

# TEMPLE SINAI



ANNUAL REPORT  
2020-2021



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 FROM  
 THE SENIOR RABBI
 

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**W**hen the great Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (the eighteenth-century founder of Hasidism) saw misfortune threatening his community, he would go into a special place in the forest. He would light a fire, say a special prayer and thereby bring a miracle to avert the troubles. When he died, the elements of the ritual were lost: the spot in the forest, how to make the fire, and the words of prayer. Generations later when Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn and his community faced misfortune, he would sit in his armchair with his head in his hands and speak to God: "I cannot kindle the master's fire. I do not know the prayer. I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is to tell the story, and this must be enough to avert the troubles." And it was.



Since the first Passover, members of Jewish communities have held story telling in the highest regard. It is literally a mitzvah enacted through the seder. In the Hasidic teaching, the impact of telling a story equals the power of the Baal Shem Tov's miracles. In our day we still rely on the salve of shared stories. Sometimes, like this year, we are bereft and at a loss for what else to do but tell the stories and hope it is enough to bring comfort from the troubles.

This yearbook is unlike previous ones as the year itself has no precedent in recent memory. There is no recounting of statistics to measure a year in the life of Temple Sinai; no description of curricula from our schools and adult learning programs; no collection of annual committee reports on goals achieved and work to be done in 5782. We offer here a collection of individual stories of celebrating a bat mitzvah, of losing a centenarian family matriarch, of welcoming a baby, of becoming a rabbi, of a wedding, of leading hundreds of Sinai member in getting out the 2020 vote, and more. These stories are just a tiny sample from the 5781 Book of Life. They cannot possibly convey the fullness of joy and the depth of suffering for all of us.

I had literally just written the previous paragraph when a member texted me that her husband had been rushed to the hospital after his heart and breathing stopped. With Covid-era distancing requirements, she was outside the ER awaiting word. I stepped outside my house to breathe and there, across the street, my neighbor was celebrating his fifth birthday with a group of children and their parents. I've come to know them all in these past months only because Covid drew us out of our houses and our cars and into each others' yards. Covid has taken away so much and it has also given.

If only we could bring about the rebbe's miracles, but we don't know the words he used, or the secret place he went, or how he kindled the flame. I'd like to end with a message of hope, but this has been an extraordinary year, characterized by a great deal of suffering. I do know that there is great strength and resilience in our community. And I know that we will tell the stories of this year over and over. In telling these stories we will learn how this year has shaped us, how we have struggled and how we've grown. We will continue to tell the stories of this year as we pray for a better year, and we continue to heal together.

*–Rabbi Jonathan Roos*

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

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**"Zoom** Covid Task Force Meeting." That particular calendar entry would have been incomprehensible to me before I became president of the temple. Zoom? Covid? It sounds like a super-fast video, or dance, or a super-fast video of a dance. Before becoming president, I anticipated board meetings in the Bet Am, greetings from the bimah, frequent schlepping up the hill from the parking lot to the entrance. I did not anticipate that I would spend most of my time as president attending meetings and services in my kitchen.

I had a desktop computer on a table and during meetings you could see members of my family opening the refrigerator behind me. It was not ideal. Before a meeting of the congregation at which we were going to vote on whether to apply for a PPP loan that would be critical for the financial stability of the temple, I warned my family to get whatever snacks they were going to get before the meeting started. This was going to be an important one.

I sat down at my table in the kitchen, notes beside me, and logged on early to make sure everything was set. With the meeting presenters, we ran through the order of the evening. Deep breath, all set.

And then my screen went dark. My computer decided to die at that precise moment, just before opening perhaps the most important meeting of my term as president. Because of course it did. Technology has done so much to keep us together during this challenging time, to enable Temple Sinai to function, but at this particular moment it was failing me completely.

This was when I learned how to join a Zoom meeting through my phone. Adding to the list of things I never anticipated is that I never anticipated leading such an important meeting through a small screen in my hand.

After the meeting, I tried to figure out what had gone wrong with my desktop. Turns out it came unplugged. That was all, because of course it was. I decided it was time for a laptop.



– *Deborah Lewis*



**S**t. Patrick's Day is not a well-known Temple Sinai festival celebration — and yet, March 17, 2020 was to be an important milestone in the Honor our Heritage, Build our Future campaign. We had planned a donor appreciation event that would usher in what we hoped would be the final phase of a successful campaign, resulting in a transformed physical facility and a vastly strengthened financial base to support our clergy, social action, and pastoral care.

Looking back, it's hard to believe just how little we understood about what was about to happen to our community and our world. Canceling the event seemed, at the time, a bit over-cautious, but we figured we would reschedule a few weeks later. Oy vey, were we wrong.

Clearly, the calamity of this past year — from the health pandemic to gross social inequality laid bare — has reinforced how enormously privileged we are as a community. It has also reinforced how much we miss coming together for worship, for study, for social action.

While this has been something of a "lost year," this spring we were thrilled to launch the Davis Center for Social Justice, which represents a milestone in our efforts to expand and strengthen Temple Sinai's dedication to *Tikkun Olam*. This is just the beginning of an exciting new chapter in our community's long tradition of social action for congregants of all ages.

Our building's physical transformation has been complicated by the pandemic. On the one hand, our building has been empty — on its face, a perfect opportunity to get our construction done with minimal disruption. Yet the uncertainty of this past year — from lower membership numbers (and revenue) to more mundane issues like getting building permits finalized — forced us to hit the pause button on

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## HONOR OUR HERITAGE, BUILD OUR FUTURE

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construction. As co-chairs of the Honor our Heritage, Build our Future capital campaign, we feel a deep obligation as stewards of this once-in-a-generation project to ensure we meet the needs of our community. We count our blessings that we have had the flexibility to make sure we are getting it right.

Phase 1 construction — the Core, which includes the sanctuary and the social hall — should be substantially completed by the end of this summer, with a transformed sanctuary with an accessible bimah; flexible, more comfortable seating; and improved lighting. We also expect enhanced audio-visual technology to reflect the latest innovations that have allowed us to stay connected this past year.

The Strategic Planning Committee is currently reviewing Phase 2 — the South Addition which re-orient the entrance off the parking lot — to make sure that the design reflects the lessons of this past year. Zoom may augment future in-person events held at the temple. We will keep our members informed and hope you will participate in any congregational surveys or meetings in the weeks ahead.

We are deeply grateful to our fellow Temple Sinai members who have so generously supported the Honor our Heritage, Build our Future campaign. And as we renew our engagement on this very special project, we hope to meet those of you who would like to join in strengthening our community for future generations.

– *Naomi Camper and Andrew Engel*

- 520+ supporters of the campaign
- \$9.9 million pledged
- \$5.75 million received

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## KEEPING THE MUSIC PLAYING

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**M**usic is an integral part of the spiritual life of Temple Sinai, and the pandemic presented obstacles to important musical elements. Our remarkable clergy kept the crucial musical aspect of Shabbat services going beautifully without dropping a beat. But would we have to go without the uplifting voices of the choir during High Holy Day services? And what about the annual, much-anticipated Shabbat Shira (Sabbath of Song)?

For the adult choir, gathering in late summer to begin High Holy Day rehearsals is always a joyful reunion, with greetings and hugs soon giving way to the first chords of the familiar melodies that evoke the richness and beauty of the Days of Awe. And the challenge of preparing a huge amount of music with limited time infuses each rehearsal with themes of Yom Kippur – striving, sometimes succeeding and sometimes falling short, committing to do better, and doing all of this together. But this year, it was not to be.

Enter the Music MVPs of the year (and every year, actually): Senior Cantor Laura Croen and accompanist Neil Weston. We all recognize Cantor Croen's beautiful voice, and many are also aware that she is the heart and soul of music at the temple, planning and overseeing the music we hear at services all year. You might know less about Neil Weston, whose extraordinary playing elevates our worship and whose musical acumen and choir directing skills have always enabled the choir to sound its best.

This last year, Neil developed a new expertise, spending countless hours creating musical video recordings for our virtual High Holy Day services. These included the "Brady Bunch" composite choir pieces, for which Neil coached and encouraged choir members, provided technical support, and did Herculean amounts of video and audio editing to make it all blend together smoothly. Kudos also go to the choir members, who persisted through challenges both musical and technical to record the individual parts that were woven together to create the beautiful whole: the full choir, singing the familiar prayers.

Through their hard work in both musical and technical arenas, they were able to record their individual parts, which were then transformed into the full choir joyfully singing together.

Shabbat Shira 2021 was also not possible in its pre-pandemic format. But with more than 250 families and individuals attending the virtual service, it was still rich, musical, and meaningful. As January marked the tenth Yahrzeit of musician-songwriter Debbie Friedman, the evening (as well as a related film screening the prior week) was dedicated to her uplifting music. We were fortunate to have Jeff Klepper, a cantor, composer and life-long friend of Debbie's, join us from Boston via zoom for a wonderful talk about her musical life and legacy. Our talented musical clergy featured Debbie's well-loved melodies throughout the service, and, thanks to technology, we were able to include the Adult and Youth choirs, a flute accompaniment, and the temple band Middle Matzah Conspiracy (MMC) to create a special musical Shabbat. Of course the Shabbat Shira dinner, which usually attracts over 200 people, was on hold this year. But we're sure that many raised

a glass at home to the memory of Debbie.

