

# **President's Report: Temple Micah Annual Membership Meeting**

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June 2024

Welcome to our Annual Meeting for fiscal year 2024. This morning we will receive a report from our rabbis, delivered by Rabbi Zemel. We will also hear an update from our Machon Micah leadership. This will be followed by an overview of our finances from our outgoing Finance Committee Chair. We will then get an update on our transition efforts from one of our Transition Committee Co-Chairs. And we will end our morning with a vote on our board nominees. Before we get to all of that, however, I want to share with you my perspective on the status of our congregation.

Our membership has maintained a healthy 680 (approximate) member units. We lost 36 member units – we saw a number of members pass away this year, and many others relocated. And we had over 50 new member units join us. On the whole, our members mainly call DC home – with 400 living in the city itself, 180 in Maryland, and around 80 in Virginia – and a small group who live elsewhere.

Our new members follow this pattern – 80% are in DC proper. 60% of our new members are Machon Micah families, and under 10 new member units identified as households over the age of 70. Overall, our new members told us they joined because of the reputation of Machon Micah, Temple Micah's diverse space, and their belief that Temple Micah offers a spectrum of positions on Israel.

We will hear more about Machon Micah in a bit – both in the update from our Machon Micah leadership, and also in our Finance presentation. That the largest percentage of new members year after year continues to be Machon Micah families, and that our unique approach to religious education is a draw was an important factor for our board's finance decisions this year and next. We believe that now is the time to continue investing in Machon, which means staffing at a level that properly supports this important piece of our congregation.

Regarding diverse space, in the fall we shared the results of the Belonging Project survey we took last spring. We learned that our congregants strongly believe Temple Micah is a place they can bring their whole selves and that people trust one another in this community. We also heard that almost everyone who took the

survey would recommend Temple Micah. That diversity and safe space is noted as a top reason for new joiners is evidence that we are community that not only holds these beliefs, we actively live them. Thank you.

On the topic of Israel, I am proud of the vast array of initiatives and engagements this congregation has offered since the events of October 7. I encourage you to read the email sent on June 2 titled "Our Ongoing Response to the War in Gaza" for further details. This is not to say that everything offered has satisfied everyone, or even that we have offered everything asked of us. I know some of our congregants have been disappointed in our leadership's decisions, actions or inactions. But I am proud of us – of each of you – for doing the hard work to tackle tough conversations, to engage in dialogue with one another and our leaders.

On our clergy team, we welcomed Rabbi Healy Slakman to our bima as a full-time Assistant Rabbi & Director of Spiritual Arts. From the start of the year she has taken us on new musical journeys and introduced us to new ways to pray. As will be discussed later in the Finance presentation, our Board is fully supportive of Rabbi Slakman's spiritual arts vision, and we are excited to see where she takes us next. This year was also marked by the announcement that our long-tenured leader, Rabbi Zemel, will retire at the end of June 2025. The board had been preparing for this inevitability and was ready to immediately stand-up a Transition Committee, led by two amazing past Presidents – Betsy Broder and Josh Berman – and enact our Transition Plan. I want to extend my sincere gratitude to Betsy, Josh, our stupendous Executive Director, Beth Werlin, and our Vice President, Brent Goldfarb, for all their hard work and dedication to turn the Transition Plan from paper to reality.

In addition to the Transition Committee initiatives and the Israel-related offerings, we have approximately 20 member groups actively gathering, learning, and serving our community. While we have an amazing array of opportunities – from various study and learning groups, to musical groups, to groups serving our congregants and groups serving the larger community - we also learned in the Belonging Project that we need to do a better job of making it easier for people to find these opportunities and participate meaningfully. In response, Beytenu has hosted numerous events throughout the year – each one designed to reacquaint us with one another, introduce us to new people, and have fun together. I'd like to thank Lauren Laitin, our Membership Committee Chair and the leader of Beytenu for her efforts to make Micah a better community.

This has been a special year for me. It was going to be my last year as President of the board, it was our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a congregation, and it was my daughter's bat mitzvah year. I went in knowing it was going to be a full and challenging year – I just didn't know how full or challenging it would really be. However, I was prepared to stop and be in the moment. To let myself savor the experience. To conclude my report, I want to share a few moments that really highlight the best of our community.

Number one: early November.

