

FROM RABBI ZEMEL

..... HOW DID WE GET HERE?

DEAR FRIENDS,

I am more and more concerned about the direction of our country and fear what we are becoming: an illiberal democracy.



As an American Jew, I search my deepest recesses for Jewish insight as to how to proceed, how to act, how to respond to the grave threats jeopardizing our freedoms.

The assault on abortion rights is the latest painful example. My position is straightforward. A woman's body is her own, period. It is not my business to have an opinion. It is most certainly not the right of a state legislature, a court or Congress. In responding to the circulation of the Supreme Court draft opinion that would overturn *Roe v. Wade*, Israeli Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz was eloquent in his brevity: "A woman's rights over her own body are hers alone." AMEN.

This approach is an extension of the Jewish principle that we are all created in God's image and entitled to ultimate dignity about the choices we make. I fully understand that this position is at odds with some interpretations of traditional Jewish law. An amicus brief to the Supreme Court filed by a group that calls itself the Jewish Pro-Life Foundation cited quotations from Orthodox scholars and sages, but their arguments are specious and unconvincing.

As Professor Michal Raucher of Rutgers University writes, some interpretations of traditional Jewish law not only permit but also sometimes require abortion—to save the life of the mother, for example. But she argues that even invoking Jewish law over abor-

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Treat the Words as Poetry: A Profile of Isaac Sonett-Assor

BY STEVE WEISMAN

THE REOPENING OF Temple Micah's beloved sanctuary has also revived the in-person music that lifts our spirits. This summer a new voice will be added as Temple Micah welcomes Isaac Sonett-Assor as a Star Fellowship cantorial intern. He is a fourth-year cantorial student at the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

"I'm excited to join Temple Micah, because it's a place where music is valued," Isaac says, adding that Rabbi Danny Zemel is widely known for supporting an "American nusach," which refers to the way that a community sings the words of the prayerbook. "For Temple Micah," Isaac says, "an American nusach means music that reflects the distinct character of its community."

At the age of 30, Isaac brings a blend of classical training, Jewish learning, teaching, and singing sacred music from many traditions. With his rich lyric baritone, he has sung in churches well as synagogues, and at several summer music festivals. His repertoire includes musical theater, opera, oratorios, and art songs in French, Italian, and German.

It seems safe to say that Isaac will be the first soloist at Temple Micah who has sung the title role in Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro" as well as bass soloist in Bach's *B Minor Mass* and Bruckner's *Mass in F Minor*.

Isaac has been singing and playing the piano since childhood in New Rochelle, N.Y., where the Assor family was devoted to pop music and Broadway show tunes. After his bar mitzvah at



Temple Beth El, where the hazan was a mentor, Isaac began studying music more seriously.

As a Columbia University undergrad, he took singing lessons and majored in music and psychology, with courses in music theory. Later, at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y., he landed gigs outside the classroom, singing in church choirs and at high holiday services at a Reform synagogue in Monticello, in the nearby Catskills—the latter "a life-changing and life-affirming experience."

At Eastman he also volunteered as practice mentor for high school students and as a teaching assistant for an after-school music program for underprivileged students.

"I loved the experience at Eastman, but I realized that I wasn't singularly focused enough to become an opera singer," Isaac said. Instead, after graduation, he took some time off,

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"Every person shall sit under
his grapevine or fig tree with
no one to make him afraid."
MICAH, CHAPTER 4, VERSE 4

Vine

Vol. 58 No. 4

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TO A SPECIAL PLACE, THANK YOU

BY JOSHUA BERMAN

I never wanted to write a Vine column. When I took over as Board president two years ago, I confided in our fantastic past presidents Jodi Enda and Marcia Silcox, that such an endeavor stressed me out. And having to pen six columns each year?! No way. Indeed, I assured myself when I began my two-year term in June 2020 that my first order of business would be to figure out how to change the Vine tradition and avoid this "burden." (Was it in the bylaws and could we amend them, please?!)



