

Rabbi Urecki, Cantor Scherr, members of the Board, my fellow congregants and guests:

About a month ago Rabbi Urecki and I were talking about what's going on in the world and he was asking me what I thought about various things. All of a sudden he asked me, "Oh by the way, Janet, do you believe in free speech" I said, "what do you mean – you've known me a long time, of course I believe in free speech!" He said, "Good, don't forget you're giving one in a few weeks!"

Cantor Scherr, on behalf of our congregation, WHERE have you been all these years? Seriously, welcome to B'nai Jacob. I know I speak for the whole congregation when I say we are thrilled that you and your wife, Susie, and your daughter, Tova (last week) are spending the High Holidays with us this year. You have enriched our High Holiday services with warmth and your beautiful voice, and for that we thank you very much!

I would like to now recognize the many people who demonstrate their caring and love for B'nai Jacob daily, and I originally had them in this address. However, there are SO many, it made the length of my remarks way too long, and while I realize that is a

great problem to have, I decided this year, with a few exceptions, to put the acknowledgements in writing and leave them for you to read. They are on the table in the entrance way for you to pick up. This is not a reflection of their importance, but rather a reflection of the large number of our members who deeply care for, and love, Congregation B'nai Jacob. When you see these folks, please take a moment to thank them for all they do for us.

There is one person so special, I will talk about her here. Betty Schoenbaum. Betty just celebrated her 100th birthday this week, and she continues to bless us with her thoughtfulness and generosity. We recently named this beautiful sanctuary the "Betty Schoenbaum Sanctuary" in grateful appreciation of Betty's many years of commitment, dedication and outstanding contributions to B'nai Jacob and our community. Personally, I cannot think of a more fitting tribute; the sanctuary is the heart of our synagogue; Betty is the heart of our congregation. We wish Betty good health, happiness and many more birthdays.

There are a couple of other people I want to mention as well.

Marilyn, you continue to work tirelessly to ensure our children receive a Jewish education through our Hebrew and Sunday Schools. When you're not teaching, you often are in the kitchen preparing meals. I said during your 30th anniversary celebration that you are the air beneath Rabbi's wings and it is so true. There is no way Rabbi could be half the Rabbi he is without your ideas, guidance, and overall support. And we can't thank you enough for that, plus all of your own contributions to our daily operations.

Rabbi Urecki, Thank you. It's hard to come up with different ways each year to describe the impact you have here. You and I have had many conversations this past year and one thing that is constant is your profound love for this congregation. While keeping our vision of Traditional Judaism for a Modern World foremost in your mind, you continue to look for ways to create an open and inclusionary spiritual community for all of us in this diverse congregation. Thank you for listening, thank you for being open to new ideas, thank you for the free exchanges we've had. You and I were good friends when I stepped into this role two years ago; working closely with you, during this time, has given me the opportunity to know you even better, and deepen

that friendship. For that I am grateful.

To our Board, which continues to have the congregations' best interests at heart. We accomplished A LOT this past year thanks to you. Attendance at Board meetings has been consistently high, discussions respectful and productive. Thank you for the support you continued to give me in my last year as President.

We very much appreciate that we were remembered in the estates of Aggie Rubin, Margaret Kartegener, Chris Whalen, Mary Pesetsky, and Gayle Preiser. I consider them as "Keepers of our Synagogue", one of the categories in the written acknowledgements, because choosing to take care of B'nai Jacob the way they have, clearly shows the amount of love and dedication they had for our shul. Please consider following their example.

In the acknowledgements, you will see a category I call "Keepers of our Traditions" We can't talk about traditions without thinking of our history; the life in our shul before we were here. Phil Goldstein of blessed memory initiated the creation of our archives, and, we now have so many pictures, stories, artifacts, and histories of the people of our congregation since

its beginning, we are ready to move to the next step in the archive process and have it organized, recorded and preserved.

This data collection and recording will be quite a big job, led by Mary Hogue. With her extensive background and expertise in Library Science, Mary is the perfect person to head up this cataloging effort.

As for our activities here, B'nai Jacob continues to be a warm and busy place:

1. Our Sunday School is flourishing with about 30 children from toddlers to pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah, 8 teens in the High School discussion class, 10 children in Hebrew School, and 6 students studying for their upcoming Bar and Bat Mitzvahs.
2. We have a variety of adult classes led by Rabbi such as weekly Torah and Talmud classes, High School discussions, an Edgewood Summit Torah class and more.
3. Rabbi Urecki and Rabbi Cohn, from Temple Israel will continue their collaboration this year with joint programming. Stay tuned for more information!