MMC also brought its talents to the annual Chanukah Shabbat service in December. Though not able to play together in person, the band's composite videos of traditional Chanukah songs made for a lively, ruach-filled celebration.

May the time come soon when we can safely gather together again in song!

– *The Music Committee*

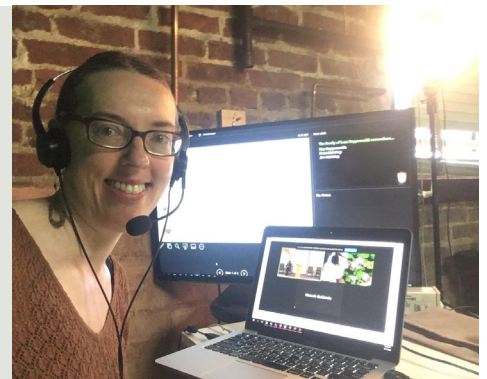


If you had told me a year ago that I would be working out of my basement and it would look like command station central, I would have said, "What??" I went from whisking paper files around the temple's main office and greeting families for their appointments to moving the entire B'nei Mitzvah process online, setting up Zoom appointments and running tech for virtual B'nei Mitzvah services on Saturdays.

In 2019, I spent my week preparing materials for B'nei Mitzvah students' services and leaving the office on Fridays, but now I am in the thick of things, helping run services and watching students become B'nei Mitzvah. It has been so meaningful to watch Temple Sinai youth become leaders in the community. I've been so impressed with the way students have skillfully connected the Torah to today's pandemic in their *divrei Torah* and how hard they've worked on their chanting.

It's not just B'nei Mitzvah. Through running Zoom for many different life-cycle events, I've gotten to know members in a whole new way. Even though we are socially distant, I feel more connected to our members than ever.

– *Rachel Hynes*



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## LIFECYCLE & MILESTONE EVENTS

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**M**y late husband, Rabbi Jonathan Eichhorn, passed away about four years ago after suffering from a degenerative disease for thirteen years. During this time, long-time friends Judy and Lew Priven (whom we first met as members of our congregation in Kingston, NY in the '60s), were also going through similar circumstances. Lew and I supported each other throughout these challenging times (Judy passed away in 2019), and over time our relationship blossomed. In late 2019, we made plans to be married in Chevy Chase on April 19, 2020, at a local French restaurant, with 70 family and friends joining us for the celebration.

In mid-March, when it became apparent that our original wedding plans had to be cancelled and we could not predict when a lockdown might be ordered, we developed Plan B. Late Monday evening, March 16th, 2020 we decided to get married the next day at my daughter Deborah's home in Bethesda (we had alerted them to the possibility a few hours earlier!). Fortunately, Lew likes to take care of things well in advance, so we had all we needed—Maryland marriage license, Ketubah, rings, glass, wedding clothes, etc.

When we arrived at their home and began to walk up the front steps, we were greeted by "MAZEL TOV SUZANNE AND LEW!!" written in chalk on the front steps. Rebecca, their eleven-year-old, had written the greeting.

The ceremony was held in Deborah and Steve's backyard, with their two children and Rabbi Fred Reiner (officiant) and his wife, Susan Liss, in attendance. The weather was beautiful and birds were chirping in the background. My grandson, Ari, manned the cell phone so other members of our immediate families could join via FaceTime and share the joy of the lovely ceremony. Steve was the photographer. We are especially grateful that Rabbi Reiner was so flexible with the last-minute plans, and that Susan was one of the witnesses.

After the ceremony, we had dinner at the dining room table, with take-out from a small local Peruvian chicken restaurant, and enjoyed a delicious chocolate mousse "wedding cake" from Whole Foods. A big celebration is being planned for "when things get back to normal"—someday soon, we hope. Our wedding was truly a few hours of joy during a very dark time!



*Left to right: Lew Priven, Suzanne Eichhorn, Susan Liss, Rabbi Fred N. Reiner*

– *Suzanne Eichhorn*



In January 2021, when she was two months shy of age 107, we lost my incredible, indefatigable Grandma Ruth. This eternal optimist was born before women had the right to vote, lived long enough to vote for a woman for president and to see one elected vice president. She was an amazing Jewish cook; I owe my baking skills to her and I'm mastering some of her savory dishes too. Always up for a plan, she was the center point of our close local family, had an expansive fan club of adoring nieces, nephews and cousins and a wide-rippling circle of friends she treated like family.



*Ruth Levine on her 105th birthday.*

It was the middle of winter, in the middle of the pandemic — how would we gather, what were the rules, how could we celebrate her adequately?

Our close family of four generations of Temple Sinai members was now three. But as is true with many things in pandemic life, in some ways, certain decisions were easier. In Before Times, we might have been overwhelmed with options — multiple shivas in different homes; deciding how wide the circle at the burial should be; a NY memorial for the multitude of loving family still centered there.

But in these unusual times, there wasn't much to decide. Rabbi Goldstein generously made herself available for multiple Zoom planning calls, intended to be an hour, but often more like 2 to 3 hours. She deftly laid out the options, being flexible wherever she could and gently matter-of-fact where Covid required it (all in her first week back from maternity leave!).

We settled on a tiny graveside burial with local, immediate family, my grandma's amazing aides, and Rabbi Goldstein. We huddled together, distanced, and our small group sang "I Love You a Bushel and Peck," a favorite of Ruth's. We had a Zoom funeral and shiva all-in-one, that very same day. Rabbi Goldstein helped us craft a service that had the tradition and solemnity of a more formal funeral, that seamlessly morphed into a more casual, loving shiva. Cantor Croen added beautiful music my grandmother would have loved, including an upbeat version of a Yiddish song and a folk "Bob Dylan" version of "Turn, Turn, Turn." Was it what we would have envisioned or hoped for, as I delivered a eulogy from my dining room table? No. But how much of 2020-2021 is either of those things? And like so many things in the pandemic, there were unexpected perks too. So many family and friends could join us from across the globe and share wonderful memories of my grandma. And because the shiva was moderated, we could focus and listen, and it was recorded!

So how did we celebrate her adequately? We cooked. Along with the Zoom funeral invite, we sent recipes for Ruth's coffee cake and rugelach, and encouraged friends and family from far and wide to make one of her recipes that day or that week. And then we started receiving texts with pictures of all the delicious food made in her honor. My cousin made coffee cake, all the way in London, the day after the funeral.

And we're still cooking. Just today, 3 months after she passed, my mom brought by my grandmother's meatballs, and my close friend made her coffee cake for her son's 11th birthday, for breakfast! Our dinner included an analysis of Ruth's meatballs vs. my mom's vs. mine. Can you guess whose won?

– *Julia Kepniss with her mother, Judy Lichtman*

**B**y the time we reached Bella's baby naming this past November, Temple Sinai had been gathering for lifecycle rituals and services on Zoom for 8 months. I had officiated at Zoom B'nei Mitzvah, Zoom shivas, Zoom memorial services...I had attended a Zoom Bris. We had migrated almost all elements of Jewish life online. Families repeatedly told us that they were surprised by how meaningful these rituals were, even if they were participating in their living rooms and wearing pajama bottoms.

When Bella was born, we didn't want to wait too long to give her a Hebrew name. It felt like an opportunity to share some joy when the world felt sad and scary. And we wanted the opportunity to "introduce" her to family and friends, knowing that it would probably be a long time before they would be able to meet her in person. Still, I shared the reluctance that many others had expressed...were we really going to welcome Bella into the Jewish people alone in our kitchen?

We scheduled Bella's baby naming for the Shabbat after the election; the date worked well for our families. It also felt right, because Gus Schwartz, Cantor Robins' son, was named at the Shabbat service following the 2016 election. We had no idea what the mood of the Shabbat service would be, but we figured that a baby naming was always a good thing—no matter what else was going on in the world.

That Friday night came at the end of an intense week. It felt as if Steve Kornacki of MSNBC had taken up residence in our living room. We had friends and family who had spent the week working around the clock as the election results trickled in. Our parents came to town, and the hours leading up to services were filled with the normal hustle and bustle that precedes any big event. We dug out our dress up clothes—after a month of parental leave and 8 months of a pandemic, it had been a while since we dressed up. We put Bella in the dress that I wore for my baby naming. We crossed our fingers because it was white, a ridiculous color for a baby to wear.

We stood in the kitchen with Bella and my dad; the rest of our family sat outside with masks on. We received blessings over a computer screen and I cried the whole time. I felt fortunate once again to be part of the Temple Sinai team, to have these incredible rabbis and cantors. Friends and family joined us from around the country, sending loving messages in the chat, and texting us photos of us from their computer screens, looking like the nervous new parents that we were.

We watched the rest of the service on a screen we had set up outside. Rabbi Roos gave an incredible sermon that spoke to the anxiety and intensity of the moment in our country. We ate a traditional Temple Sinai Shabbat dinner (Sushi Ko). It was not a baby naming that I could have imagined before the pandemic began, and yet it was fitting for our pandemic baby. I cannot wait to bring Bella to Temple Sinai, to meet this incredible community into which she was lucky enough to be born. And I join all of those who have been surprised by just how meaningful it can be to participate in a lifecycle event on Zoom.