This year was our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We celebrated this milestone like we do many others at Temple Micah – with a service. On November 3, we honored our legacy members and inducted a new class of the 25 year club during this service. I had the great honor to carry our torah around the sanctuary, joined in the hakafah by former President Sid Booth, representing the numerous dedicated, intelligent, and Hamish congregational lay leaders throughout our history. The sanctuary was full to the brim. The joy as I held the torah out for congregants to touch it with their tallit or prayer book – the joy in the room was palpable. I felt that I was a part of Temple Micah – not just the part at 2829 Wisconsin Ave, but going all the way back to its beginnings in Southwest. I felt in that room l'dor v'dor of Temple Micah's generations. It was a highlight of my year to celebrate with so many of you that shabbat morning.

And in another Micah tradition, we also tried something new to celebrate our anniversary. On the evening of November 2, we hosted the first Community Shabbat dinner since the pandemic AND we ran our Kabbalat Shabbat service during the dinner. We had over 200 congregants spanning many phases of life gathered at dining tables in our social hall. We set the tables with candle sticks, kiddish cups, and challah covers from our own homes – recreating our pandemic-era shabbat services, now no longer separated by screens. Our rabbis led us in prayers as we wine and dined together. The singing that night – the acoustics so different from our sanctuary, but still – it carried the soul of our congregation just the same.

In that one shabbat we managed to honor and demonstrate our resiliency, our innovation, and our traditions as a congregation. 60 years are behind us now, and if we continue to co-create our American Jewish lives and focus on building a new Jewish narrative, I have no doubt this congregation will see another 60 years in its future.

Number two: Memorial Day weekend.

This year was the culmination of two years of study for our most recent Adult B'nai Torah class. Thirteen adult students – spanning from their 20s to their 80s – learned Hebrew and torah trope and chanted lines from that shabbat's parasha. They studied the meaning of their portion and wrote a drash. Then, on the shabbat morning over Memorial Day weekend, this band of 13 b'nai torah students stood on the bima in front of their friends, family, and fellow Micah congregants and taught us all a lesson. We learned about the jubilee year and the fair or unfair practice of resetting things every 50 years. But we also learned about commitment to a Jewish life. We learned about love within a community. And when the prior b'nai torah class participants stood, we learned that l'dor v'dor does not have to mean biological generation, but can refer to a generation of ideas – for it made perfect sense that a 20-something and an 80-something were in the same generation receiving the gift of their congregation's responsibility to keep learning, teaching, and engaging in dialogue with torah.

Number three: October 7

I woke up and got to right to baking some quiches as our family was contributing to the kiddush that day. I don't remember how I learned of the atrocities that day – did I read it scrolling through the news on my phone as I waited for my quiches in the oven? Did Seth see it on the news and come tell me? I just remember being in Temple Micah services that morning. The feeling that we were all dazed, not sure how to make sense of what happened but knowing that being in community felt right. I remember the tears in my eyes singing the Hatikvah. But what I recall most of all is gathering after service in the social hall for the kiddush. What is normally such a festive atmosphere was subdued that morning. But in a way that was appropriate for the heaviness of the moment – not oppressive. We needed each other that day, as we have learned we need each every day. As we ate the food prepared for what was supposed to be a joyous occasion, we let the food fill the emptiness we felt. We let the comfort of being in a Jewish space, surrounded by our loving and welcoming Jewish community start the healing process.

On the morning of October 7, Temple Micah felt more like home than my own home. It felt more right to be in community with you all that day and I am so grateful to those quiches. They gave me purpose that morning and brought my extended family a little bit of healing.

This has been a year full of joyous occasions and huge challenges. My fellow board members deserve a huge 'thank you' for the many extra meetings, new working groups, and hard decisions required of them this year. In particular, I'd like to thank our two board members rotating off the board this year – Robin Rudowitz and Evan Bloom. Robin has led our Finance Committee for a number of years, bringing her level-headedness and judiciousness to this important role. Evan has served as our Secretary for the past two years; his keen eye and attention to detail kept us all in line. You both will be missed.

Let me close with some words from our Roadmap:

When it comes to Temple Micah, our posture is one of Abraham and Sarah's tent:

- Our doors are wide open, with permeable boundaries between the inside and the outside of our tent.
- We welcome a diversity of people and the stranger: Jews, non-Jews.
- We meet people where they are and where they live.
- We hold an obligation to the wider Jewish world, not just to ourselves.
- We seek Jews who take their Judaism seriously and who serve as positive models for all people.

I believe the Temple Micah we are today is well placed to continue to strive for this aspiration.