of being anti-climactic, here it is: The past year at TINW had its share of ups and downs. But I'm happy to report, they were overwhelmingly "ups".

First, the financial picture. The Treasurer's report contains all of our hard budget information. That report will show that we have had a terrific year. However, the numbers on the report will not tell you about all the work that went into helping us achieve that goal. They won't tell you about the people who do that work. As amazing as our staff is, (and they are amazing!) we literally could not function without a dedicated and functional volunteer work force. The finance committee chaired by Steve Rubinstein and working in tandem with our Treasurer Arlen Epstein and our Financial Administrator Sandy Goldstein spend hours upon hours managing and forecasting our finances every single year. Our budget for 2017/2018 will end up with a surplus, which will be added to our general fund and invested by our highly competent investment committee. And they are all going to start the process all over again come June 1<sup>st</sup>.

Membership numbers for 2017/2018 have actually gone up. This is a remarkable

statistic as the trend for Temple membership nationwide is going in the exact opposite direction. On the macro level, our programs are generally well-attended, and highly regarded across the board. On a micro level – you may have heard me announce that Torah study would be held on Saturdays at 9:30 AM.... well apparently, many of you have been paying attention, as our weekly study group attendance has outgrown the conference room and now meets in our community room. Credit for the above is wide-spread across a number of sources, but the addition of Michelle Minoff as our new Director for Community Engagement has certainly helped. Along those lines, a hearty thank you needs to be said to Millie Jasper and the members of the search committee that helped us to find Michelle, as well as the donor who provided the grant to fund this new, full-time position.

While I am on the topic of search committees, I would be remiss if I did not thank Matt Copel and our Cantorial Search Committee who spent many hours and considerable emotional energy in order to select our incoming Cantor Lauren Fogelman. Cantor Fogelman will begin her service with TINW this July, and we are looking forward to having her join our family.

We will all miss Cantor Ellerin, but I wish him and his family only the very best in his future endeavors. I am sure we will be hearing more from and about him in the future.

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Rabbi Wendy Pein completed her first full school year as our Director of Education and frankly, I'm feeling pretty good about myself for hiring her last year (With a LOT of help!) Our Center for Jewish Learning is well-organized, well-regarded and thriving under her leadership. Because she is not a rest-on-your-laurels kind of person, Rabbi Pein has begun a program to receive an Executive Masters in Jewish Education. We look forward to reaping the benefits of this addition to Rabbi Pein's already impressive resume and are expecting wonderful things out of the CJL in the years to come.

We have added three professionals to our staff in the past two years, which means I have written three professional contracts. Luckily, and thankfully, I have had the help and counsel (pun intended) of our very own staff attorney, counsellor, Temple Secretary and friend Evan Janush. Evan has literally never said no to a request I have made and has been a steadfast member of our Executive Committee.

Steve Samuels, another member of the Executive committee, is serving his second year as a Vice President. He has also headed up the committee to update the TINW website. The amount of work that has gone into this endeavor is daunting, but we are looking forward to seeing the fruits of his labors in the coming months.

There is only one standing committee chair stepping down this year. Steve Krisky will be handing over the reins of the Building Committee to Bruce Appelbaum. Steve has overseen the committee through capital projects including the renovations of our conference room and our community room. He has been the man in charge of

maintenance of our building throughout his chairmanship and has worked diligently and tirelessly with the Temple Office to make sure the heat is working, the grass is cut and the parking lot is plowed (among many, many other tasks!) As a longtime member of that committee, I have firsthand knowledge of what goes into that position, and so I extend my personal thanks to Steve for his service.

Our Temple celebrated its 70<sup>th</sup> birthday this year. Two events commemorate that milestone. First, our Brotherhood conducted their annual beautiful service organized by Richie Schupper. And coming up next week, our marvelous fundraising committee has organized our spring event around a birthday celebration. In addition, our resident historian, Jack Judd, has agreed to update the 50-year history of TINW with a new edition that will bring us to the present. Also accomplished this year was the completion of the first phase of our "Prayer Trail" at our Yorktown property. The trail has been created and marked. Please stay tuned for future events and programming to be held there.

The URJ held its national Biennial conference this year in Boston. I asked for volunteers to attend, hoping to get six, which would have qualified us as a "delegation". We had never had that many people attend a Biennial before, so I knew it was a long shot. I got ten. And it was exactly as amazing an experience as I hoped it would be.

Lastly, a few more folks to thank, with apologies to those I am sure to miss!

Our Board of Trustees and Executive Committee: Just in case you thought you weren't appreciated. You are. So there.

Our superb staff, including Roberta, Sandy, Michelle, Bob and Ruben (and professional volunteers Sue Feir and Norman Newman): Thank you for everything that you do every day. I could not possibly list everything that only gets done because you are here. But I am pretty sure that it involves cookies at the end.

Robin: Well. Where to begin there? You are the conduit that the life of the Temple flows through. And the life of the Temple is better because of it.

Rabbi Jaech: Our spiritual guide. Our moral center. My forever Rabbi.

Year 2 is over. I've got one year to go, and nothing to lose. Let's have some fun together.

## **Rabbi's Report**

### **Jennifer Jaech**

This past year I have had many opportunities for professional growth and development. Last summer I attended a week-long intensive interfaith spiritual writing workshop at Kenyon College in Ohio. My colleagues and I studied with accomplished writers and social media experts to learn how to strengthen our writing and make it available to a wider audience. Preparing for and leading the congregational civil rights journey (see below) was also enriching for me.

Teaching remains a primary responsibility and a personal joy. This year we did not

have enrollment for a confirmation class. As a result, I was able to spend more time with other students who attend the CJL on Wednesday nights, especially with the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders. When I teach in the CJL, I almost always use visual aids (PowerPoint). Learning this skill has made me a more effective teacher.