*Rabbi Goldstein with her husband, Josh and daughter, Bella.*

– *Rabbi Hannah Goldstein*

**A**s reality set in during the first few months of the pandemic, our family wondered how Isabelle would become a Bat Mitzvah. Days before the pandemic began, we had just picked up her printed invitations, details were coming together for the celebratory dinner and we were starting to get really excited. Then our new reality forced several questions: Should we have her Bat Mitzvah on June 6 and what would it look like if we did? What is a “Zoom Mitzvah” and can the same in-person spirit be achieved? Should we postpone? If one doesn’t have a Torah to read from, is it considered a Bat Mitzvah?

After thoughtful consultation with Rabbi Hannah, Isabelle decided she would stay with her June 6 date, embracing her day and her Torah portion, regardless of what it looked like. As the date got closer, we started to understand what a Zoom Mitzvah could look like. We spoke to another Sinai family who opted to have a Zoom Mitzvah the week before ours. They even created a podium for the occasion, which we borrowed. Thank you, Sussmanns! We moved around furniture in our dining room and created a sanctuary inspired space. Then Rabbi Roos called with amazing news: the Torah could be borrowed and picked up from Sinai. Isabelle’s portion will be “post-it noted,” and she could read from the Torah. We even had a tech practice the Wednesday prior to confirm all participants were comfortable and that the laptop was positioned correctly.

The weight of the occasion and its original historical intention set in: even without the physical attendees, the in-person aliyahs, the post-party celebrations etc., we were surrounded by family and friends spiritually, and that was all that mattered. And although Rabbi Hannah, Rabbi Roos and Cantorial Soloist Robyn Helzner were there via Zoom, their direction and support was felt, experienced, and exceeded our expectations, as if we were all on the bimah together. Despite protests outside of our house, a D.C. curfew, and Covid lockdown, Isabelle read the Torah that day and became a Bat Mitzvah. Sinai created an intimate and meaningful event, even if we weren’t in our sanctuary. We could not have dreamed of a better day for Isabelle. Truly. Thanks to Temple Sinai, our clergy and our community.

– *Meredith Margolis*



*Isabelle and her parents (top left) celebrate with family, friends, and Temple Sinai clergy via Zoom.*

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## NEW BEGINNINGS

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**W**hen I was interviewing with communities around the country, Temple Sinai in Washington, D.C. was my absolute top choice. This was the only community that asked me an actual, hard-hitting question about Israel during my interview. It was a community led by an incredible team of clergy and dynamic, committed and wildly intelligent lay leaders. It was a synagogue at which several personal friends had either worked in the past or were working presently. It was a community that welcomed me with open arms and assured me that my particular skill set would be well put to use. I couldn't possibly have been more excited to come join this incredible community when I signed my contract in early March—but then the pandemic struck.

Until the 2020 class of rabbinical ordinees, no rabbi in the history of the Reform Movement in the United States had ever been ordained and sent out into the field in the midst of a pandemic. The task of trying to serve a community with whom one would only be able to get acquainted over Zoom was daunting. The currency in which rabbis traffic is relationships, and building relationships with my new community in hour long bursts over video-conferences seemed nigh-on impossible. Yet, slowly and steadily, it began to work. I was able to recognize folks instantly when I saw them come onto my screen and be recognized in return. I'd meet with families at the temple to help them get a Torah scroll to their home, and smile ear-to-ear beneath my mask as, for the first time, I heard their voices in the real world and not through headphones. I was able to join and even create new spaces to share, learn and pray, and felt supported by our amazing cantorial leaders in sharing some of my musical gifts.

Never could I have predicted that a year after my ordination I'd still only be in my office one day per week, or that I'd still have met only a tiny fraction of my congregants in person, or that both my first and second High Holy Day sermons would be experienced by the large majority of my community over the internet. Yet the silver linings shine brightly: I have been blessed with significantly more time spent at home this year which has allowed for a major uptick in quality time spent with my wife and now one-year-old son, Dylan. I have still been able to speak out on the issues that face our society both from the pulpit and beyond. I have learned to treasure and better nurture professional and personal relationships that I hold dear, and I have been able to establish myself as a leader in this amazing community of which we're all blessed to be small parts. *Baruch shehechyanu, v'kiyemanu, v'higianu lazman hazeh.* Blessed is the One who enlivened us, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this moment, and may we reach even higher heights in the year to come. Thank you, Temple Sinai, for welcoming me so warmly.

– *Rabbi Noah Diamondstein*



*Rabbi Diamondstein with his wife, Marnie and son, Dylan the night of his installation.*

**F**inding a new synagogue topped the list of boxes to check for me and my husband, Ed, during our move to the D.C. area in January 2020. We were deeply engaged members at our synagogue in Dallas, where I had also been a staff member. We knew what we wanted: to find people to have Shabbat dinner with, create a wonderful friend group and deepen our spirituality. Not a lot to ask, right?

We attended services at Temple Sinai and two other Reform synagogues within the first six weeks of arrival, and gave ourselves a timeline of about six months to choose. The institutional personalities began to emerge and the invitations started to arrive. We felt hopeful.

By mid-March, of course, in-person synagogue life shut down. Our search, too, went on hiatus. Or so we thought.

In those first early weeks of the pandemic, we turned to our Dallas community for services, seders and shiva minyans. Particularly meaningful was being able to mourn with friends from afar. One of my fears in moving had been whether I'd make friends here to mourn with.

Then, in mid-May, death hit really close to home when a close friend from Dallas died of a heart attack. Feeling shocked, heartbroken and isolated in so many ways, we did the most life-affirming thing we could think of. We joined Temple Sinai.

We knew how much a synagogue could be a source of comfort through pain. We didn't want to have to start our search from scratch once pandemic restrictions were lifted. And, most importantly, we'd begun to make special connections.

We are grateful to Karen Auerbach, who hosted us at Shabbat Shira in February 2020, and who called me by name as we walked into a place where we, for the first time in decades, knew no one. She seated us at dinner with Nancy Liebermann and Joe Godles, a relationship that has flourished even during the pandemic.

Nancy recruited me to sew masks for a WRJ project. That led to helping out on the get-out-the-vote effort with Carole Brand. Which led to an invitation from Helene Sacks to join the WRJ board. I'd never been active in sisterhood and did not expect that it would become the path to connection here. You just never know!

What tipped the scales for us wasn't worship style, physical space, program quality or leadership vision — all attributes that we have been privileged to help shape elsewhere over the years. Rather, it was the simplest acts of welcome — calling us by name, seating us at the right table for dinner, chat messages during services, mazel tovs for family simchas and meaningful projects— that made the biggest difference.

For some, attending protests, organizing food drives or participating in drive-by parades have helped them get through the dark times. For us it was joining a synagogue — even though we have not stepped inside since we joined. It's a place where hearts are open, and that gives us hope.



*Connie and Ed Dufner at their son's wedding in September 2020.*

– *Connie Dufner*

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## THE TEMPLE SINAI LIBRARY

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**S**ometime before the pandemic, long-time Library Committee co-chair Herb Mintz z"l came up with the idea of creating a Circle of Book Lovers composed of people who had participated in temple-wide book discussions (now called SinaiReads), with the idea that they would receive occasional e-mails containing information about temple book events. Last March, as the temple closed in person, the Library Committee wanted to provide resources to book-loving congregants isolated at home. So, on behalf of the committee, I started to send the e-mails on a weekly basis.

The e-mails expanded to provide information about online Jewish literary and cultural events in the D.C area and beyond, including book discussions, author talks, classes, lectures, films, festivals, cooking programs, podcasts, and streaming series. They include content related to Temple Sinai programs and people, holidays, and observances such as Jewish American Heritage Month and National Poetry Month. I incorporate recommendations and content from other Library Committee members – including Children’s Circle Time, a periodic feature that focuses on recommendations for children – as well as TSWRJ, Multiracial Sinai, Daytimers, and individual Book Lovers.

The e-mails have been a good way to provide information not only about online events, but also about the Library itself, including its newly redesigned website and what books mentioned in the e-mails are available for contactless curbside pick-up. The Circle has grown to include people who learned about the e-mails and asked to be added to the list, including some from the wider community, and now has over 150 members.

I have enjoyed keeping a close eye on what’s going on in the Jewish literary and culture world and participating in many of the events myself. The structure of coming up with the weekly e-mails and trying to keep them fresh has been beneficial for me in this time when the days sometimes seem to blend into each other. And it has been fun and rewarding to engage with other temple members in this context.

Over the past year, the Library Committee has grown into a strong and supportive community. New members have joined, we meet weekly on Zoom, and we continue to build the Library’s collection, with a special focus on social justice and multiracial content. Being actively involved with the Committee and communicating weekly with the Circle of Book Lovers has been a silver lining in my pandemic experience.

If you’d like to receive the Circle of Book Lovers e-mails, please contact Librarian Ruth Polk at [rpolk@templesinai.org](mailto:rpolk@templesinai.org).



