

Yom Kippur Morning 5778

Naomi Gorstein, KKBE President

When I was installed as President this past May, I was immediately struck by my place within the larger history of our synagogue, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim. Most all of you know that Jews began settling here in the 1690's, that the first religious society was formed in 1749 and that the first synagogue was built in 1794. We are the longest running Reform congregation in the United States. Jews came to Charleston for freedom of religion as well as for the economic opportunities afforded them. They were also able to participate more fully in the secular society. Francis Salvador was the first Jew to hold elected public office, and the first Jew to die in the Revolutionary War. We have had many soldiers fight in both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. Some of our forebears held slaves, and then their descendants marched for civil rights. As Reform Jews, one of our primary tenets is to perform Tikkun Olam, to heal the world, and from our humble beginnings we did just that. We have had the Hebrew Orphan Society, the Hebrew Benevolent Society, The Jewish Braille Institute and the 1st organized Sisterhood. All these organizations were created to care for and educate the impoverished, the less fortunate among us.

Speaking out against injustice has always been central to who we are as Reform Jews. "Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof! we're taught in Deuteronomy, "Justice, justice shall you pursue!"

Unfortunately, we have now passed a threshold unlike any we have ever seen before in the United States. The expressions of xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism have been increasing all over the country. White supremacists walk proudly, no longer feeling the need to hide their faces, or their beliefs. Jewish leaders find themselves targeted on social media. Antisemitism, racism and bigotry have no place in our society. We are called to stand up and denounce hatred wherever we see it. The tolerance for intolerance must be thwarted.

We are also taught to take care of the most vulnerable among us. We must

come together as Jews, and take the time to listen, listen to others who are in pain, who have lived a completely different story from our own, who have experienced difficulties we cannot imagine. We have an opportunity to truly make a difference in the Charleston community as we have done so many times throughout our history.

I believe that the synagogue has become more important than ever. It is here that we, as a Jewish community, come together for solace, for leadership and for inspiration.

We are a diverse congregation, with members who are 10th and 11th generation, as well as those who have just joined us this year. Our members include young families, seniors, singles and those who are intermarried, and others who don't fit any of the above categories. We welcome you all to our KKBE community. We want to meet you where you are on your Jewish journey.

Currently, we have 500 family units in our membership. We have a rich selection of programming, a growing Adult Education program and the largest Jewish Religious School in South Carolina with 150 students and we have 16 students preparing for b'nei mitzvah this year. We had 23 kindergarteners on the first day of religious school, excited to begin their Jewish Education! Our youth, our young families, they are our future. We certainly are the place to come to be part of a vibrant, Reform Jewish community. We are incredibly fortunate to have two committed, compassionate, energized Rabbis. Thanks to both of you, Rabbi Alexander and Rabbi Kanter for guiding us through our life cycle events-teaching us the rituals that help us live as Jews.

This is who we are.
And what of our future?

The health of KKBE is vital for a vibrant Jewish community in Charleston, and by many measures KKBE is flourishing. However, in order to continue to prosper, we need reliable funding from an endowment that keeps pace with the demands of our congregation. The Harold

Grinspoon Foundation stated that by 2025, 20% of our operating budget must come from our endowment or our organization will be in fiscal crisis. As many of you know, our membership dues do not cover our expenses. Each year, we struggle to make ends meet and this is not sustainable. With a more robust endowment, we can bridge the past to a sustainable future. We can do the one thing our forefathers and foremothers had not yet achieved, financial security for our congregation. As we move forward with our endowment campaign, I hope that each of you will consider what KKBE means to you and how you might contribute to our vision for a Jewish future.

A community is too heavy to carry alone. Deuteronomy Rabbah 1:10

As the new year begins, my hope for us all is for good health and strong relationships. My prayer for us all is that we look for commonality, instead of focusing on what divides us. And, as Jay-Z says in his song “Young Forever,” “May the best of your todays, be the worst of your tomorrows.”

L'Shana Tova Tikatevu,