

Rosh Hashanah Morning
Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim
Ben Glass, President
October 3, 2016

Good Morning, *Gut Yontif*, and welcome. For the past year and a half, I have had the honor and privilege to serve as President of Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim. For that, I thank all of you, but I want to offer some more specific thanks, since this will be my last opportunity to do so in front of the entire Congregation before assuming that most coveted role of Immediate Past President this coming May.

First and foremost, I want to thank my wonderful wife Janice for sharing me with the Temple these last 18 months – really, these last eight years, since I came onto the Board of Trustees. What started as just an understanding that I wouldn't be available the third Tuesday night of each month, turned into patient support when I wasn't around because of committee meetings or spent the evening on the phone discussing Temple business. She has been a sympathetic ear when I got frustrated, a strong shoulder when I got tired, and she has put up with my secrecy when I was dealing with delicate and confidential Temple issues.

I also want to thank those with whom I have served on the Board of Trustees, who have given of their time, talents and expertise to advance the interests of KKBE, particularly Naomi Gorstein, who has been a tireless VP of Administration, taking on various special projects, engaging in shuttle diplomacy when needed, and always keeping me on task, even when I was pretty grumpy about it.

Of course, I need to thank the men and women on whose shoulders I stand, all of our Past Presidents. They have given freely of their time and wisdom, showing up for Past President Luncheons, taking my calls and sometimes calling me. They have taken on projects at my request, and been an important sounding board. They have supported me as I have worked to usher in sometimes uncomfortable change, and they have pulled on the reins when they felt I was moving too far, too fast. Most importantly,

they have inspired me and others with their example and their leadership. So to Anita and Ira Rosenberg, David Jaffee, Billy Olasov, Marty Yonas, David Haller, Rob Turkewitz, Myles Glick, Eve Berlinsky, Robert Goldstein, Edwin Pearlstine, Stephen Baumrind, Jack Kurtz, Alan Davis, and Maxine and Henry Freudenberg, I say thank you. Thank you for being the keepers of memory, the quiet leaders, and the role models for our Congregation.

To the hundreds of members who volunteer in ways large and small, from stuffing envelopes to docenting, working in the gift shop or manning the grill at Temple events, coordinating and hosting programs, and lending your time and your expertise in so many different ways, thank you for building the community that makes our Congregation so strong.

And to the many members who lend their financial support, through dues and donations, mitzvah memberships and Nosh sponsorships, major gifts and testamentary devises, thank you for supporting the unglamorous work of making sure the bills are paid, the lights stay on, and we are able to provide those activities and services that are central to our mission. I am so proud of all the ways we have expanded our offerings to meet the increasing needs of our growing and increasingly engaged Congregation, and so grateful for all those who make them possible.

When I first came on to the Executive Board five and a half years ago, we had a new Rabbi who had been in the role for less than a year. I have to admit I had a vested interest in seeing her succeed, as I had co-chaired the Search Committee that recommended her. She was excited and enthusiastic, but also a little overwhelmed. She had come to realize that she needed to spend the vast majority of her time attending to the core functions of our Temple – services, pastoral care, and life cycle events – and she was a little frustrated that she could not spend more time on the big picture – engaging more members, coming up with new and creative educational programming, and representing KKBE in the larger community.

Four years ago, the leadership of the Temple concluded that we needed a second clergy, but we didn't have the necessary financial resources to make that a

reality. Fortunately, a group of families came together and agreed to fund the initial contract for an Assistant Rabbi, which would give us three years to build a sustainable financial model to pay for a second clergy into the future.

Our addition of a second clergy has enabled us to offer a level of rabbinic service and other programming we have never been able to provide before. For two years, we have had a rabbi available for every worship service in our sanctuary. We have had a rabbi involved in our Religious School. We have had a rabbi available for nearly every naming and bris, b'nei mitzvah, confirmation service, wedding, and funeral. From birth to death, our Community can provide pastoral care and rabbinic support to all members, in all seasons.

