

Presidential address to Bnai Jacob Congregation- Yom Kippur 2015
Steven M. Rubin President

Shana Tava, Welcome friends, family, and guests. and a special welcome to Cantor Zucker. We appreciate you sharing these moments and your talents with us, and thank you Eric Persily for helping bring the Cantor here.

By a mysterious chance of fate, I stand before you today. My first presidency ended many years ago, but with an occurrence that none of us could have expected, I am here once again the recycled aged person that you see before you who has had the privilege and honor of serving as your president once more, and for that I would like to thank you.

There is no doubt that some of you may have some concerns about our new seating arrangement, after all, the view from here is a lot better than the view from your seats. We decided to take a chance and try something different. The board wanted to create a closer feeling of togetherness to share the holidays. The opportunity to have our focus on the bema, the ark, the rabbi and the cantor provided what we hope will be an enriched experience at Bnai Jacob.

This year, we have had many shakeups in our normal routine. No longer do we have a full time building maintenance person. Some of

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the major time issues this year was the oversight of the new installation of our boiler system, repair and maintenance of the shul, multiple roofing issues, plumbing problems, new floors and blinds in the library and many more.

In addition, the investment committee, under the much appreciated and skillful direction of Harry Peck, made a major change in one of our managers, and had over eight lengthy meetings. We did get tired and grumpy with each other, the process and determination of this committee, made up of Chairman Harry, Joe Friedman, Ben Zacks, Ted Kanner and Michael Victorson deserve a gracious thank you. And what can you say about Steve Max, who continues cooking breakfast every day and is always available to help. Thank you Steve

Linda and Stu, representing our Ladies Aux and Mens Club, thru many programs, you made our stomachs full and provided great gatherings.

This wasn't the only busy committee, Nemo Neurman came to us with the idea of trying to generate additional funds for the much needed upkeep of the old cemetery. . With Nemos efforts a letter was

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sent out to congregants with family ties, and to date thousands of dollars have been received. The cemetery is old and has several walls that are not structurally sound that need addressed immediately, to insure safety, for the congregants and the proper respect for those buried there. Thank you to those that have stepped up and for the many more that will. Thank you Cary, Gary and Ted for your work on the cemetery.

As always it is difficult to thank so many, with the risk of leaving a few out. Please forgive me if I do. First, to the board, you have taken your time to attend meetings, and provide insight for the congregation. The Chevra Kadissha, one of the most important organizations in our synagogue, a difficult task, but always with respect and tender care for those that have passed. Nancy, not enough words or thanks for what you do. Literally, this place would fall apart without you, and to my dear friend Ted. Your dedication and countless hours balancing our checkbooks on your dining room table, serving where needed whether on committees or services, and almost daily conversations are greatly appreciated.

This year, Rabbi become very dedicated to what he believes is the

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one of the most important decisions that has ever been made. Like many congregations, we have many diverse opinions but what we all agree is that we respect the Rabbi. Throughout his trips and meetings for the Iran issue, Rabbi has continued to serve our congregation, we have spoken or text almost everyday, and Rabbi has stayed in contact with our members in need and planned all of our services. His energy is amazing, but his first priority has always remained our congregation.

Its not a wonder that other Jewish organizations recognized his special talents, we have known for years Rabbi is a jewel, a wonderful leader, father and friend. Rabbi, we may be smaller in numbers since your arrival, but our lives have been enriched and grown because of you, and we are so very lucky that G-d sent you here.

One reason the Rabbi has been successful was because he was graced with a special wife, who not only has a fulltime career, but still makes time for our Sunday school and the preparation of meals, like last weeks meal for over 90 congregants. The Urecki team is strong and getting deeper. So not only did we get a Rabbi and Marilyn, but we got Elliot and Jean. The memorial lights that are changed each day, and so much more are the result of Elliots good deeds. Thank you Elliot

So now is the part of the Presidents address that is focused on

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financials. Actually it is kind of mandated and it is difficult. The reality is stark, we run a deficit of over \$200,000 a year and its growing, and that's even without a fulltime maintenance person. There really are no frivolous expenses. What we have is the worst of all worlds. An aging building, declining membership, and the worst of the worst are congregants that either don't pay or won't step up to a level which they can pay. This is a tremendous source of frustration, to hear the story from some of our member, that attend services regularly, and still feel no energy towards helping the shul. We have contacted them, shown them financials, and despite uncomfortable conversations, they don't step up. Perhaps its time for more aggressive actions. i.e. lists of giving, limited activities. These are just some of the consideratons. Look around you, most of our congregates give, please reconsider your levels of giving or start giving, so that when that special experience or support for your family is needed, it will be here.

Recently, Betty decided to give us a very, very special gift, Thank G-d for Betty because without her and a few others this building would be dark right now. Imagine that hundreds of us, yet without Betty's love of us, we literally would not be here.

Of course that is just one part of the picture. The reality is, that even

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with increased dues, our budget would still fail. We have a declining membership, approximately 176 families with close to 50% being over the age of 60. Our beautiful building needs so much. Big ticket items new pump in the basement, new airconditioning for the classrooms, and on and on. We don't have the young people, we have an under utilized building, which is costing us a small fortune, and frankly we are lacking the direction that we need to be going.