4. This past year we had about 5 free casual Shabbat dinners with attendance ranging from 85 - 100. Thank you to the sponsors and chefs who made those dinners possible.
5. We had about 8 Jews & Brews with an average attendance of 15 – 18 each time.
6. Some joyous events this past year included two weddings and one Bar Mitzvah. We also celebrated the completion of Rabbi's and Marilyn's 30th year at B'nai Jacob.
7. Last fall the Synagogue sponsored a very successful cocktail reception followed by a Shabbat dinner in honor of the new members of our congregation who had joined within the prior three years. Many thanks to the Engagement Committee, and in particular, Russell Emrick, Ben Redmond, and Jennifer Mize for all the work they did to make it such a memorable evening.
8. We started mailing out a newsletter this past year. Our goal is to turn this into a monthly publication. Please look for it in your mailboxes.
9. We developed a new brochure that we can now give people (both in and out of town) which lists the

many ways they can memorialize their loved ones with various donation levels.

10. Occasionally we get asked by members or friends if they can use one of our rooms for a meeting in exchange for a donation. We've been working on a policy for that and it will soon be complete.

11. Many of you have made comments about how clean the synagogue is. Partnering with Auxiliary, about 6 months ago we began using a professional commercial cleaning service that comes in twice a week and does a great job of making sure our building shines.

We gained 9 new members this past year, and sadly, we saw the passing of 6 beloved congregants. We have a total of 170 single and family memberships.

The air conditioning has been replaced in both the library and upstairs in the Alex and Betty Schoenbaum Education Center. They are now both great options for classes or meetings.

We had some old pipes downstairs that decided it was time to either break, or leak. Significant repairs

and changes have been made to the old underground piping downstairs to prevent future issues, and in a few minutes, I'll be talking about some other changes we'll be making down there.

Regarding our finances, expenses (both operating and capital) unfortunately continue to exceed our revenue by about \$200,000/year. On a regular basis, we've been withdrawing money from our endowment funds – on average about \$20,000/month.

I told you last year that our old dues structure was simply not working. We need dues income to help pay for monthly expenses such as salaries, utilities, repair bills, all the things we need to pay for so we can have a Shul that meets our needs and that we can be proud of. A dues committee was created this past Spring, and it worked very hard into the summer to create a dues structure that is simple, fair, and flexible.

The new structure includes various levels of extra giving, called Partnership levels, for those who desire, and are able to contribute more than the minimum dues.

We recognize that for various personal reasons not everyone is able to pay dues at the established rates. We will NEVER turn anyone away for inability to pay. We mean that. If you've thought of becoming a member, but stayed away because of inability to pay dues, please see me, Ted Kanner, or Gary Sheff. We very much want you as part of our congregation.

If you've not yet returned your dues form, please do so soon. We are updating our records and membership list. If you've lost your form, just call the office, or stop by and fill one out.

For me, it has been personally heartwarming and inspiring to see the positive reaction to the new dues information. Many of you, without being asked, have committed to become a "Partner" and pay dues above the minimum amount. In addition, many of those not able to pay the minimum amount for personal reasons, still took it upon themselves to increase what they had been paying in the past. I thank each one of you in these two groups for making B'nai Jacob a priority. You are helping us work toward narrowing the gap between our dues income and our operating costs.

I've also been deeply moved by something else. Last year, I told you we have people who participate in many of our offerings, including having their children become Bar/Bat Mitzvah'd, but they don't contribute one penny to our operations. A number of those people are now dues paying members. You know who you are; thank you to each of you who didn't just hear, but listened, and took action to help support our shul.

Also, as I said we would last year, we've started charging non-member rates for various activities, classes, Bar and Bat Mitzvah training, Sunday School, and Hebrew School. You will see more of that as we go forward.

We have a number of former local members who now live out of town. Fortunately, they want to maintain their connection to their B'nai Jacob family. It's unrealistic to expect them to pay the same dues as our local members, so we created an Associate Membership. To be an Associate Member, the criteria consists of only two things; they need to live out of town, and, pay minimum dues of \$300. They will have all the same benefits as local members, except for the ability to vote whenever we have a need to do so. For Associate Members who want to give more than

\$300, we have also established Partnership levels for them as well.

