

KOL NIDRE APPEAL

5782 - 2021

Dear Friends,

For those of you who haven't met me, I'm Keith Artin, recently elected President of the Kehillah. On behalf of the Kehillah Board, I want to welcome everyone on this Kol Nidre. We are all grateful that despite the challenges posed by the ongoing pandemic, we can still gather as a Jewish community in prayer. It may not look like we all imagined a few short months ago, but thanks to the dedication of staff and many volunteers, we are still able to gather in a meaningful way. For that, I am thankful.

As I am sure you are all aware, it's not just our services that have been impacted by the pandemic. Kehillah Jewish Preschool has navigated the past year and a half successfully, but enrollment last year was well below our pre-COVID levels. Our membership is down, but it is starting to grow again. Prior to the pandemic, we'd seen several years of consistent growth. We've made it through to this point on fairly solid footing, primarily due to the hard work and dedication of our staff who made sure we were exceedingly careful and identified opportunities whenever they presented themselves.

But perhaps the biggest impact has been seen in our Kehillah Religious School (KRS). Enrollment during the pandemic has been lower than it has been in years. There are a variety of reasons for this. Some of it is cyclical – our community doesn't always have the same number of children of school age each year. But last year, a completely virtual classroom was something that not every family was interested in. This is easy to understand, as their children spent Monday through Friday in front of a computer for the entire school day, and several families sought screen less weekends. Also, children with learning differences had needs that could not be met in a virtual platform.

And for the year that has just begun, there are ongoing concerns as many of the students are not old enough to get vaccinated yet, so in person school, even outdoors, can be worrisome as well. Thankfully, we've seen an increase in enrollment this year, but we're still below pre-pandemic levels. On a positive

note, I'm very pleased to report that the first day of Religious School was held on August 29th. All classes were held in person and outdoors at Kehillah. It went exceedingly well. Letters of appreciation and accolades from our families have been received. Our Madrichim, Religious School Committee members and parent volunteers worked diligently and enthusiastically with Morah Sherri to offer an excellent and joyful in person learning program.

I know that many of you may not have children in KRS, but I hope you might all consider the importance of teaching the children in our community about Torah and Judaism. Not to be corny about it, but they are the future of Judaism and our community, whether they stay here at the Kehillah or move on as they grow up. Investing in the KRS as we have in the past, results in young Jewish women and men who can lead our community in positive ways, whether it's joining the pool of members who can lay-lead services, or read Torah, or teach religious school as several of our KRS graduates now do. Some of our KRS graduates have gone on to be presidents and board members of their university's Hillel and one even founded the first Jewish students' union on their college campus.

We have over 20 Madrichim this year – that's more than 20 teenagers, all graduates of KRS, who choose to get up early on Sunday mornings to help at the school. These are teenagers volunteering to get up early on a weekend! They clearly want to make the KRS experience great for the younger members of their community. That says a lot about the environment we've created. And much of that is thanks to the leadership of our Education Director, Sherri Morris.

Many of you already know that Morah Sherri is planning to retire next spring after the completion of the current school year. She has been a blessing to the Kehillah, and our children have benefitted from her leadership. **I am asking that as a community, we honor Morah Sherri by focusing our giving these High Holidays on KRS.** Traditionally, we only ask the families of students for donations. But the cost of preserving the quality of religious school is high, and we shouldn't compromise. Kehillah Synagogue currently subsidizes 63% of the actual cost of student tuition.

So this year, we have decided to direct our *contributions from the Kol Nidre Appeal to the Kehillah Religious School* for new and essential technology for the

teachers and for needed general support. While virtual teaching has been extremely challenging, one benefit from last year was increased use of technology by our religious school teachers. They found many creative ways to impart knowledge and understanding using a variety of apps. This creativity doesn't need to stop when we are back in the classroom. The use of a computer in each classroom would maximize the way that we reach our students. Technology is integral to their lives and we need to be taking advantage of all that technology has to offer. Currently, we have just two (aging) laptops that are shared amongst nine KRS teachers while on site.

We hope you will give as generously as you can. Just mail your check to Kehillah or go to Kehillah's website to the donate page and use your credit card. **Specify Kol Nidre Appeal on the memo or note section for your donation.** 100% of the contributions we receive will go to this important educational program. To maximize dollars raised, we ask that you make an unrestricted gift, so that it can be used for what is most needed in our KRS.

On behalf of Kehillah, I thank you in advance and wish an easy and meaningful fast for all of you who are able to do so.

G'mar Hatimah Tovah, may we all be sealed for a good year in the Book of Life.

Keith Artin, President, Kehillah Synagogue