– *Cathy Klion*

In January, I came to Temple Sinai for a morning meeting, and arriving early, I waited in the library. I had the good feeling I always get when I am there. The sense of familiarity and warmth when I walk into Temple Sinai, the peacefulness of the library, the joy of seeing people I know and care to be with. I am in a safe place where I can fully experience and share my Jewishness.

When I retired in 2010, I joined my friend Janis Colton, our librarian Ruth Polk, and a cadre of wonderful volunteers in maintaining the library and its collection. I am able to contribute there, be productive, and be appreciated. It is one of the activities that has cemented my strong connection to Temple Sinai.

By the time Bobbe and I joined in 1998, we were typical empty nesters: kids grown and out of the house, not regular Shabbat service attendees, and pursuing our busy careers as attorneys. However, early in our marriage, we had made a commitment to always belong and contribute to a synagogue as a vital center of Jewish life. We had been longtime members of a Conservative congregation in Gaithersburg, but we were ready for a change, and friends introduced us to Temple Sinai.

Rabbi Reiner immediately welcomed us, and we quickly took to the freer, more flexible spirit of Reform Judaism. Just having musical instruments at services and the variations and innovations they allow, as compared to the more restrictive Conservative synagogue practices, was a major difference and a great change for us.

But we also understood that to make Sinai our special place, we had to take on some responsibility of our own. We did that by finding other empty nesters of similar age and circumstance with whom to form a new kallah. For the past 20 years, our kallah has been a remarkable addition to our lives, where we have developed close friendships, shared holidays and other events, and can look to each other in both joyful and difficult times.

Through her involvement in the Temple Sinai Women of Reform Judaism, Bobbe has come to know many temple members, and as regular attendees of the Daytimers programs, we both have met more congregants. Familiar faces, friendly greetings, sharing experiences; those are all part of being engaged in the activities here.

For the past three years, I have had to face the realities of a life-threatening illness. I am very fortunate to have the strong and unwavering support of my wife and our wonderful family. But I also learned the importance of Temple Sinai to my well-being and continuing enjoyment of life. Our friends in the kallah, my colleagues at the library, the outstanding congregation members I have worked with on Sinai committees and programs, and the regulars at the Daytimers all spur me on. And in addition to being incredibly smart, imaginative, and dedicated, our clergy is warm and caring on a very personal and individual level. I am so grateful for their concern and support.

I was thinking about these things that morning while waiting for a meeting to start. I was in one of my most comfortable places in the synagogue. I knew I have a caring community behind me as I weather the challenges that always lie ahead. I was feeling good, relaxed, and full of life that morning. In the library. At Temple Sinai.

—Herb Mintz (z"l)



*This story was to be included in the Spring 2020 Sinai Quarterly, which was never printed. Herb passed away in February 2021. Special thanks to Bobbe Mintz, who gave permission to share Herb's story here.*

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## TEMPLE SINAI

# WOMEN OF REFORM JUDAISM

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**A**fter the temple building closed a year ago, TSWRJ co-presidents Lisa Tucker and Nancy Liebermann – along with a strong supporting Sisterhood cast – creatively reimagined our traditional activities and found ways to be together online.

“We found new ways to gather and lift each other up – through phone calls, glimpses on Zoom computer screens, porch visits, postcard writing, and fundraising,” Lisa said in her remarks at TSWRJ’s opening meeting in September.

Here are some highlights of the ways TSWRJ connected with members and the community since September of this unusual year:

**Raised funds from our congregation for the Capital Area Food Bank through TSWRJ’s annual High Holy Day fundraiser and a second “emergency winter food drive.”** The Sinai community enabled the food bank to provide over 2,440 emergency food boxes. These donations “made a huge difference in the lives of so many families in our area in this exceptionally difficult time,” says Michelle Engelmann, fundraiser chair.

**Took the Judaica Shop online.** Meg Seldin, administrator of the shop, worked with TSWRJ member Paola Rivera to catalogue the shop’s more than 1,000 items. “We’ve been busy filling curbside orders, but people can make an appointment to come into the shop as needed,” says Meg.

**Played weekly Mah Jongg online.** Maj continued online throughout the pandemic, say members Robin Glantz and Susan Schiffer. “We are a small but steady group and have listened to dogs barking and spouses calling in the background. It’s been a ton of fun!”

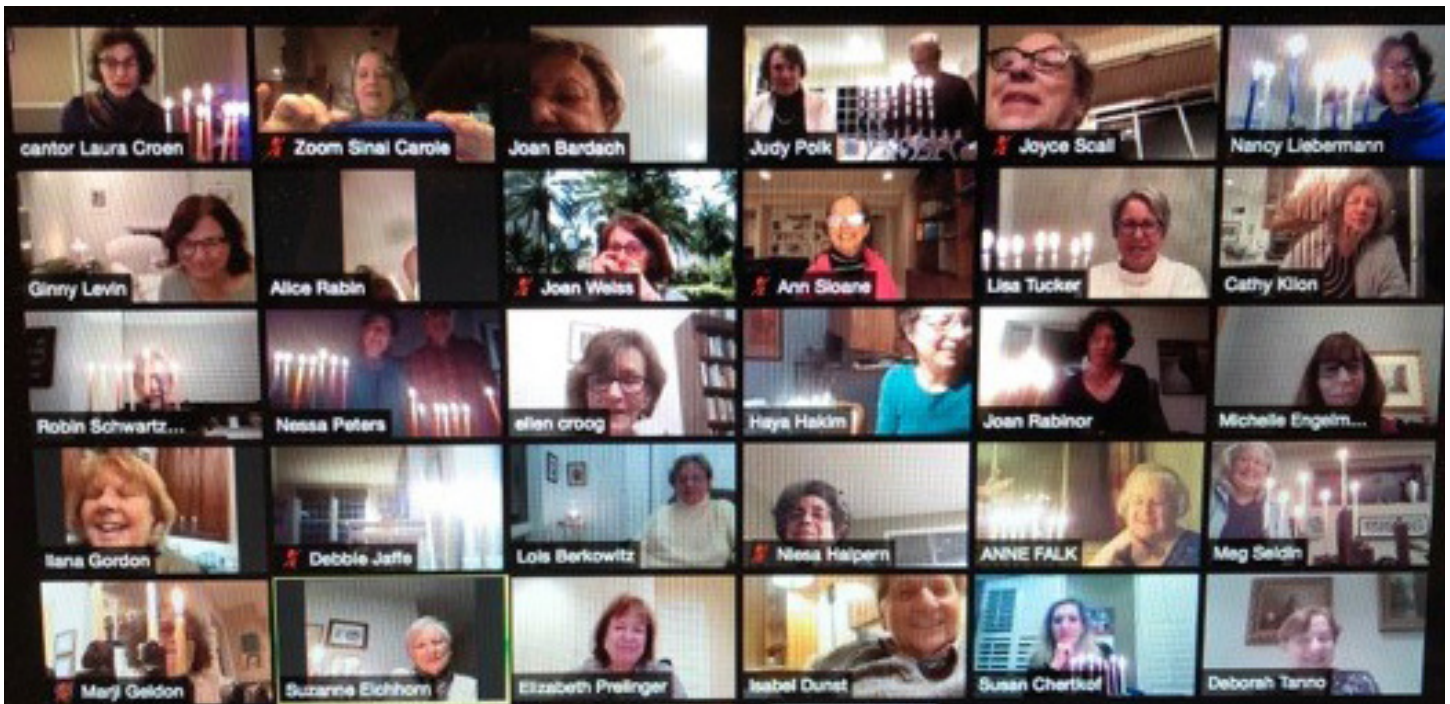
**Coordinated the annual Chanukah Mart, virtually.** “Although TSWRJ could not offer our usual gifts, food, and activities in person, we knew we wanted to offer something to congregants,” says Carole Brand, chair of the Chanukah Mart. Sinai congregants ordered boxes of latkes and dreidels, gelt and candles for socially distant pickup. Congregants could shop the mart virtually thanks to vendor chair Cara Jablon, who procured vendors to promote their wares on a new mart website.

Mart events included a children’s author Zoom book panel. Spearheaded and moderated by TSWRJ’s Pamela Fields, the panel drew insights from author panelists Allison Soffer, Rabbi Mindy Portnoy and Deborah Kalb, all Sinai members.



*Ilana Gordon at no-contact Chanukah pickup on December 6 — latkes and bags of dreidels, candles, and gelt!*





Led by Cantor Croen, the sixth night of Chanukah was brightened by temple members lighting menorahs and chanting the blessings together.

**Held the annual Authors' Roundtable (ART) in February.** The theme of this year's ART was women's suffrage. Many thanks to participating authors Martha S. Jones, Elaine Weiss, and Sinai member Laura Kumin. Thanks also to ART committee members Carole Brand, Pamela Fields, Marji Geldon, Andrea Harnett, and Fran Rothstein, who moderated the discussion.