Perhaps as important, the additional rabbinic support has allowed Rabbi Alexander to focus more attention on our overall mission, and turn a fresh eye to our educational, programmatic, and worship offerings. It has allowed her to interact more regularly with the larger Jewish community, and to take a leadership role in her dealings with other clergy, and the larger Charleston community. It has given her time to reflect, to refresh, and to inspire others.

Over the last two years, we have managed to incorporate about half of the cost of a second clergy into our regular operating budget, through belt tightening and the identification of additional revenue streams like tourism. We have a year to fill in the rest of the gap, or face some very difficult decisions about what essential services we would have to cut to avoid a return to the days of being a single clergy Congregation. Whether it is our music offerings, our Religious School, our facilities, or something else, if we are unable to close the gap in our annual funding, something will have to be sacrificed. It is my most sincere hope that we do not have to face that prospect.

For the last four years, we have worshipped here at Memminger Auditorium, together as a whole community. The services are creative, inclusive, and spiritual. Most importantly, they further one of our primary missions – the building of connections and community. I, and many others, believe these services have become a central aspect of our Congregational character and identity. The idea that we can all gather

here to worship together on the holiest days of the year, free of space constraints, unequal seating options or raised tempers gives me great peace. I remember the days of showing up two hours early to claim a seat, sitting four to a pew in the sanctuary or watching services on a screen in the Barbara Pearlstine Social Hall.

I don't want to go back to those days, and I don't think many of you do, either, but off-site High Holy Day services add more than \$20,000 to our annual operating budget, and that cost increases every year. Additionally, one need only look up in our Historic Sanctuary to see the work that needs to be done to restore our ceiling to its original glory, and I can assure you that work will come at significant cost.

Against the backdrop of these needs, the changing landscape of Jewish organizational life has created constant challenges to sustainable operational funding. In 2011, member dues covered 58% of our roughly \$967,000 operating budget. Last year, member dues covered just under 50% of our \$1.1 million budget, and that includes mitzvah member dues. Synagogue membership is at historic lows in the United States, and each succeeding generation of Americans becomes less and less culturally inclined to join a synagogue. Report after report heralds the tendency of millennials to resist "joining" in general. Many Jewish scholars and publications bemoan the coming decline and death of the dues based model of financing for Jewish organizations. And while here at KKBE we have had remarkable success in maintaining and even growing our membership and its engagement, we would be naïve to think that we can completely insulate ourselves from the emerging trends in society that will threaten our future prospects.

For the last eight years, KKBE has played a central role in my life. This community has educated my children and prepared them for B'Nei Mitzvah. Our confirmation classes have sent them out into the world prepared to grapple with and defend whatever place Judaism holds in their hearts and their lives. For me, KKBE has provided meaningful opportunities for prayer and reflection, has been a source of friends and confidantes, and has given me a sense of meaning.

I know I am not alone in this. In fact, I am a relative newcomer to this experience. I look around and see many of you for whom KKBE is a multi-generational experience. I also see many who have immersed themselves far more deeply into our Community and Temple life than I have. I ask all of you to consider the role that KKBE plays in your life. Consider the ways that this community has supported you and given your life meaning and value over the years. Consider how that compares to other organizations to which you belong and which you support. And please, consider how you can return that support, to your Community, to your Congregation, to your Temple.

Because we, sitting in this room, may be the last assembled group in the life of this Congregation to have the opportunity to ensure the financial sustainability of KKBE into the future. Through lifetime giving and testamentary gifts, we have the opportunity to build our endowed funds to a level that they will generate sufficient annual income to cover the ever-increasing gap between our annual revenues and our annual expenses. By doing so, we can guarantee the continuing vitality of our beloved KKBE, for our children and grandchildren and for all those future generations of Jews in search of a supportive, inclusive Reform Jewish community in Charleston, South Carolina.

So thank you. Thank you all, for everything you have done to bring us to this point in our existence and for all that you will do in the future to ensure our continued success. Living, praying, learning, and working, may we all, together, move from year to year, from generation to generation, from strength to strength.

Thank you, and Shana Tova.