

Shana Tova – I would like to warmly welcome all of you and especially our guests who are joining us for the holidays. This year we have opened our doors to worshipers who are new to our community and also to welcome home people who have not been with us for a while. We are thrilled to be together as we begin a new chapter for our synagogue.

This morning, I'd like to tell you the story of Community Synagogue, a story that many of you know even better than I.

In 1948, just after the formation of the state of Israel, a group of dedicated Jews in Rye decided they needed a place to learn and worship together. With a bit of publicity and a strong vision for what their union would be, 60 people gathered at the Rye Recreation Center – now known as the Rye Arts Center - to organize a Reform Jewish congregation that would have a religious school. Just 10 kids came to those first religious school classes, and the group used a pulpit and brass candelabra that were donated by the local churches for Shabbat services.

Over the past 70 years, we have built a vibrant, strong community, welcoming people with diverse backgrounds. We have shared many joyous events and mourned sad times together, too. Many of you have shared with me **your** stories of what this community has meant to you over the years, and it is so moving to hear them.

Why **do** we tell stories? We tell stories to pass on traditions and inspire one another. We tell stories to communicate our core values. And most of all, we tell stories to connect with one another.

So, I'd like to tell you a bit of **my** story. My father was born a Reform Jew in Frankfurt, Germany in 1928 and escaped the Nazis in 1936 at the age of 8. How blessed **I** am that he is here with us for services today and how thrilled **he** must be that our family has continued the

traditions and customs (and cooking) that has been a part of our family for many generations. Community Synagogue has been a place where my sister, Carol and I, and our husbands, have raised our children to give them the same foundation that our parents gave us. It has been very special for our children to grow up with their first cousins here at CSR. As I am **now** an empty nester (for exactly one week), I reflect on how CSR has helped us give our children strong Jewish roots. I think back to my son Jacob, who bonded with Rabbi Gropper over a book about Abraham Joshua Heshel as he prepared for his bar mitzvah, and how Noah created beautiful music on the bima with Cantor Cooperman and chanted Torah for the high holidays for so many years. And we can't forget Rabbi Frankel's efforts to keep both of our children involved throughout high school which has helped to put them on a trajectory to continue being engaged in college – I think joining a Jewish fraternity counts, doesn't it? For our family, community synagogue has been a safe place where we have nurtured relationships with people who share similar values with us and have grown Jewishly.

As you hear what's going on at the synagogue right now, remember that the mission of our congregation is a theme that runs throughout our story and provides the foundation for all of our spiritual and social activities and programs. It's a mission that is guided by and encourages the Jewish practices of Worship, Kindness, Life-long Learning, Repairing the World, Love of Israel and, of course, Community.

For our **youngest** members, our schools offer meaningful and joyous experiences for our students. Under the **dynamic** leadership of Dale Oberlander, our early childhood center continues to grow and provide state of the art, hands- on learning opportunities. Our religious school is led by the innovative and powerful team of Rabbi Frankel and Amy Rosenbaum, who have spent the past year re-evaluating and restructuring the school's program. Both schools

focus on developing social and emotional skills including the Jewish values of kindness, empathy and community. Our teachers know that building positive relationships and developing positive Jewish values in our learners is **as** important as imparting Jewish content.

Yael Farber, our young and **vibrant** director of youth engagement and informal learning, has expanded our teen program. Yael spends her summers at our reform movement's Eisner Camp gathering ideas that she can bring back to help our teens grow, nurture, and build their leadership skills. Last year she took 11th and 12th grade students on a Civil Rights Journey to Georgia and Alabama and 10th graders to the Religious Action Center in Washington DC where they learned about and advocated for issues such as gun violence prevention and reproductive rights.

Additionally, one of the **gems** of our community is our programming for empty nesters and seniors. Empty nesters meet in the evening and weekends and SAJE, meets twice a week during the day and offers a wide variety of programs. All are welcome to participate and congregants of all ages are invited to present programs to the group. These engaging activities offer congregants a social setting for learning and connection.