When my first deadline approached (before the High Holidays in 2020), I had calls with Rabbis Crawley and Beraha about my writer's block. They, in their own thoughtful, creative and challenging ways, pushed me to look inward and outward to share how I relate to the Micah community. And that is what I have tried to do for two years with this column. Looking back, it is comically obvious to me now that Vine columns are "easy" because this community is so special and so inspiring in endless ways. As this is my final opportunity, I wanted to take a moment, say thank you and share my views on Micah – not just what it means to my family and me, but how I believe we better the lives around us.

Several of my fellow Board members have good naturedly joked that I'm "the Pandemic President" – having started my term in the midst of Covid, after our shut-down, and exited just as we were "emerging." I can put a happy face on it, but truth be told, handling many of my responsibilities from the window of Zoom has been a bummer. Being live and in person – chatting, schmoozing, hugging, clapping, dancing – all fall squarely into my personality sweet spot. I looked forward to those pleasures. I would have liked to have been very present at Friday night candle lightings (including the pre-game greetings and post-lighting rush for the challah), Saturday morning stomping and singing Sweet as Honey as the b'nai mitzvah marched the Torah around the sanctuary, rollicking Purim spiels, Sunday morning speakers, standing in the center of the unrolled scrolls during Simchat Torah and many other in-person traditions. We held all but two of our board meetings remotely, rather than at the temple. I craved the opportunity to look

out at the congregation in person as one of the weekly board greeters and see so many friends and just as many smiles. (Another confession: you all have great smiles!)

But something else happened along the way: I stumbled across other depths and levels of this warm community. You are stunningly resilient. During 2020 I had numerous calls with congregants and heard how community members were keeping their traditions going, one way or another. I wish I had kept a journal, because the different ways you celebrated shabbatot, simchat, Passover, Rosh Hashanah, baby namings, b'nai mitzvah and so much else that year speak to who you are and what Micah means to you.

Time and time again you found ways to lead and help others in need. How easy it would have been to ignore the plight of those around us while we were all shut inside – to ignore the Black Lives Matter movement, Afghan refugees, victims of gun violence, the homeless, substance abuse survivors, and many others. You rallied even harder to give, give, give and give again in so many ways.

Micah found new ways to worship, pray and delve into our Jewish roots together. Sure, it seems routine now to click a button and join services online, but it took will, vision and trust (and the unfathomable hard work of Debra and so many others behind the scenes) to get there. And selfishly, by doing so I could be with my parents, 3,000 miles away, on so many Shabbat evening services. I can't tell you how much that blessing meant to me each week.

It was also inspiring to see how we captured lightning in how we leaned into learning – as adults and as Machon students. The Racial Justice Initiative is just one shining example of how we seized a difficult moment and challenged ourselves to learn more and be better. And of course Sharon Tash's deep, meaningful and encouraging Machon Micah grew in size and scope. (For those of you who don't know much about that program, do me a favor and just ask someone. The Machon has opened the Jewish eyes of our students in so many ways.)

So this leads me to the only natural place for me to sign off: a place of gratitude. I owe the deepest "thank yous" to the rabbis for being spiritual and human leaders, for always being there to guide, and for sharing their insights into Jewish life and our community. Thank you to our cantors and all of the mem-

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My dearest Micah friends,

Greetings from Texas! I look back with fondness on my time as your Rabbinic Intern in Summer 2015 and I marvel at the profound impact it had on my rabbinate. Micah is a place that values experimentation and curiosity and I have tried to live by those commitments as well. I admire Rabbi Zemel's commitment to asking the big questions of Jewish life and I feel fortunate to still hear his voice in my ear, pushing me to think expansively about the work that I do. Though Micah is a truly unique place, I strive to let the values I learned there inform what I do here.

After ordination in 2017, my family and I moved to Houston, where I am an Associate Rabbi at Congregation Emanu El. It has not always been easy being a rabbi in Houston because of the geological climate (we arrived shortly before Hurricane Harvey) as well as the political climate, where reproductive and voting rights are under threat and gun violence has caused one tragedy after another. Still, I am proud of the work I have been able to do in partnership with great organizations like the Religious Action Center, National Council of Jewish Women, and the Houston Area Faith Leaders Coalition (an organization for progressive clergy of which I am currently the president) that seeks to respond to these mounting challenges. I am buoyed by my time at Temple Micah, where I learned from rabbis who use their prophetic voices to bring the wealth of Jewish text and tradition to bear on the problems of our day. I will forever be grateful for my time as your intern and I hope, if you are ever in Houston, you will come say hello.