**Supported activities of the temple's Reproductive Health and Rights cohort, led by chair Liz Rose.** Our activities included watching the documentary film *Belly of the Beast*, about illegal sterilization in California prisons. TSWRJ and WRJ co-sponsored a lively panel on the documentary that was moderated by Sinai member Nilmini Rubin and featured filmmaker Erika Cohn, activist Kelli Dillon, and Rabbi Goldstein.

Led by Sinai member Karen Shalett, a group of TSWRJ members created personal care bags for mothers served by Community of Hope, a nonprofit organization focusing on underserved families in the District.

**Provided two NIH Children's Inn dinners for patients' families.** This year, TSWRJ partnered with a restaurant instead of cooking and serving the dinner in person. Congregants donated enough money to enable Gregorio's Trattoria restaurant to offer two dinners, says Audrey Kramer, who led this effort. Remaining funds will buy gift certificates for the families.

**Hosted TSWRJ Shabbat.** This annual event was renewed in April 2021 in a virtual format, organized by Myra Jacobs and committee members Suzanne Eichhorn, Michelle Engelmann, Audrey Kramer and Lisa Tucker. Small groups met before the service to schmooze virtually and then gathered together for the service. TSWRJ Board members helped the clergy lead the service and contributed personal reflections on the theme of *Shehecheyanu*: what sustained us during the challenges of a year of isolation, hardship and grievous losses.

We gave thanks and acknowledged the strength of our Sisterhood bonds and our community.

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## THE VIRTUAL SANCTUARY

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**T**he meaning of being in community has changed for all of us during the pandemic. And what it has meant to be part of the Sinai community has changed for us as a couple, too.

We had been occasional attendees, or “semi-regulars, at best,” at Friday night services, and getting ourselves out of bed and to the temple on Saturday mornings for Torah study seemed an insurmountable challenge. Now, missing one or the other looms like a void.

At Torah study in particular, we’ve grown to love and appreciate the different teaching styles of our rabbis, the rich discussions, and the insight and generosity of our fellow congregants, not to mention the texts themselves. We look forward to thinking about the Friday night sermon in the context of the discussion of the *parshah*, and then moving on to talking about current events in the context of both. Barbara has used lessons learned in Torah study in discussions in WIN (Washington Interfaith Network) with those from other traditions, resulting in some WIN meetings becoming comparative religion seminars. We have also come to appreciate the resilience and depth of the Temple Sinai community and our great good fortune in being part of it.



– *Peter Winkler and Barbara Kraft*

**B**efore the pandemic, I used to join Friday night services at temple occasionally — perhaps every six weeks or so — and often associated with observing a Yahrzeit.

Since Shabbat services moved online, I have become “a regular.” I have enjoyed attending weekly Friday evening services enormously, actually planning my schedule to ensure I could attend. I have found the services themselves, and the community surrounding them, to provide such comfort and meaning in uncertain times. Seeing our clergy and ‘chatting’ with fellow temple members has been one of the “highlights” for me of this difficult time.

I am so grateful for all of the effort that has gone into making services and other online programming possible. The high holidays were so meaningful and beautifully executed.

I look forward to returning to in-person services, of course, but also hope that services will continue to be accessible online.

Thank you for your steadfast and thoughtful support of the congregation.

– *Amanda Broun*



I always meant to attend Friday night Shabbat services more regularly. Attending brought me back to my childhood, where sitting between my parents and listening to the familiar Hebrew chanting was peaceful and somehow magical. But as a busy adult, the fatigue of the work week or some other demand on my time on Friday evenings made staying home the option that often won out.

Then it was March 2020, and staying home was all we did. Especially in those early months of the pandemic, when we all were looking for ways to assuage the fear and anxiety of the pandemic, there were Temple Sinai's Friday night Shabbat services on Zoom, a comforting presence. It certainly was a different experience from being in the temple—no name tags, no nibbling on hummus and crackers

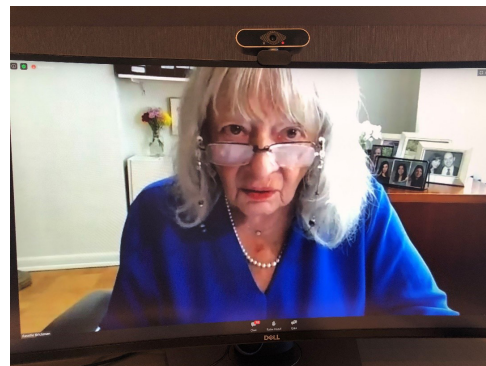


Marsha with her grandson, Charlie Bergman.

before Cantor Croen sang us into the sanctuary, no praying shoulder to shoulder with other congregants. But there were acceptable substitutes and even some inherent positives. We didn't have to fight rush hour traffic to get to the temple, and my living room couch is more comfortable than the temple seats. I know my husband's name, so we didn't need name tags. We munched our own hummus and crackers (occasionally enjoying a glass of wine that extended into the services). The running chat box with "Shabbat shalom!" was no substitute for hugs and face-to-face greetings, but it did let us share Shabbat greetings with many more people than we'd get to greet in the lobby, and created warmth and community. But what wasn't different at all was the clergy—separate and from their homes, but warm and welcoming, and emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually engaging, as always. Much more often now, I find a place for Shabbat services in my life.

– Marsha Shaines

When the lockdown began and in-person worship suddenly ended, it was like a gate slamming shut. The very notion of a spiritual service on Zoom seemed absurd. So I did what any skeptic would do: I withdrew.



That changed when a series of events—including an appeal from Robyn Helzner, the leader of our Kehillat service—brought me back into the fold. To my astonishment, the digital format—while weird at first—began to seem normal. I could see other people in their little boxes, and they could see me. Some even waved. I waved back. Robyn, whose spirituality and joy seemed to burst through the glass, virtually demanded that I join in. Gradually, I forgot that I was sitting alone at my desk, singing into a muted microphone. And soon I was delivering *divrei Torah*—echoing Moses and exulting in Joseph's triumph over his brothers—and feeling as involved as if I were on the bimah.

Similarly, a Yahrzeit prayer or one of gratitude—a reflection on the wonder and brevity of life—brought me the same connection that I thought had been lost. Often, the connection is an anchor. Coming at a time of isolation, the link is a reminder that we are apart but not alone.

And while I wait for our return to in-person services, I am grateful to Temple Sinai for keeping us bound together, proving that connection need not be physical to be real.

– Ravelle Brickman

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## DISTANCE LEARNING

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“Welcome to our little circle online....” is how every day of school has started for Penelope. It is these seemingly small consistencies, her TSNS (Temple Sinai Nursery School) bag full of tools for learning and fun, being welcomed personally to class by Kim Perks and Marcie Berul (who also always stay that extra five minutes to chat with Penelope), that has made the big unknowns of this past year tolerable for everyone.

“While we’re here, have no fear....” We knew this applied to Penelope; after all, we chose TSNS because kids come first, social and emotional development is prioritized, and play is the catalyst for learning. But the reassurance that TSNS provided to us, as parents, was a gift. Acting Director Ali Hurewitz took many long late-night calls to provide us soothing and poignant guidance on selecting a kindergarten for Penelope. Teachers Kim and Marcie emailed and called with tips and advice for everything from handling big feelings to practicing mindfulness. As a family we felt heard and supported in ways we didn’t know we would even need.

“When we’re together, we’re like family....” Penelope loves to tell everyone that she is an Arayot at TSNS. From just a daily half-hour in the morning and a half-hour in the afternoon, a community of five-year-olds has been created, one that reflects the same love, respect, kindness, and trust that we experienced in person at TSNS. This sense of community was given even more depth as we were provided the opportunity to sing with Sally, climb on the TSNS playground in the fall, participate in TSNS Out Front and Art on the Patio, and join beautiful events like the “Passover Experience.”

This year has not been what we had expected as a family and the trying times have been felt by all. But there have been glimmers and unanticipated treasures, like being a witness to and participant in Penelope’s learning, that will make us forever grateful to TSNS.

– *Tara Van De Mark & Matt Simpson*



*Tara and Penelope.*

A year into this pandemic, I often find myself swapping stories with friends, recalling what the last “normal” thing was that we did before the world shut down. Our family’s memories of that last week are rooted in Temple Sinai. For my son Miles, it was marching through the halls dressed as a unicorn and singing in the Bet Am at what would be his last TSNS (Temple Sinai Nursery School) Purim Parade. For my husband and me, it was the TSNS Auction – A Night in Paris. A mixture of hugs and elbow bumps, laughter and a touch of nerves as the reality of what was to come began to set in.

Then we hit the giant “pause” button. And we waited, under the impression that this would be a couple of weeks, just to flatten the curve. When the true weight of this pandemic really occurred to us, that’s when we felt the shock and loss of our beloved TSNS community. It felt unfathomable that our son would not return to school, would not see his friends or teachers. And before the distance could feel too great, we watched our community mobilize and do what it’s always done best – connect us. TSNS began to take on its virtual form. Facebook was the new Military Road with the same familiar faces rotating on our screen – leading us in Shabbat Sing, teaching us how to blow bubbles with some dish soap and a sock, make homemade play-dough. Our personal favorite was teacher Alex who would lead us in silly songs and storytelling using his latest produce offering as the main characters (Sweet Potato was a household favorite). We giggled, we learned, we

played alone yet together.