Our tzedek council is our umbrella organization that coordinates all of CSR's social action initiatives. It's an important and meaningful way to get involved and help each other within our synagogue and our surrounding community. On your way out today, you will receive a bookmark with various social action programs that we currently have. The bookmark has contact information if you are interested in getting involved with any of these programs.

All of these things happen around the main work of our synagogue—a safe place to worship and find opportunities for spiritual growth and transformation. We are blessed with incredible clergy in Rabbi Gropper, Rabbi Frankel and Cantor Cooperman who lead our spiritual

worship with beautiful words, ceremonies, and music that teach us to live our lives guided by Jewish values. They offer a diverse selection of programs for learning – I **encourage** you to look at what is available and find something that interests you – you won't be disappointed.

Additionally, so many people have shared how the clergy have provided support during lifecycle events, including how meaningful their b'nei mitzvah services were or how the clergy really comforted them during an illness or loss.

We have many dedicated people who volunteer their skills to make the synagogue what it is today. I am so fortunate to work with a fabulous group of **talented** and committed board members and our **phenomenal** executive director, Glynis Conyer, who are all motivated to meet the needs of our congregants and find ways to help people engage with the life of our community, while being mindful of our synagogue's mission and vision. **This** year, we have modified our dues assistance program to make the process simpler and more dignified and more in line with the Jewish value of Kavod, or respect. In this vein, as other congregations have done, we are looking seriously at ways to restructure our dues model. We also have these new fashionable nametags that we created this year to help connect our community and foster relationships.

The story of our synagogue is far from over. With the opening of our newly renovated sanctuary, social hall, and entry, Community Synagogue is beginning a new chapter in its story.

But, the subsequent chapters of our story is in our hands..... Synagogues as we have come to know them over the past 70 years are facing challenges – how do we remain **relevant** in the 21st century? How do we reach Jewish members of the community who have chosen not to affiliate with a synagogue? These are questions we are trying to answer as we go forward.

Many here today **do** understand the value of being a member of a synagogue community, especially one like ours with everything it has to offer. Some of you even have 3 generations of your family affiliated with this synagogue. How incredible is that??

Our story certainly does not have an ending..... but our level of excellence can only continue with your generosity. We rely on philanthropy from our members to support the growth and forward-thinking activities that we are able to maintain. We **know** that you have many choices when it comes to synagogue affiliation in this area. We appreciate and are so thrilled that you make CSR your spiritual home for these high holidays and beyond. **Your** generous contributions will help keep this story going strong for many more years!

What a **great** time to be president of our community and a special thank you to my amazing husband, Andy, for supporting me in taking on this role. We are celebrating 70 years and will be back in our spectacular spiritual home in just 2 weeks!! I know you will be delighted and **absolutely** awe struck when you see the outcome that our dedicated team of professionals and volunteers (led by the brilliant team of Karen Cherney Saltz and Susan Rudolph) worked tirelessly to create. Among other new additions, our space will include a café area which will be a safe, comfortable place to gather. I hope to see you on September 30th, when we march back from Rye Presbyterian Church to Community Synagogue. We will be joined by Rabbi Rick Jacobs, the **president** of our reform movement, local civic leaders and many members of the church, who so warmly welcomed us a year ago. We will be singing and dancing with the Torah and celebrating our new space. And on November 16, 17 and 18, we will have our grand reopening weekend with a professional storyteller, a celebratory gala and our interfaith Thanksgiving service. That weekend we will honor our **incredible** past presidents who have led us to this day. It will be an amazing fall at Community Synagogue.

We have so much to look forward to. We need to celebrate our past, embrace our present and prepare for our future. We look forward to the chapters we'll be adding to the synagogue's story.

And one more thing – as I mentioned in the beginning, stories connect us. And as we begin this new era of our synagogue story, I'd like to bolster the connections **between** congregants. In the coming days, you will be receiving an email from me asking you to share a meaningful story about your connection with CSR – with a few prompts to help you get started. We would love to hear from you and share your story with our community.

I wish all of you a wonderful new year, filled with happiness, love and prosperity. Shana Tova