—Rabbi Joshua R.S. Fixler

Rabbi Joshua R. S. Fixler, a Tisch Rabbinic Fellow, serves as the President of the Faith Leaders Coalition of Greater Houston. In 2021, his article, "Mishpatim—Stricken from the Text: Sacred Stories of Reproductive Justice," co-authored with Rabbi Emily Langowitz, appeared in the *Social Justice Torah Commentary* from the CCAR Press. He lives in Houston with his wife and three daughters.

Profile FROM PAGE 1 ►

freelancing, auditioning, working in advertising, while learning Hebrew and studying Jewish subjects. He came to realize how he could combine his love of music and his Jewish faith by enrolling in cantorial school at Hebrew Union College (HUC) in 2018.

At HUC, Isaac is a member of the Tisch/Star Fellowship Program, which is led by Rabbi Larry Hoffman, and has served as a student cantor at Aspen Jewish Congregation, Ohel Abraham

Synagogue in Haifa, and Westchester Reform Temple in Scarsdale. In his spare time, he enjoys playing guitar, reading, cooking, running, and rooting for the Yankees.

Teddy Klaus, Temple Micah's former music director, who knows Isaac from some of the Reform movement's summer camps, calls him "a rising star in the cantorate."

Isaac's wife, Caroline Sonett-Assor, whom he met at Columbia and studied with at Eastman, is associate director of Mannes Prep, the pre-K through high

school training program at Mannes School of Music in New York. She plays and teaches the flute, and one can hope that she will help make music at Temple Micah while he's here.

Isaac is on track to be ordained as a cantor next year. At HUC, Isaac absorbed the most fundamental part of cantorial singing, which will be well appreciated at Temple Micah: "I learned to put text above all else—to take the words of the text—whether the Bible or any other text—and treat the words as the poetry they all are."

Rabbi's Message FROM PAGE 1 ►

tion implies that "women do not have the bodily autonomy to make that decision on their own" and that "Jewish law must permit it — and sometimes demands it, regardless of what a woman prefers." Deferring to rabbinic or Jewish law, she concludes, by itself legitimizes "a system that does not support bodily autonomy" for women.

Raucher writes that we should be proud of the stance of Reform Judaism, which bases its support for abortion rights on "the core belief that each person should have agency and autonomy over their own bodies."

Let me be clear. The assault on abortion rights is merely the most recent brutal offensive on our way of life and right to privacy. I shudder to consider what the next assault will be. Same-sex marriage? Contraception? Further restrictions on the already paltry level of legal immigration?

How did we get here? A few moments stand out.

NOVEMBER 8, 2016

The election of Donald Trump to the office of president changed my rabbinate. How could it not? It changed the world. A once-respectable political party had nominated a demagogue as its candidate and a minority of voters put him in the Oval Office. There was much that Trump and his party stood for with which I vehemently disagreed, but that was not new. Policy differences can be animated, but this felt different.

The 2016 election represented a repudiation of the values that I believed this country had been founded on but had imperfectly embraced. These have always been for me among the noblest ideas of the human spirit: tolerance, an open mind, a spirit of generosity, a belief that we are all created in God's image. We have been a nation that has struggled, in fits and starts and despite trenchant opposition, to overcome its racist past. The bright light of promise ushered in by the Enlightenment, I believed, would come to eventually right past wrongs and open doors that had traditionally been shut to people who were African American, Native American, Latino, Asian, members of the LGBTQ+ community and women. It was through the prism of Enlightenment thinking that Reform Judaism engaged and interpreted our Jewish inheritance.

Because of the 2016 election, I devoted more time and Micah, as a congregation, devoted more energy to supporting the Jewish and American values that we cherish and felt were threatened.