In recognition of our many non-Jewish friends in the Charleston community that come to classes, programs and even some services here and want to make donations, we established a new category of giving called 'Friends of B'nai Jacob'. This past year we received an additional \$5,800 through our 'Friends'. If you know of anyone who feels a connection to this synagogue as our 'Friends' do, please come see me or Gary.

In the weeks leading up to today, as I thought of all the things I wanted to say, I kept coming up with one overall theme, I'm EXCITED! I am excited! I'm excited for our future, and here are all the reasons why:

1st, I'm excited about our emerging leaders coming up behind me and the more senior members of our Board. Look at people like Russell Emerick, a Board member and Chair of the Engagement Committee, and driver of the under 30 and new member part of our dues structure. Look at Blaire Malkin, a Board member, a key member of the dues committee, and President of Auxiliary. Look at Ben

Redmond, a Board member and key member of our Engagement Committee who has come up with some great ideas for programs such as the upcoming Sunday afternoon at Gritts Farm. I hope many of you will be there. Look at Avrah Leven, an executive officer in Auxiliary, a key leader of our Sunday School, who also works very hard in the background to help provide meals when we need them. Look at Kristin Clendinning, who is now the Chevra Kadisha representative on our Board and is coordinating an Information/Brunch for Chevra Kadisha members and non-members in November. I look at all these younger people, also others who are stepping up, and I can't help but feel excited for our future.

I am excited because we now have a Religious, or Ritual committee to act as a sounding Board for Rabbi and offer ideas of their own for consideration.

I'm excited because in 2019 it will be the 125th birthday of our congregation! That's right – our congregation will be 125 years old in just two years! That is something worth celebrating, and it will be here before we know it. My husband, Michael, has graciously offered to head up the celebrations and will soon be putting committees together to begin the

planning. There will be plenty of opportunities for those who wish to be involved.

I am excited because of our continuing and deepening relationship with Temple Israel. Just last Sunday, Rabbi and I received an email from their President, Dave Shapiro, and Rabbi Cohn, which I told them I wanted to pass on to the congregation and I'll read it now:

The members and Rabbi of Temple Israel extend their warm wishes to the members and Rabbi of Congregation B'nai Jacob for a good 5778. May you have a joyous and healthy year and may the new year bring you abundance and shalom.

In my response on behalf of Rabbi Urecki and the congregation, I said "*We look forward to continuing and strengthening our friendship with our friends at Temple Israel in the coming year,*" to which Dave replied that he does, too.

I'm excited because of a new idea recently suggested that we'll implement after the Holidays. A Havdalah Dinner Club! This is the PERFECT club! There are no dues, anyone can be a member, everyone is welcome, and you can participate whenever you like! The idea behind the Havdalah

Dinner Club is to join us for the beautiful, short Saturday night Havdalah services, and go to dinner afterwards with others who want to go. It's that easy! We will let you know when it's starting, please come and give it a try.

I am excited because during this past year, Ruth Bernstein approached Rabbi. She wanted to honor the memory of her late husband, Maurice, of blessed memory, known to many of us as Dutch. She asked what she could do in terms of a gift to help our synagogue. We talked about various opportunities and now, thanks to Ruth's generosity, our downstairs area, including the nursery and archives room, is going to have a major facelift! It will become a true multi-purpose space that can be used in various ways by our teenagers, adults and Sunday School. Through a comprehensive upgrade, the downstairs area will be bright and attractive with a new floor, new ceiling, new lighting, and new furniture. Work will begin shortly, and this will definitely give new life to our Synagogue.

I had a great conversation with Ruth's son, Ben, this week and he said the family wants to make this contribution because of what they got from the synagogue when they lived here. If anyone here

today is interested in following the Bernstein's example, we have lots of projects, ranging from very small to quite large. Please reach out to me, Gary Sheff, or Rabbi.