Fast-forward to the following school year, where we are today. My daughter joined her big brother at TSNS- a milestone we’ve been looking forward to. “Drop off” is a walk from the kitchen table to their makeshift desk. “Carpool line” is the place we line up to collect our giant Ziploc bag filled with thoughtfully measured and labeled materials for the weeks ahead.



*Joyful and interactive learning from home.*

“Circle time” is comprised of small squares of friends on our screen. And despite it all, connections continue to be made. Whether it is learning how to cut with scissors or properly greet a friend, the remarkably talented and compassionate teachers at TSNS have created a space where these kids can come together and learn. The

greatest gift of all has been the patio gatherings at TSNS, where twice a month the class can gather and see each other in *real life*.

Despite the challenges of this most difficult year, the embers of this community remain lit. Touchpoints throughout the year have ensured that. And while we close this TSNS chapter for my son as he goes off to Kindergarten, we re-open it, for my daughter will now have a turn to experience TSNS in person come fall. And perhaps if we’re lucky, my son will be able to join her in the Bet Am someday for a rousing rendition of “Hey Dum Diddely Dum” to welcome in Shabbat.

– *Dolores Siegel*

*At Temple Sinai Religious School, we have had a great, if totally unusual, TSRS@Home year! From home to home, we've connected in our youth education programs from grades 1-12; learning together, praying together, laughing together, hanging together, and making the best of these days. We've been surprised at how wonderful it can be to be connected from home to home, and delighted that we have been able to celebrate so many holidays, Shabbatot, and weekend festivities together. Meeting one another's pets and seeing favorite at-home spaces has been a special bonus this year, but most of all, we've learned that what matters most to us matters even more – that at TSRS, every child and their family should feel a sense of **Significance** – our learning really matters, **Belonging** – each person is an important part of our family, and has a important role to play here, and **Fun** – joyful Jewish experiences make our time together matter.*

*At the end of a book of Torah we say chazak chazak v'nitchazeik – Be strong, be strong, and let's strengthen each other. We have seen strength in fortitude and perseverance from creative teachers, dedicated school leaders, and open and willing students. We have been strong for one another – teachers drawing strength from students and students from one another through this year – and our continuous presence in one another's lives has strengthened each other. May it always be so.*

*We are so eager to be together again in 5782 back at 3100! See you there.*

*– Cantor Rebecca Robins*

**T**his year participating in Temple Sinai Religious School has been one of the few things that has made an unusual year feel far more normal. All the time I've spent bonding with my class over Hebrew has made me feel as though this year is like any other and the special play and projects we did made me genuinely happy. The teachers have been creative and thoroughly engaged me, like when we had a special Purim class complete with hamentashen and performances. The temple has adapted in more ways than one: we have been able to have services, such as the Shabbat service — conveniently located in my kitchen — because of the work and creativity of the Temple Sinai team.

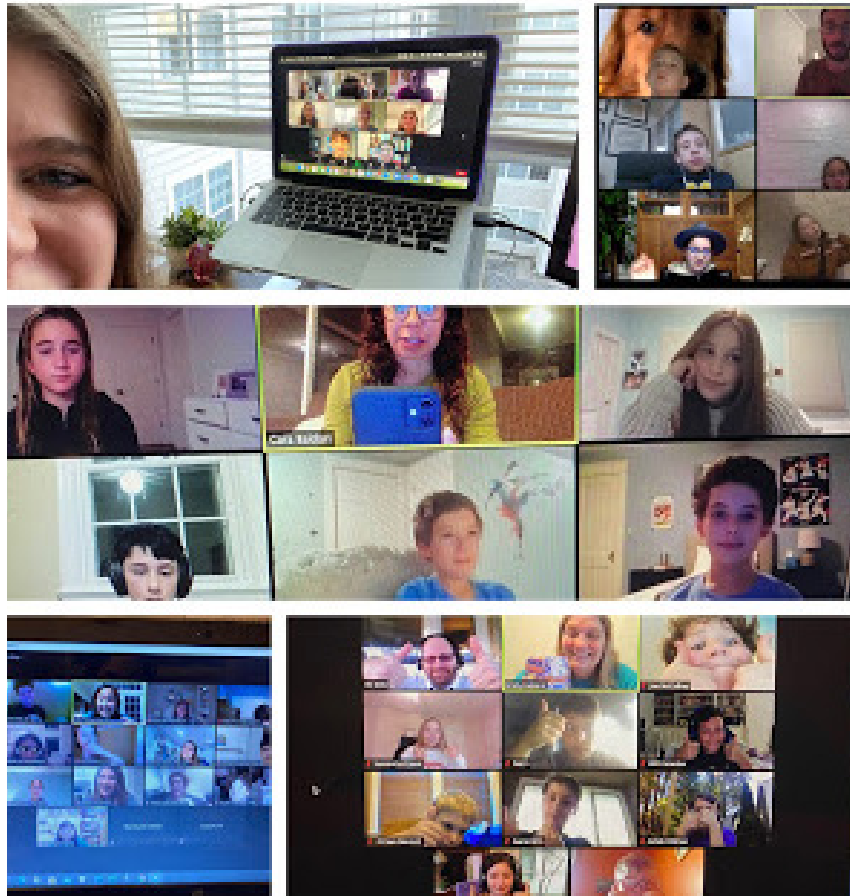
*– Amelia Fox, TSRS@Home 5th Grader*

**A**s with almost everything else this past year, the Sinaites youth group has had to completely reinvent the way they approach programming and events during Covid. Previously, the youth group did monthly dinners at restaurants, sleepovers in the temple, and excursions to nearby farms and parks. This year, we could do none of that and had to come up with many new kinds of events. Nobody wants to come to a Zoom event at night after they have sat on their computer the entire day doing schoolwork. So we had to get creative and find new events that were engaging and didn't just feel like more screen time. From baking to trivia to game nights, we were able to come up with events that people actually wanted to attend. This did take some time though; we started off the year pretty rocky and had very few participants at events and even had to cancel one event due to not enough interest. But overall we were able to find the balance between engaging and religious events that many people wanted to participate in. Although it has been a difficult year, I am so proud of all the board and cabinet members who have helped reinvent the way we do youth group and kept people interested in a year where it has been very difficult to do so. I look forward to finally being able to have events in person after such a long wait!

*– Max Regardie, Sinaites President*

**W**hat social distance??! We focused this school year exploring *middot*, and through our reflections we learned about each other and our Jewish history. We shared our likes and dislikes, we thought about what comes easy to us, where our challenges lie, and about our place in this awesome world that we are part of. We framed our learnings through a lens of Torah that built bridges to our Jewish ancestors. In some Zoom classes we met each other's pets, and sometimes siblings popped in to say hello. We embraced it all — and in this nourishing community of learning and laughter, I quickly came to realize that even on Zoom, we had created a holy space. TSRS 2020-2021 was great!

– Kathryn Spindel, TSRS@Home 3rd Grade Teacher



TSRS students and teachers gathered together for a year of Significance, Belonging, and Fun...via Zoom!



Kindergarten Shabbat in a Box.

**O**ur family has just loved Temple Sinai's first grade program, which brightened our pandemic weekends with creative and fun boxes on the Jewish holidays. My six year old, Max, would look forward to getting them each month, loved opening the fun treats and games in each and it brought the Jewish holidays to life. But it was not just the boxes that were fun. We all know the limitations of Zoom classes, but Temple Sinai made these Sundays fun, interesting, and fast-paced. Our six-year-old loved them all, as did I!

**From Max:** Thank you for all the stuff that you have given us. I appreciate it a lot. Hopefully I will see you again some time in person. They really made me understand everything you taught me about being Jewish.

– The Cort-Stone Family (Heather and Max), Sinai-in-a-Box 1st Grade Family

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY

*As you can see from the following stories, Temple Sinai social action and social justice activities readily adapted to the reality of the pandemic and continued as strong as ever. While we could not gather in person to create Thanksgiving baskets for families in need this year, we quickly pivoted to distributing supermarket gift cards. Similarly, our summer reading program was able to distribute age-appropriate books during this particularly difficult time for children. We publicized nonprofits focusing on addressing the impacts of the pandemic to the congregation. Temple Sinai members joined with our neighbors in protesting racial injustice and supporting Black Lives Matter. We continue to sponsor an asylum seeker from the Congo who happily is thriving and has been able to secure employment. The temple also secured a Kraus Immigration Mini-Grant from the Religious Action Center to help Solutions in Hometown Connections meet increased demand for two programs serving children of refugee and immigrant families. Through the generosity of our congregation, we were able to make a total of \$25,000 in Rabbi Eugene Lipman Social Action Fund Grants grants this year to organizations doing important work during these challenging times. Finally, we have joined with other D.C. based synagogues to launch the DC Synagogues Social Justice Initiative to present a Jewish voice to the city on key social justice issues.*

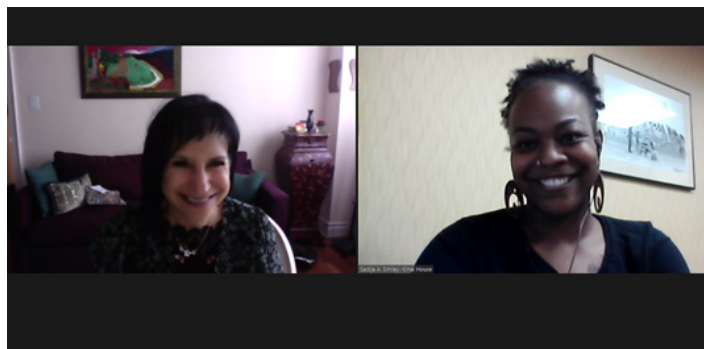
– **Glenn Engelmann**

I always admired Sadija Smiley, our tireless Executive Director of Sinai House. As a relatively new member to the Sinai House Board (two years or so), I welcomed the opportunity to get to know Sadija better. Then, the pandemic hit. In-person meetings froze, so I thought I might have to wait. However, Sadija knew I enjoyed writing so she asked me if I would like to help substantially revise the Sinai House Manual, which explains the entire operations of Sinai House, and draft a new manual for the Post Residency Program Pilot. I jumped at the opportunity.