That struggle continues as now we must turn our energy to fighting for abortion access.

JANUARY 6, 2021

This date represents yet another turning point, starker and more decisive than the last. January 6 brought an attempted coup against the duly elected government of the United States. It was treason, plain and simple.

By January 2021, we knew that the norms that form the guardrails for our democracy had been shorn.

In this respect, two earlier moments stand out for me.

JULY, 2015

When Trump uttered these infamous remarks about the late Sen. John McCain, a previous presidential nominee from his own party who had spent five years as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam: "He's not a war hero. He was a war hero because he was captured. I like people who weren't captured," I assumed everyone would be aghast over a sacred norm being profaned. In its anemic response, the Republican Party wounded the nation.

FEBRUARY–MARCH, 2016

Following the death of Justice Anthony Scalia, President Barack Obama's nomination of Judge Merrick Garland of the United States Court of Appeals was blocked by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell who refused to bring the nomination to the Senate floor. With this craven move, McConnell stripped the High Court of its ability to stand above the partisan fray, magnified by emotional Senate hearings that resulted in the confirmation of Justice Brett Kavanaugh and was brought to a climax with the stampede to confirm Justice Amy Coney Barrett at the end of 2020.

All that makes democracy sacred in our land is being trampled. Now the Supreme Court's expected reversal of a constitutional right to abortion is the next step in this authoritarian takeover of our government.

What makes this a Jewish issue? This great American experiment has bequeathed to Jews a treasure that has no precedent in Jewish history. The flourishing of organized Jewish life and the opportunities available to individual Jews are incomparable to any other period in our long history. We have a great deal to protect, and we know that there has never been an authoritarian regime in history that has not at some point turned its sights on Jews.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE ►

JUST ENOUGH COOKS IN THE KITCHEN

By Roberta Goren

As Rabbi Zemel said when he came into the kitchen, “The band is back together.” In late April, the Micah Cooks were hard at work for the first time in more than two years, preparing old favorites and new classics for the Moran family’s simcha. If you want to join in a fun and rewarding experience, learn culinary techniques, taste delicious recipes and be a key part of a wonderful community, consider joining Micah Cooks. There are many volunteer jobs: come and set tables, shop, prepare ingredients, cook, serve, or lend a hand cleaning up!



If you will be hosting a b’nai mitzvah kiddush in the future, please consider supporting Temple Micah by using Micah Cooks. Eighty percent of their income is used for Micah programs.

Contact Adrienne Umansky at micahcooks@templemicah.org to find out more and to volunteer.

Rabbi's Message FROM PREVIOUS PAGE ►

As Rabbi Eric Yoffie, former head of the American Reform movement, wrote in Haaretz: “One of our two major parties is increasingly turning its back on the principle of a sovereign people governing itself democratically. The Republicans under Trump have moved in the direction of replacing American democracy with a homegrown version of authoritarianism or even toned-down fascism.”

Yet there are Jewish organizations that invite these Trump cronies and conspirators to speak at their events. Those who commit treason against the government of the United States and those who support them should not be given a platform at any Jewish venue. We must distance ourselves from them, protest their actions and never, ever cozy up to them.

At Micah we must each continually and relentlessly ask ourselves what we might do to protect our democracy, and to do our utmost to project our Jewish voice into the public square. Shalom.

President's Column FROM PAGE 2 ►

bers of our music teams for allowing me to hum Micah at all times. (I’m willing to share my Spotify and YouTube playlists of Micah tunes that I put on when I really need a pick-me-up.) A very special thanks to Rachel, Beth and the phenomenal office teams, along with our security specialists who make Micah a safe and rewarding home. And a very heartfelt appreciation to my fellow board members who work so hard and thoughtfully to be stewards for this community.

Most important, to this special congregation: Thank you for continuing to teach me how to be a better Jew. Thank you for leading me to new ways to learn and grow. Thank you for forgiving my mistakes. Thank you for inspiring me to search for ways to engage in tikkun olam. Thank you for helping me find compassion and ways to say goodbye to old friends and welcome new ones. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your lives, your greatness, your passion and your human spirit. I love Micah because of you. Thank you.