I devoted a great deal of time to adult education as well. Nine of our Temple members will become Adult B'nai Mitzvah on June 22<sup>nd</sup>. It has been a pleasure to teach and guide these adult learners this past year. Temple Israel's weekly Torah Study continues to draw a robust attendance. We have outgrown the space in the conference room where we had been meeting for the past few years; we now meet in the community room. In the fall I offered a class ("Why Write the Torah?") as part of the Westchester Jewish Council's "Night of Jewish Learning."

I have also provided regular pastoral support for struggling families. The Mental Health support group, formed three years ago, continues to meet regularly on early Sunday afternoons. We welcome new members and several have joined since the group began. In my social justice work, I and colleagues from the Croton Houses of Worship attended two training sessions with the New Sanctuary Coalition. This group provides support for undocumented neighbors who are striving to remain legally in this country with their families.

I have been very active with the Croton Clergy this year. In the fall, we offered an interfaith Thanksgiving potluck supper. In honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, we offered workshops on immigration, racial

justice and civil discourse. The program also included Eddie Pleasant as our keynote speaker, and songs offered by our cantor and adult choir. Our Croton Clergy program for the spring focused on teen activism and gun violence. Also in the area of interfaith work, I was part of the planning committee for the Peekskill Area Pastors Association Yom HaShoah program (held at First Hebrew Congregation).

In February, I travelled with twenty others from Temple Israel on Civil Rights Journey. We visited important civil rights sites and organizations in Atlanta, Montgomery, Selma, Birmingham and Memphis. It was powerful and inspiring to meet with people who were part of this movement in this country. The Forward published two articles I co-authored with Lauren Shenfield about this trip in their on-line edition. I also put together a presentation about the trip for the Brotherhood lecture series. The presentation included over 100 photos and three videos.

Finally, I devoted a great deal of time and effort to the search for the new cantor. Cantor Ellerin has been a wonderful cantor and I wish him every success in his new position. I have every reason to believe that Cantor Fogelman will have a seamless transition when we welcome her in July. Rabbi Pein remains an outstanding colleague in our work together. Our new Director of Community Engagement, Michelle Minoff, has been a valuable addition to our staff. In the short time she has been here, I have found myself wondering how we ever managed without her! Glen Wolland, our leadership, and our staff remain a source of inspiration and

support. Every day, I give thanks for the opportunity to serve this sacred community.

## **Cantor's Report**

### **Benjamyn Ellerin**

I am astounded at how quickly the time has flown by as our third and final year begins to come to a close. I am humbled by all of the wonderful experiences that we have shared as a community. This year, as we further explored the depths our new prayerbook, Mishkan Hanefesh, our High Holy Days continued to build musical excellence with the inclusion of our professional guest musicians, Hallel B'shir, and Sh'ma Na Na.

Other special musical services included a spirited Simchat Torah celebration, a Shabbat to commemorate the anniversary of Kristallnacht, several Shabbatot enhanced by Sh'ma Na Na, Hallel B'shir, Selah, and the Glee Club throughout the year, and beautiful Brotherhood and Sisterhood shabbat services. Purim was a particular high point this year as we combined forces to produce a Speil on a grand scale, featuring not only our extraordinary spielers but also our choirs and professional musicians. It was a thrill to see the sanctuary overflowing and to celebrate together with so much enthusiasm.

Following Rabbi Jaech's excellent example, it has been a pleasure to continue our temple's tradition of interfaith work. Hallel B'shir contributed their voices to the Peekskill Area Pastors' Association (PAPA) annual interfaith MLK service again this year in addition to providing musical leadership for the MLK event organized by the Croton Clergy Group where Eddie

Pleasant was featured as the keynote speaker. Hallel B'shir's leadership also extended to this year's PAPA Yom Hashoah service at First Hebrew Congregation in Peekskill. It is wonderful to see the reputation of our music program extending beyond the walls of our building and we are grateful for their leadership and outreach as they share our beautiful music and prayers in the wider community.

It was also a personal highlight to present two concert lecture programs this year as part of the Brotherhood and J.E.W.E.L. series. With the help of Sari and Dina, "Hanukkah Around the World" and "Humor in Jewish Music" were fantastic opportunities to share beautiful and fun music that is otherwise an unheard part of our tradition's repertoire.

I am proud this year to have prepared 28 Bar and Bat Mitzvah students and it has been an honor to co-officiate at a full spectrum of life-cycle events in our community with Rabbi Jaech. I have watched with pride and excitement as our temple's education program grows under the expert guidance of Rabbi Pein and I am thrilled to see the many initiatives that Michelle Minoff has begun with our community engagement.

Please know, I am going to miss Temple Israel very much. But as I see our community growing and moving from strength to strength, I am glad to know that Cantor Lauren Fogelman will be Temple Israel's next cantor and that she will help continue our traditions of musical and pastoral excellence. Working with Rabbi Pein, Roberta, Robin, Sandy, Ruben, Bob, and now Michelle has been a daily pleasure. And of course, I count myself

most lucky to have had the privilege of working with and learning from Rabbi Jaech. It has been an honor to work with our highly talented music team, Dina, Eddie, and Sari and all the members of Hallel B'shir, Sh'ma Na Na, Selah, and The Glee Club. Thank you all for your friendship and for all that you have taught me these past three years. Fortunately, we are not quite done yet! Please do plan to join us on Friday, June 8th for our board installation and Broadway Shabbat and a very special Jewish Jazz program on Sunday, June 17th.

I wish everyone joy and blessings in the coming year and I know that you will embrace Cantor Fogelman and her beautiful family with same warmth that you showed me. I have no doubt that she will feel equally lucky to serve as your cantor.

L'shalom,  
Cantor Ben Ellerin