The younger people and the older people of this congregation don't attend services on a regular basis. Whether it's the time, the challenge of Hebrew in the service, the young people throughout all religions are turning away from the model of the past. They don't mind social interaction, coffee shops, food gatherings or fun programs, but they don't like organized religious services. Rabbi is lucky to get twenty people on a Saturday morning, frankly our present model is failing and will only get worse.

After much thought and concern, and many discussions with the Rabbi, I came to realize that what we needed was a new direction and its difficult and emotional, and yes this is what keeps me up at night. And although no doubt controversial it needed to be said to you my

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friends.

First, and most importantly, I respect you the members of this congregation. We are a family, It's who we are. Our parents and siblings have been married here, bar and bat mitzvahs, aufruf, our whole lives have been lived in this building. We have all shared so many wonderful times in this sanctuary. I still envision my mother, sweet Grandma Aggie, walking down this very aisle. We are blessed to have her with us today.

That's what we have a spirit and love of what has made us a family, Fighting at times, but always coming together to support each other. That's why I'm humbled to be here. To be affectionately known as an elder.

So today as an outgoing President, an elder, and most importantly as your friend who will tell it like it is, we need to address our future honestly and openly. This problem is not just ours, as Bruce Greenfield of the NY Conservative Judaism center noted, there are too many synagogues and not enough Jews. Looking around our shul, I see limited years of energy left in some of our most devoted members. After that, I see an mostly empty expensive building, a rabbi who will be in retirement or preretirement mode, a congregation in decline

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with potential financial problems. This is not the picture our generation should leave for the next. The past generation, provided this building and this congregation leadership and we need to step up and provide a future for the next generation.

So how do we do that? What new direction do we take. Let me share with you my dream and the dream of many. Yes, I have a dream of a vibrant new congregation, The Charleston Jewish community Center, a home for the Jews of Charleston, (temple and synagogue) a building that provides what will be the meeting place for young and old. That will maintain our traditions but will offer a coffee shop, workout place, a new home that we deserve a place that the Charleston Jewish community can gather as one. A hub for Jewish activities of the entire state. A place that will have not only have the spirit of our Bnai Jacob hearts but will have a spirit for all Jews in our area. A place that won't drain our financial resources, maintaining an outdated structure for a few, but a place that will serve the needs of the present and future. It will take at least five years to make this a reality, but now is the time to realize that we need to move in this direction, and join with our fellow Jews at the temple and make a new home, and exciting place for all of us. The temple has only 100 families, and over half are over the age of

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60, and many already are members of both the synagogue and temple. Recently, we came together, as the Jews of Charleston, to honor Marty Glasser, an outstanding man, who cared deeply for both groups. We both are blessed with outstanding, rabbi's and endowments, just not enough Jews and like us they also have an oversized under utilized building.

It won't be easy, other communities will need to be visited, discussion and town hall meetings will need to occur, but it will be exciting, that we are providing a future for our members, while still having the traditional service, and having so much more. We can't afford to not start this now, because in ten years it will be too late, we will be too old.

Although uncomfortable, this is the right move, and its exciting and will give us the community we need for more than just our generation. Actually, We have already turned one corner, I was proud to nominate for our next presidency Janet Victorson. Janet will be Bnai Jacob's first female president. We have had many strong, smart and dedicated women in this congregation over the years, like Lynn and Millie, and in the present and future young woman like Gail and Avra, who will now have a chance to lead our entire congregation, and participate fully.

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This is just the first step in women participating in all aspects the Jewish experience at Bnai Jacob, and in the Jewish Community Center of Charleston. We are changing and I believe that soon, very soon, all members will be all that they want to be as part of our congregation.

Change is difficult, but I make a pledge to you. The reality is that I am in the fourth quarter of my life, the way I'm walking, I might be in overtime, but my pledge is if you like me see a bright future in taking on this project, whatever time, energy, and resources that we need to make this a reality, I will devote the rest of my life to making this happen.

Our Rabbi, is getting closer to Bnai Jacob south, or Hilton Head. I was concerned that we might be building a new home, without our leader and respected Rabbi. Rabbi has endorsed this idea 100 per cent, and he has made a commitment that if we move forward in this new direction, he will remain a part of Bnai Jacob for a very long time, and use his talents, abilities and growth to make this happen. Perhaps the experience of Apac and the skills and experiences he had, prepared him for this important work. Maybe just maybe, it was written by some force greater than us, that helped Rabbi thru those activities prepare him for this next important chapter in his life and ours.

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We need this change, it is the right move so we can assure the continuity of our Jewish community. We can't afford to let this vision die. Can you imagine an empty building, with few services, no leadership and financial problems? That vision is chilling.

I stand before you humbled and appreciative for your guidance and support. I love this congregation and the friendships that we have here and that have made make my life richer. I have been blessed with a strong, beautiful wife, Sharon, who has always supported me and made my life full of laughter and love.. Thank you, Sharon, for making this journey so special.

Over the new several hours, our voices will rise together to ask forgiveness for our sins, we stand before G-d, together to join in this important tradition, we stand as the spirit of those before us and for the generations that are yet to come and we thank G-d for this opportunity to share the spirit of Bnai Jacob together.

Best wishes from Sharon and I for a happy healthy special New Year.