WE HOLD THIS TRUTH

By Rabbi Stephanie Crawley

America is always beginning -
Sometimes with a set of signatures
underneath a calligraphy of rights -
And sometimes that beginning is a vote
a birth
a proclamation
a speech
a chant and a sign
rewriting our story over and over
to begin America again
If these truths are indeed, self-evident
then we make them truer in each generation
ensure that every self sees them as evident
to know that we are endowed by the same creator
that the rights that some have must be the rights for all to have
above all -

the right to live
to live freely
to live free from fear
to live towards the day

Where each one of us, will sit under our own vine and fig tree
Where all who are within our borders will feel safe, free, and seen.
Where all who are here will help us begin America, again.



PRAYER FOR OUR POWER, PRAYER FOR OUR CHOICE

By Rabbi Stephanie Crawley

God of Mercy, God of Plague
God of Compassion, God of Righteous Anger
Teach us how to choose
Between the thunder and the dew
Between the match and the tear
Tell us when to pray and when to yell
Shout for the welfare of the government
Fight for the welfare of the government
Not for its own sake
But for ours
Not for the body politic but the body that has been politicized
We pray for the government because we fear it –
But maybe it should fear us
Let today be the day we learn our power.
May the nation merit our protection.
As we assert the ability to choose
How to breathe
How to birth
How to be in a body
How to be.

This prayer was published on the website ritualwell.org in April 2022.

TZEDAKAH

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IN MEMORY OF
Andrea Hamos, by Barbara Beder

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The kindness and generosity of
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Yamaykin and Eatay Shechter
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Coates Jr., by Sarah and Jay Grusin

THE STOREFRONT PROJECT

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Milton Socolar, Walter Schiff, Alex Schiffman-Shilo,
David Wilson, by Roberta and Morton Goren

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The Afghan family assisted by Sukkat Shalom, by
David Forman and Johanna Mendelson-Forman
Stacy and Emily Cloyd, by David and Sallylou Cloyd
Pat Goldman and Steve Kurzman's birthdays and
wedding anniversary, by Jane and Chaz Kerschner
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and Olivier Fleurence
Andrea Hamos, David Raviv, by
Elka and Sidney Booth
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(z'l) and Arlene Reiniger
Judith Levin, by Norman Blumenfeld
Robert Salzberg, by Stanley and Ellen Brand

This list reflects donations received Feb. 1-Mar. 31, 2022. Every effort has been made to ensure its accuracy, but if there are any errors or omissions please accept our apologies. For corrections or clarifications, please contact Rhiannon Walsh in the temple office. Thank you.



MAZAL TOV

Debra Knopman, on the marriage of her daughter, Leah Weightman, and David Foran
Jane Yamaykin and Eatay Schechter, on the birth of their children,
Reuben Mendel and Benjamin Lev

CONDOLENCES

The Temple Micah community extends its deepest condolences to:

HELEN BURSTIN, on the death of her mother,
Rose Burstin

JULIET EILPERIN, on the death of her father,
Stephen F. Eilperin

ABBY GOLDEN, LEESA KLEPPER, AND JULIE KLEPPER,
on the death of their father and grandfather, Arthur
Murray Golden

DARA GOLDBERG KAYE, on the death of her mother,
Sandra Goldberg

ROBERTA GOREN, on the death of her brother,
Melvin Saferstein

JUDY HADLEY, on the death of her brother-in-law,
Harvey Nathan

MICHAEL INLANDER, on the death of his cousin,
Jon Goodman

NAN E. KAUFMAN, on the death of her mother,
Carol Bernstein Ellin

ALAN KRAUT, on the death of his wife,
Deborah Aviva Kraut

PETER KRISTENSEN, on the death of his mother,
Geneviève Kristensen

LORRI MANASSE, on the death of her brother,
Rick Obrand

CLEM RASTATTER, on the death of her mother,
Ellen Jane London

ARLENE REINIGER, on the death of her husband,
Pete Reiniger

MARJORIE DICK STUART, on the death of her brother,
William Yale Dick

SARA WILLIAMS, on the death of her mother,
Gail Sadick

THE TEMPLE MICAH COMMUNITY, on the death of
longtime members, Marlyn Socolar and Arthur
Frank

May their memories be for a blessing.