Thereafter, we met one a week for several weeks via Zoom. We laughed, exchanged stories, and confided in each other, all while drafting the manual together. Whether Sadija was sitting at home, or in car waiting for her daughter to finish a lesson, we had terrific times together. I looked forward to these meetings (and still do) and they are not volunteer work at all – just time to spend with a new dear friend and assist where I can, a very worthwhile endeavor that our

temple has engaged in for over 30 years. Sadija’s warmth and caring attitude shone through the Zoom screen and I felt I was in the room with Sadija. On top of the emotional fulfillment I experienced, I enjoyed the intellectual stimulation of describing the operations of Sinai House in a friendly, ease to understand manner. We closed our drafting sessions with arms outstretched as virtual hugs! Despite the challenges of the pandemic, I feel more connected to Sinai House than ever – both to Sadija and the wonderful program of services provided by Sinai House.

– **Debi Kant**



*Debi Kant and Sadija Smiley.*



**W**hen the pandemic started, like many, Multiracial Sinai Committee (MRS) pulled back on our activities thinking that it would be difficult to continue to plan and provide programs over Zoom. As the pandemic dragged on we realized our work cannot and should not wait. We realized that our committee functioned almost as well as we did while meeting in person. While we missed the chats before and after the meetings and the camaraderie, we took inspiration in rising to the moment of racial reckoning in our country through a call to action Zoom meeting with over 100 congregants in June. We put up a sign declaring that Black Lives Matter and knew that the deeds must accompany the words. We convened members for a panel discussion of the documentary *13th*, along with a call for sustained action to dismantle systemic racism. We tweaked the Building Racial Stamina (BRS) facilitated discussion series to work the best it can virtually and added 60 people to the 40 people who had already participated in person.



Being antiracist in this time means continuing with the individual internal work and it means joining efforts in a community of people who are working towards dismantling racism. This has included standing with our Asian American and Pacific Islander congregants and community members after a year of increased racist abuse and the tragic murders in Georgia and declaring the need to stop Asian hate. We have also formed a group called Practicing Antiracism for all the people who have participated in BRS. We ask people to center the values of antiracism and racial equity in their choices and actions, often by leveraging unearned privilege, to repair our community and our society at large.

MRS continues to guide Temple Sinai in the work of being affirmatively antiracist by thinking about equity in all parts of our temple. We have started a Racial Equity Project in which members of MRS will collaboratively engage with committees and leadership throughout the temple. This is sacred work. It is the work of *tikkun middot* and *tikkun olam*. It is the work of each and every person at Temple Sinai.

– *Deitra Reiser*

I came to drop something off at Temple Sinai on March 17, 2020, and I saw congregants gathering for the Purim celebration. I decided not to stay because the Thursday before, I had cancelled an event for 150 people because of Covid. I was uncertain, frightened of what might be coming, unsure when we'd see our children, grandchildren, my mother, and our TS friends again in person. I think this was a universal feeling – that of the unknown – what did our immediate future look like with this highly infectious disease among us?



Contactless postcard packet pickup.

I was thrown off my game – I didn't know what to do next – I felt paralyzed and unsure, from day to day, hour to hour, what to do next. I couldn't focus on much other than the news and the bombardment of information about this new disease. I kept checking news reports and Facebook. I couldn't concentrate.

In early May, I was invited to help start Maryland Women for Biden. I was thrilled for the chance to focus on something outside of my home, to make a difference. About the same time, the Religious Action Center announced its voter engagement project and Rabbi Goldstein thought that TS should get involved. She brought together a small multi-generational group which led TS volunteers with postcarding and phone-banking during the election season.

This was a *Shehecheyanu* moment for me — with Glenn Engelmann, Maddie Feldman, Noah Roos, and Debby Litt, I was very pleased to be able to gather a group of 300 TS volunteers to write post cards to voters in the South. Learning from Reclaim Our Vote leaders, liaising with them to get names/addresses and exact wording for each card, ordering post cards, finding volunteers to purchase stamps, working with TS volunteers and staff to print everything we needed, creating packets bi-weekly for each volunteer, sending emails to volunteers and staff – all this helped me cope with our isolation and the uncertain future during the spring, summer, and fall. I loved seeing friends and meeting TS members whom I did not already know as they picked up their packets. I loved seeing volunteers on our bi-weekly Zoom calls.

Making a difference in our community is very important to me – and despite Covid, I felt like our committee, with all its eager volunteers, made “good trouble” during the pandemic and encouraged voters who had been removed from the voting lists to be re-instated and to VOTE.

**“Yes, we did it! We succeeded in getting out the vote in Georgia!”**

When the news came over the radio that people long excluded from the vote—people resigned to not being counted in states where their very existence was questioned—I knew it was the result of our Get Out the Vote campaign, led by Carole Brand.

Thanks to Carole and Temple Sinai's Social Action Committee, I and hundreds of others completed thousands of postcards, telling voters who were eligible to get out and do it.

They did. And we did it!

– Ravelle Brickman

– **Carole Brand**

**W**hen Rabbi Roos asked me to join the Covid-19 Advisory Group, I was pleased to be invited to help Temple Sinai in this way. And even though I've been working in the field of public health for three decades, and am currently a professor of public health at American University, I was unsure about how I could contribute given that infection control is not my specialty. The discussions with this able group including physicians, an attorney, a communications specialist, and dedicated temple administrators about the latest guidelines for keeping the building safe and protecting the health of temple staff and membership have been incredibly informative.

My area of expertise in public health is health education and community outreach. I teach my students about the importance of community partnerships in health promotion, specifically about the effectiveness of working with churches and other religious institutions to deliver health programs and messages. In November, with the availability of the vaccine on the horizon, I was thrilled that the Advisory Group embraced the idea of partnering with a church to arrange for trusted medical authorities to share information and answer questions from those understandably hesitant about the vaccine and/or unsure about how to get inoculated.

Through the temple's membership in the Washington Interfaith Network, we were able to rekindle a longstanding partnership between Temple Sinai and Emory United Methodist Church. Emory's Pastor Janice Harmon and Nicole Mitchell, a nurse practitioner who heads Emory's Covid-19 Advisory Group, were amazing partners and together we planned a virtual Covid-19 Vaccine Forum for February 9 that over 150 people attended—the majority of the participants were from the church community as well as early education providers from across the city. Rabbi Roos and Emory's Senior Pastor Joseph Daniels set a warm tone, beginning the forum with blessings for good health and fellowship. Nicole authentically shared her story

about her initial concerns about the vaccine and why she eventually decided to get vaccinated. Both Nicole and I had the privilege of moderating the all-star public health panelists we invited to answer ques-



tions solicited in advance from event participants. Dr. Kizzmekia Corbett, a renowned immunologist who oversaw the Moderna vaccine trial and works closely with Dr. Anthony Fauci at NIH, reiterated that the vaccine is safe in African American people, and everyone else. Dr. LaQuandra Nesbitt, Director of the DC Department of Health, shared the plan for the vaccine rollout in D.C., including eligibility groups and how to access the vaccine. Anita Jenkins, CEO of Howard University Hospital, a champion for the Covid-19 vaccine, described the hospital's efforts to vaccinate both employees and the surrounding community. We received an outpouring of gratitude for this timely temple/church initiative, such as:

*I can't even list all the good things, from the personalities of the organizers and panelists, the structure and organization of the programming, the quality of information, and everything else. Thank you for the program, everyone's time and sharing your passion for people. Amen. Shabbat shalom.*

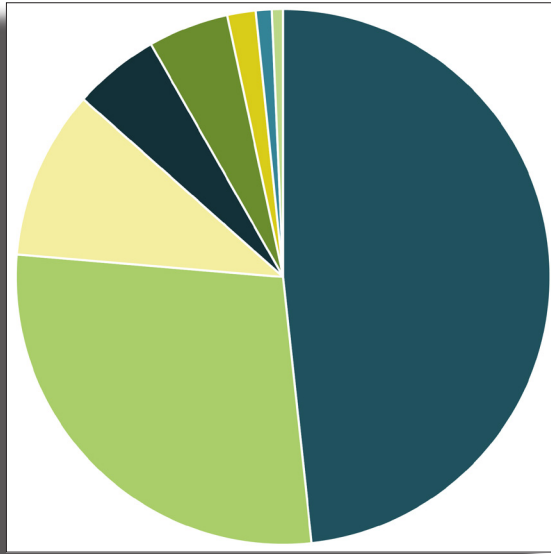
As the pandemic lingers, Pastor Harmon, Nicole, and I are looking into future collaborations, but first are eager to celebrate the success of the February forum by having dinner together, when it is safe, and meeting in person for the first time!