I am excited about our pending affiliation with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, or USCJ. Recently you received a letter from Rabbi Urecki and me, that talked about Rabbi's and, the Board of Trustee's unanimous recommendation, that we become a member of USCJ. Joining will open up a world of resources to us. USCJ offers leadership training for governing Boards, and emerging leaders. They have conferences and conventions any of us can go to for enriching experiences and networking. When the day comes, and I hope it's a very long way off, that Rabbi decides to retire, USCJ can help us with the process of finding a successor. They can help us to ensure that our Jewish youth develop leadership skills and a sense of belonging to, and identity with, Judaism through programs for teens, and pre-teens.

Some of you asked me if joining means we will have to change our traditional approach to prayer and synagogue life. The answer is "NO". We DO NOT have to change ONE THING. The synagogues in the U.S. that belong to USCJ run the gamut from very

traditional all the way to bordering on Reform. In all reality, even though we have an Orthodox-trained Rabbi, we are a Conservative, not Orthodox congregation; we already “fit” within the umbrella of the USCJ. Let me explain...

In 1949, when our ‘Orthodox’ congregation moved into this building, because of its changing needs at THAT time, we stopped certain Orthodox practices such as having a mechitza, separate seating for men and women. Over time, we continued to evolve away from Orthodoxy. Rabbi Urecki has been able to maintain his affiliation with the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America, but that’s it. We couldn’t even get the help of the Orthodox Union in obtaining a High Holiday Cantor after Cantor Weiss retired!

So, we’ve been an island unto ourselves for a very long time. For many years that was OK – it seemed to work. Now, with the continuing evolution of our congregation and its needs, it is time for us to become part of something larger than ourselves.

In the coming weeks, Rabbi and I will have an Information Meeting for our members who want to find out more about USCJ membership. That meeting will be followed by another meeting on a later date, where our members will have the opportunity to decide by

way of voting, if we should become a member of USCJ. This is an important and significant step in our history, and your Board of Trustees feels this decision should be made by our members.

I feel positive and energized when I think about our future. I believe we are positioned to grow in depth, involvement, and spiritually. My term is soon coming to an end, and I look forward to the next steps toward reaching our potential as a congregation under Gary Sheff's leadership.

Now, I want to briefly move to something that I've been thinking about quite a lot lately, although it has nothing to do with synagogue operations. It has to do with forgiveness ('tis the season).

I have been a member of B'nai Jacob for about 35 years. I consider this my 2nd home and you my extended family. Over many years, I've seen too often, relationships end, when as with literal families, we sometimes unintentionally offend or hurt each other, make each other mad or angry. Sometimes we say and/or do things that are interpreted in a way different from how we intended them to be.

Just last week I was talking with one of our members who told me that many years ago, with all good intentions, she made a comment to another member of our congregation with whom she had a friendly relationship. Unfortunately, her comment wasn't taken the way it was intended, and they haven't spoken since. Sadly, stories like this are not uncommon and there is something wrong with this picture! We let one action or act define the whole person.

It's not always easy, and believe me - I've been there myself, but taking the time to step back and consider the whole picture; the positive, thoughtful or kind actions or exchanges that were shared in the past, will help put the immediate situation in context. No one is perfect. We all make mistakes. We need to look at the entire person, the sum of all of his/her actions and behaviors over time, and then decide if the most recent offense is really something worth destroying a relationship over. I believe doing this will make it easier to stop carrying the 'baggage of anger', make it easier to move past any discomfort or pain, and enable healing and moving forward together.

Finally, I am so honored to have been President of B'nai Jacob these past two years. I'm the third Victorson to have this role. First my father-in-law, Mort, of blessed memory, was President of the congregation for two separate terms in the early and

mid-to-late 1980s. Then, Michael, was President in the early 2000's. I realized when I took on this role that they would be hard acts to follow, and that I had big shoes to fill (really – Mort wore a size 14.5!).

I appreciate the confidence you had in me when you elected me to this position, and I sincerely thank you for the kindness and understanding you have shown, and support you have given to me over these past two years. I appreciate, and will long remember, the individual discussions, advice, and very kind words I received from many of you.

I especially want to thank my husband, Michael, for essentially taking back seat these last two years and not complaining about the amount of time I spent on synagogue business, or at the shul, or each time I said, “just a minute, Honey, I have one more email I need to send”, or, “I’ll be back in a minute I have to make a quick call”, or “I just have to send this text”. Thank you, Michael, for your patience, understanding, and unwavering support.

Michael and our children join me in wishing each of you a happy, healthy and peaceful new year, and a meaningful fast.