

CBST

קהלה קדושה בית שמחת תורה

May 15, 2006

A MESSAGE TO THE CBST COMMUNITY FROM ERIC ROSENBAUM, CBST PRESIDENT

I have been President of CBST for just over a month, and every day I am more impressed with this remarkable institution and the people who are its clergy, staff, lay leadership, volunteers and members. At various Friday night services in April, we celebrated the bat mitzvah of Amy Weiss-Meyer, the baby-naming of Maya Aliz Taylor-Prince, our rabbis performed a baby conversion, and we offered our condolences to Lesley Siegel on the death of her stepfather Ruby Schneider, Sara Krulwich on the passing of her mother Marilyn, Sabrina Farber on the death of her mother Georgia, and Lizbeth Dornfeld on the loss of her father Norman. For each of these, our community showed up, made phone calls, and demonstrated how much they care. Our staff made arrangements and kept in contact with the families. If there was a shiva minyan, we sent food made possible by a generous gift from the Dr. Milton Roven fund.

I always knew this was part of synagogue life, but I never fully understood just how much work it takes to make all of this happen. Our office is prepared to respond to an emergency call at a moment's notice - every day of the year. This sets in motion a series of calls, emails, and activities that can involve dozens of people coming together to help a member in need.

And all of this takes a strong organization, which each year has become stronger and more capable. Under Rabbi Kleinbaum's leadership, our clergy (which includes Rabbi Cohen, our two Cooperberg-Rittmaster rabbinical interns, Music Director Joyce Rosenzweig, and cantorial intern David Berger) have deepened their understanding of our community and worked to improve every aspect of the ritual life of the synagogue. Our Executive Director, Ilene Sameth, brought with her experience from two leading Manhattan synagogues when she joined us. She has been working to build a responsive office infrastructure and provides superb leadership for the administration of our synagogue.

Your Board of Directors is a highly dedicated group of people, as diverse as the congregation itself, and they contribute deeply with their time, money, and talent. Every person on the Board is a member of Rosh Pinah, giving a minimum of \$1800 - and in total this Board has pledged over \$130,000 to the budget of the congregation this year. But this is not just a fundraising Board. Every Board member is active on committees across the range of synagogue life.

As we have grown, running and managing the synagogue has become more complex. And so, we once again have undertaken a strategic planning process, which began two years ago under the leadership of Past President Lisa Kartzman. One year ago, we approved five Pillars as the foundation of this Plan. Each of these pillars is critical to CBST's continuing growth and development. Each requires constant work - there is no such thing as being 'done' in any of these. And so, each year, we must develop a workplan to improve in each of these pillars as much as time and money allow, recognizing that there are inevitable tradeoffs and limitations.

This year, we will be able to make some significant progress in each Pillar of the plan:

Pillar 1: Deepen the experience of CBST's services

Joyce's participation at our main Friday night service has increased to three per month, up from two. Our cantorial intern will also be at the service three weeks per month, including leading a children's service. We have increased the presence of our clergy at the Saturday morning services, and we have increased the budget for the Friday night oneg, and for Shabbat lunches, recognizing that attendance is growing. We are also in the final process of publishing our new siddur - which will for the first time ensure that Jewish ritual treats all people equally regardless of gender, sexual orientation or gender expression. This siddur, which will eventually be available for purchase by individuals and other congregations, will demonstrate CBST's unique leadership in liturgical innovation. There will also be a companion CD with some of our most popular prayers in song, to help members become more familiar and comfortable in our services. These two projects have been made possible by major gifts from Phyllis Dicker and Peggy Traub, Bill Ample in memory of his partner, former Board Chair Mark Bieber, and Jonathan Sheffer among others.

We will be returning to the Javits Center for Yom Kippur this year, with an improved sound system and new classrooms for children's services. Our Rosh Hashanah services will be held at the Town Hall Theater.

Pillar 2: Strengthen the bonds of community within the congregation

We are developing new initiatives to increase connections within our membership and to reach out to newcomers, such as "First Fridays" where we pay special attention to attracting new people and making them feel comfortable. We are investing in our website to improve the quality of communication with the membership, and to make it more interactive. We just returned from an incredible retreat at which almost 60 members got to know each other in a different setting, sharing Jewish ritual, meals, workshops (and even square-dancing) over the course of a beautiful spring weekend - thank you to Chair and Board member Neal Hoffman and the rest of the retreat committee! We wish to provide more support to smaller groups within the congregation such as the 20's/30's group and the Dish group. We are embarking on an amazing 18 month process supported by a grant from UJA to "Reimagine" education at CBST. This initiative will be co-led by Past President Yolanda Potasinski, current Board member and Education Co-Chair Laurie Hanin, and Rabbi Cohen, and will look not only at developing children's programming for our community, but review our adult education program as well. We are planning an amazing Shabbat Shirah concert for February, 2007. And of course, all of our clergy are committed to providing pastoral care to members in need. These are just a few of the areas of work in Pillar 2.

Pillar 3: Build a sustainable leadership infrastructure

In Pillar 3, we are working to improve how the office functions. We have hired a professional accountant two days a week to improve our financial reporting and management. We are (finally) migrating off of our antiquated MARKS software program into a new, much more sophisticated synagogue database program called 'Chaverware'. We are investigating further developing foundation support as a key element of our funding. And critically, we must continue to focus on major donor development, engaging Board members and other members in reaching out to current and potential donors. We are working to engage members in more of a structured way to develop the next generation of lay leaders. Finally, we will begin planning for Rabbi Kleinbaum's second sabbatical following the completion of her 14th year as our Senior Rabbi.

Pillar 4: Create a physical space in which we can thrive for at least a generation

We continue to lay the groundwork for a capital campaign. This will take time and much behind-the-scenes effort. Board member Bill Hibsher is leading this effort, and there are two main activities - building a donor infrastructure that can raise the millions of dollars needed for a home of our own; and detailed site search and negotiations with brokers, developers, and key politicians. New Board member Emily Giske has proved invaluable with her deep connections to many city and state politicians. We hope to schedule a special membership meeting in the fall to update the community on our search for space.

Pillar 5: Ensure that CBST is a visible, vocal, and deeply relevant voice in the Jewish, GLBT and secular worlds

Pillar 5 represents many new activities for CBST, designed to raise our profile in the world and attract donors and members by more widely publicizing the social justice profile of our rabbis and congregation. To this end, we are leading several GLBT congregations in a joint trip to Israel for World Pride, of which Rabbi Kleinbaum is the North American chair. She is organizing a multifaith clergy conference in Jerusalem during World Pride with support from a special grant of the Ford Foundation. We are also committed to preserving and protecting CBST's history and will begin some of the basic archival and preservation work this summer under the leadership of Board and Executive Committee member Aari Ludvigsen, supported by a generous gift from Sari Kessler and Board member Erika Karp. We plan to hold community forums to update CBST's vision statements, and to develop ways to enhance our image with advertising and public relations strategies and funding. Hopefully you've noticed CBST in the press recently, with articles in The Advocate, Gay City News, The New York Times, scholarly journals (Conscience), on radio (Air America) and television (Gay USA and QTV). This visibility is the direct result of public relations initiatives supported by the Michael and Sophie Gaines Fund.

As you can see, our plate is very full. At the May 10 Board meeting, this agenda was approved by the Board as the workplan for the year. We are tremendously excited by the challenges and opportunities we see for CBST this year, and look forward to sharing them with you as the year unfolds.

*Respectfully submitted by Eric Rosenbaum
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