– Jody Gan

# FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Fiscal Year June 1, 2019 – May 31, 2020

Where does money for temple programs and operations come from?

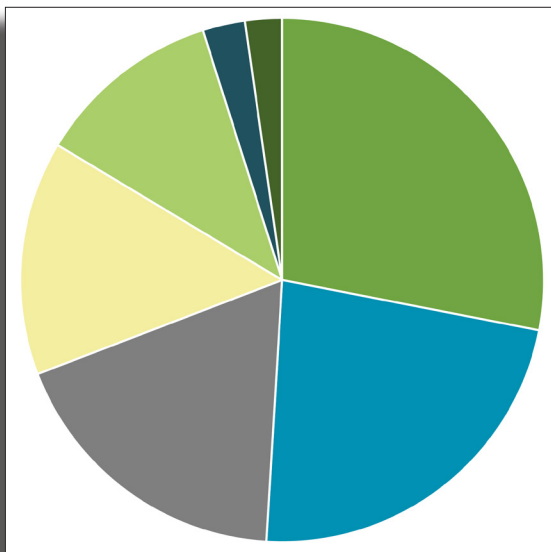


Revenue		
Membership Financial Commitment		\$3,251,547
Nursery School		\$1,887,046
Religious School & Youth		\$688,290
Contributions		\$350,964
Endowment & Investment Income		\$328,384
Program Fees		\$115,707
High Holy Day Tickets		\$64,105
Facility Fees		\$45,968
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$6.7 Million</b>

## Why does Temple Sinai need financial support beyond membership commitments?

Membership commitments are the largest single source of funds, representing 49% of the operating budget. Other funds are essential to our operations, including income from our endowment and investments (5%) and contributions to the Sinai Annual Fund and other campaigns (5%).

What does the money support?



Expenses		
Nursery School		\$1,887,046
Administration & Communications		\$1,538,628
Ritual		\$1,223,674
Building & Security		\$970,882
Religious School & Youth		\$772,621
URJ Dues		\$176,000
Programs		\$153,160
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$6.7 Million</b>

Personnel represent the largest expense at Temple Sinai, around 76% of the overall budget.

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## APPRECIATING OUR DONORS

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### Giving at Temple Sinai

Temple Sinai has a long and rich heritage of *tzedakah* consistent with our Jewish tradition. Such giving often occurs at times of birthdays, Bar and Bat Mitzvah, weddings, anniversaries, births and deaths, or in conjunction with special charitable campaigns. This year Temple Sinai members, family, and friends contributed \$1.8 million above and beyond member financial commitments. These gifts supported a wide variety of funds, programs, and causes including the Honor our Heritage, Build our Future Campaign for Temple Sinai (the Capital Campaign), the temple operating budget, endowments, and clergy discretionary funds. ***Thank you to the many generous donors who make Temple Sinai a special and vibrant community!***

#### RIMONIM SOCIETY

The Rimonim Society recognizes those individuals who have included Temple Sinai in their estate plans or established another type of planned gift. Rimonim Society members enhance our congregation and provide the means to carry on our work for generations to come. Their gifts create a legacy for the congregation and continuity of the Jewish people. To learn more about legacy giving or if you have included Temple Sinai in your estate plans and are not listed below, please contact Noah Benjamin at [nbenjamin@templesinaidc.org](mailto:nbenjamin@templesinaidc.org).

*We recognize and thank all our current Rimonim Society members!*

Esthy & Jim Adler	Betty Ferber & Robert Pomerance*	Rosann Wisman & Michael Lilek	Ted & Linda Rosen Robert* & Sandra Schwarzbart
Anonymous (3)	Emil Frankel	Marsha Shaines & Robert Loesche	Gertrude Slifkin
Chris Intagliata & Larry Asbell	Gary Friend & Tara Sonenshine	Martin & Syma Mendelsohn	Marcie Solomon
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David & Jane Fairweather	Marvin & Sally Kranz	Sherry Levy-Reiner*	
Elizabeth H. (Robin) Farquhar	Michael Levitt & Laura Greenberg	Catherine Ribnick	
Patrice & Barney Feinstein		Chip Rosencrans	* Of Blessed Memory

#### ARZA FUND

*512 members made voluntary contributions to this fund on their Member Financial Commitment form.*

#### RABBI EUGENE LIPMAN SOCIAL ACTION AND TZEDAKAH FUND

*814 members made voluntary contributions to this fund on their Member Financial Commitment form.*

#### SINAI HOUSE FUND

*594 members made voluntary contributions to this fund on their Member Financial Commitment form.*

#### \$ FOR ISRAEL FUND

*512 members made voluntary contributions to this fund on their Member Financial Commitment form.*

## ANNUAL SUPPORT FOR GENERAL PURPOSES

*These donors made contributions to support Temple Sinai's general operations—from worship to education, and programming to pastoral care — making a direct impact on the temple's ability to "meet every member where they are." Major categories include the Sinai Annual Fund, Memorial Gifts, and the Virtual High Holy Days Support Fund.*

*The Sinai Annual Fund supports everything that happens at Temple Sinai. Whether your Temple Sinai passion is music, social action, religious school, nursery school, adult education, or any of the many other programs and activities that have transitioned to virtual and socially distant formats this year, the Sinai Annual Fund supports what makes Temple Sinai special to you. While membership financial commitments are our largest source of support, they cover only 78% of the congregation's annual expenses. We rely on the Sinai Annual Fund to bridge the gap and reduce financial barriers to membership for those who need it.*

Michael Abramowitz & Susan Baer, Ira & Joy Adler, Ellen & Jeffrey Agler, Kent & Karen Allen, Judith Alperin & Marc S. Diamondstein, Robert Zeskind & Maryetta Andrews-Sachs, Edward Angel & Susan LaMountain, Cherrill Anson, David & Ari Antonelli, Lawrence Asbell & Christine Intagliata, Jane Axelrad, Mitchell & Sheryl Baer, Andrew Baker, Michael & Raanan Baratz, Joan Bardach, Ruth Bartfeld, Michael & Marilyn Barth, John Freedman & Cecily Baskir, Nathan Beaver & Kristin Nicholson, David Glanz & Michelle Becker, Jeremy & Alisa Ben-Ami, Noah Benjamin, Susan Berger, Barbara Bergman, Debbie Berkowitz, Lois Berkowitz, Donald & Norma Berlin, Seth Berlin & Susan Mayer, Jonathan & Andrea Berlowe Binder, Debra Berlyn, Jack Deutsch & Lori Berman, Rabbi Stephanie Bernstein & Henry Winokur, James Berry & Hali Edison, James & Barbara Bershon, Richard & Elaine Binder, Steven & Lisa Bleckner, Samuel & Phyllis Blum, Wendy Bogart, Lorraine Bolkosky, Judith Harkavy Bor & Family, Amy Borrus & Richard Miller, Nicholas & Carole Brand, Daniel Koch & Leah Brasch, Helen Breitbart, Ravelle Brickman, Rita & David Brickman, David & Anne Brill, Matthew & Hillary Brill, Frederick Parmenter & Julie Broido, Bradley & Stephanie Brooker, Ken & Heidi Brotman, Ann & Kenneth Brown, Marilyn & Ross Brown, Stan Crock & Pamela Brown, Gerald & Deborah Burg, Martin Burns & Wendy Kahn, Naomi & Clarke Camper, Joseph & Margaret Chachkin, Marc Zwillinger & Kirsten Chadwick, Kenneth & Linda Chaletzky,

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*Special thanks to those who supported our Virtual High Holy Days Support Fund to underwrite the added costs of our 5781 virtual High Holy Days. These gifts allowed Temple Sinai to maintain a spiritual and meaningful High Holy Days experience in a virtual format:*

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*These donors made contributions to support Temple Sinai's special endowments.*

#### **Bernstein Religious School Endowment Fund**

Rabbi Stephanie Bernstein & Henry Winokur, Trivers Harkins Family, Barbara, Zack, & Ben Kagan, Sussmann Family

#### **Endowment Fund**

Robert & Lesley Gasperow, Gail Fishman & Julie Kaplan, Martin & Syma Mendelsohn

### TEMPLE SINAI FUNDS

*These donors made contributions to support Temple Sinai's special programs, causes, and committees. You can learn more about what each fund supports at [templesinai.org/donate](http://templesinai.org/donate).*

#### **Benjamin Goldstein Adult Education Fund**

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**Temple Sinai's Get Out the Vote  
Campaign**

*This year Temple Sinai's Social  
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Women of Reform Judaism  
partnered to support a large-  
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These donors supported that  
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