

My thoughts as I begin my third year as President of the Board

It is hard to believe it has been two years since I was first elected President. As I have said many times, it has been a pleasure to serve you and our community.

In this article I would like to summarize my thoughts about our community. First, I want to repeat what I said on Rosh Hashanah: We are a **strong and vibrant community**. We have many of the key elements necessary to continue to be strong and vibrant for many years to come. There are many things going well in our Kehillah Kedoshah. Let me give you a few examples:

1. We added 33 new member households this year – a record.
2. Our Religious School enrollment is at 150+, an increase of 40 students from last year, and we just hired a dynamic and innovative Director of Education.
3. Our Shabbat Services, Rockin' Shabbats, and Kiddushes are full. It is literally hard to find a parking space on Shabbat.
4. Our Men's Community and Sisterhood are very active.
5. While last year we faced revenue shortfalls, we still found a way to break even.
6. Our support for Israel remains strong. Again we had the largest contingent of attendees at the South Bay AIPAC membership dinner, and many of our members went to Israel last year.
7. The Solomon Campaign to renovate our building and grounds is in full swing and going very well.

On the High Holy Days, I said, "I feel confident about our future because we continue to manage our operations very well, we are attracting young families to join as members, and we have an outstanding clergy team". In addition, on Yom Kippur, we launched the congregation-wide Solomon Campaign. I spoke about the importance of that project and why we must think of it as an act of stewardship. What I mean by stewardship is that we, as members of this Kehillah Kedoshah, are the stewards of this community today and for future generations. As stewards it is our role to make this community stronger compared to when we became members.

The Solomon Project is our community acting as stewards to make our spiritual home better for us today and for the future. I'm happy to report that the campaign and project are going well. As I write this article (mid-December), we have received commitments of \$2.75 million. We have many solicitations to complete. In the next couple of months we will know how much we will raise for this first phase. In addition, the project design is going very well. The design team is working with our architect and consultants to come up with a very beautiful and exciting

design. You will be getting a call from our solicitors. Please welcome them and agree to meet and discuss a contribution from your family. To get the latest numbers on fundraising, please check our website, www.bethjacobrwc.org.

Let me raise another aspect of stewardship. In the midst of all this good news about our community and the Solomon Campaign, we also need to recognize that to continue our positive trend we need to make sure that we take care of our most important assets, our professional staff.

The personnel cuts we made in the office this fiscal year have made it very difficult on what is now a very small office staff. The salary freezes are also having a negative impact on our employees, especially on our clergy.

This year, actually starting this month, we will negotiate a new employment contract for Rabbi Ezray. We have been very fortunate to have Rabbi Ezray as our leader for 15 years. He is not only an outstanding senior Rabbi, he is the driving force for all great things that we are doing here. His vision continues to raise the bar in everything we do. Using a football metaphor, he is our “franchise player.”

Extending clergy contracts in synagogues is never easy. I’ve been thinking about this for several weeks. On one hand, I’m thrilled to be able to secure another contract with Rabbi Ezray because it brings certainty to our community. On the other hand, renewing clergy contracts is one of those issues where we will hear a wide range of views, and, in some cases the way those views are expressed can cause serious heartburn in our community. It is my goal to make this a positive experience. The only way I know to do that is to be open and transparent about how we are proceeding. We will spend more time together on this topic over the next few months.

Let me give you just a headline of the biggest hurdle we face. I have looked at the data for senior rabbi salaries on a local basis and a national basis. What I have learned is that today we are underpaying Rabbi Ezray. The gap has moved even more in the wrong direction because he voluntarily offered to freeze his salary this fiscal year. What this means is that our community needs to have a serious conversation about paying our rabbi a market-comparable salary and the implications that result from it.

I’m telling you about this now because I don’t want to surprise you. I view this process as an opportunity to secure our future with Rabbi Ezray, which we mutually benefit from. As I said before, we will have ample opportunity to discuss this and understand it as we move into early 2010. I firmly believe our community will do what we need to do, when our community understands the details behind it.

I'm sure it seems like a lot of what I've been talking about relates to money. I tend to look at it another way, I see it as a recognition that a key reason for our success is because of the quality of our professional team. We are very fortunate to have that. We come to expect it and we grow because of it. But at the same time, good people earn and deserve competitive salaries.

So what is the bottom line that I'm asking of you? I'm asking that every member accept their role as a steward of our community. That you feel an ownership of our success, and, as an owner, you will view Congregation Beth Jacob among the top organizations that you support. That is what Nancy and I do. We make Congregation Beth Jacob and the Jewish National Fund our top organizations. We accept our role as stewards for our Kehillah Kedoshah and for the land of Israel. We know there are many important organizations doing great work, and we support several of them including AIPAC, Federation and others. However, when it comes to our priorities, Congregation Beth Jacob is right on the top. I'm asking our Congregation Beth Jacob members to also accept their role of stewards and to help our community to continue to thrive for many years to come.

I also want to acknowledge that economic times are tough. Some families in our community are facing real economic challenges. We understand that and we want to be clear that our community welcomes all members regardless of their economic circumstances. That is how we have operated in the past and how we will continue to operate in the future. As stewards of our community, we step up to support those that are facing more difficult challenges to enable the continued success of our Kehillah Kedoshah.

I want to close my comments by saying thank you for your support in my first two years as President. Contrary to popular belief, being a synagogue president is a fulfilling and fun experience when the community, Board, and clergy are working together toward making our Kehillah Kedoshah a special and sacred community. We have that at Congregation Beth Jacob. We should be proud of what we achieved and excited about our future together.