UPDATES AHEAD FOR OUR SANCTUARY

By Debra Winter

If you've joined us for services via Zoom lately, you may have experienced diminished audio quality, unbalanced sound, or other technical issues. I'd like to start by thanking you for your patience! As we've returned to worship together in the sanctuary we love, we've learned our current audiovisual systems no longer meet our community's needs. In the coming months, our hope and our goal is to change that.

Last July, we convened a "Technology Committee" to help us think through our next chapter of communal prayer. There is little doubt that the nature of community worship is shifting; what some are terming "hybrid" or "multi-access" services have now become the norm. While we recognize that in-person and remote (Zoom) participation are not equivalent experiences, we hope that certain technological upgrades can help us provide meaningful interactions between, and among, all of the populations we serve.

With two additional cameras on the way, we are paving the way for a more dynamic service experience to be broadcast from the sanctuary for those joining remotely, including better close-up angles of our clergy, and even exploring the idea of an over-the-shoulder "Torah cam" so that those at home can read along in our scroll. In addition, we will also be able to bring our online community into the sanctuary via two display screens at the front of the room. This is an area of our technology we plan to use judiciously, and very intentionally, having selected a model ("The Frame" by Samsung) that will be made to resemble artwork when not in active use.

Of course, changes are also in store for our audio technologies. A well-functioning sound system is crucial to the remote experience – while it's possible to hold an audio-only service with no working cameras, it becomes almost impossible to participate in a video-only service with no working sound. Unfortunately, we have often missed the mark here. We hope that by replacing what's not working, adding several new microphones and audio channels, and doing extensive testing, we can achieve what any great sound system should, as clarity and balance blend with what the rest of your senses may be experiencing: becoming unremarkable.

Part of our audio upgrade includes a new assisted listening system (ALS). Our current system relies on infrared signals, which can be disrupted as solid masses—such as our bodies—move nearby. The new ALS will

instead function via radio frequency signals (RF), which are not subjected to the same disruptions, and will also include a hybrid option via WiFi. Community members and their guests will have the option of either using the provided RF devices (with an in-ear, over-the-ear, or neck loop attachment) or connecting their personal cell phone and headphones. We hope this upgraded technology will make a discreet, but significant difference in the experience for those using our ALS, and we will provide detailed instructions and training to anyone who requests it.

We're refreshing our sanctuary's audiovisual systems—and we hope you'll never notice.

The clergy and technology committee's shared intent is to avoid interfering with our prayer space – we want Micah to feel like Micah, and we want Shabbat

to feel like Shabbat. At the same time, we recognize the accessibility that comes with having a remote option, and would love to welcome our members' extended families from all over the country into our sacred space. With these upgrades, grandparents unable to travel to Temple Micah for b'nai mitzvah will be able to chant an aliyah blessing, for example. To keep services spontaneous, vital, and organic, those leading services will have the ability to adjust views in real time.

This is an immense project: an attempt to change our beloved sanctuary space as minimally and gracefully as possible and give us flexibility and options well into the future—even as we're not yet sure what that looks like. We hope the necessary, new equipment will reach us over the summer; as with many other items, this has been greatly impacted by supply chain issues. Once everything arrives, it may take a few weeks to install, so there may be a Shabbat or two without our sanctuary – we're looking forward to trying new things.

We love feedback and we want people to continue to rebuild with us! We are moving forward toward something new, and we will continue in a spirit of experimentation and exploration together. To be in touch about our technological upgrades, our ideas for building community near and far on Shabbat, or other questions around our re-visioning of the Temple Micah sanctuary, please email shma@templemicah.org.

Generous matching gifts to our Sanctuary Technology Fund made these improvements to our audiovisual systems possible. If you would like to contribute, please reach out to Executive Director Beth Werlin, werlin@templemicah.org.