

## **President's Report to May 22, 2013 Congregation Meeting**

Welcome everyone. Thank you for attending tonight's Congregational Meeting.

I'd like to begin by extending my congratulations to Richard and Marsha Lowry on receiving the Vassar Temple Founders Service Award. Richard and Marsha have been active in the Temple for many years. You heard about their accomplishments, but I want to note my particular thanks to Marsha, who recently helped me manage the kitchen personnel shortly after I became president. Marsha has also assisted in the coordination of recent Galas. Richard, of course, has been our webmaster for a number of years, for which I've been very grateful. Once again, congratulations Richard & Marsha.

This has been a very busy year with a number of significant accomplishments. It's very clear that Vassar Temple is alive and well, playing a visible role in the community, and working toward the future. We are fortunate to have many Temple members who lead important committees that are responsible for many of the ritual, educational, publicity and social activities that occur at the Temple. We are also fortunate to have professionals among our ranks, including Rabbi Golomb and Dr. Joel Hoffman who, in addition to their normal duties, have each brought new and innovative ideas on Jewish education at the Temple.

Our Temple Board of Trustees does a good job representing the needs and opinions of Temple members in many different activities or discussions. Whether we're focusing on a specific Temple function, the Religious School, membership concerns or budgetary matters, the Board works well together, offering and debating opinions without the fear of their views being held against them.

But running the Temple is not all about the Board conducting Temple business. Many of our committees contribute to help make our Temple an enjoyable place to meet friends and enjoy ourselves.

The Ritual committee, under the leadership of Ron Rosen, has had a very busy schedule, coordinating the High Holy Days and working with Rabbi Golomb to pilot a trial version of the High Holy Day Machzor. The committee also coordinated five lay-led summer services and sponsored Saturday morning services where very engaging speakers were featured,

including "Life on the Stage" with Molly Katz and Kristy Grimes, a session on "Aging" with Linda Tafapolsky, and our "Elected Leaders" discussion with Mary Solomon, Lee Klein, Didi Barrett, and Joel Miller. The committee also sponsored Shabbat evening programs, including the "Growing up Jewish in ..." series. Let's not forget Shabbat Noach, featuring Sandra's cat on the Bimah, and pet therapy dogs at the Oneg.

The Ritual committee also oversees the Torah Rolling activities, organized by Jeff Brenner, focused on re-rolling the Torah scrolls to ensure that they remain usable for a long period of time. It is particularly impressive to see our Religious School students take an interest in viewing the Torah manuscripts and participate in the rolling process.

Sandra Mamis and her crew fostered a huge sense of community with the very popular Break-Fast at the conclusion of Yom Kippur, serving around 70 people; and the wonderful second annual Vassar Temple first night Passover Seder, attracting around 80 people!

A relatively new feature of Vassar Temple's support of lifecycle events has been the Nachamu committee, which completed development of materials to assist members facing end-of-life issues. The committee produced a Bereavement guide, brochures and a CD with spiritual music, and is very willing to assist personally in matters related to bereavement.

The Men's Club, under the co-leadership of Dave Wolf and Jeff Brenner, has been busy with small projects focused on improving the look of the Temple, both inside and outside. Classroom and outdoor enhancements and repairs, and construction such as the new sidewalk in the back of the building have been great improvements. Particular thanks go to Alan Kafowitz and David Lampell, who handle or led many of the repair tasks around the Temple. Most recently, the Men's Club and Sisterhood jointly raised funds to sponsor a bench on the Dutchess Rail Trail in memory of Seth Erlebacher, ז"ל, which will be placed in the new section currently being built. This is a wonderful way to honor Seth's memory, in a way that will be passed, and used, by many walkers and bicyclists using the Dutchess Rail Trail.

Sisterhood also takes an active role in the temple, hosting dinners and organizing the twice-annual rummage sale, raising funds for the Temple. The Sisterhood helped defer the cost of Jewish Summer Camp for a student, and raised money at their annual Donor Dinner, where Marian Schwartz was presented the Evelyn Kahn Award. A very important part of the

Sisterhood is the College Committee, which maintained contact with our many undergrad and graduate students, sending them holiday treats. The Men's Club and Sisterhood will again jointly host our June Picnic Shabbat dinner.

Our Religious School continues to improve, with an exciting Wednesday evening program for teens, as well as our Sunday program for the younger students of Temple families. Sunday mornings include the beginnings of a music program and expanded age-appropriate worship. 4<sup>th</sup> grade has been learning about Israel, 5<sup>th</sup> grade has been discovering messages of the prophets, connecting them to liturgy and modern times, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade has explored Jewish identity and ethics in the context of popular culture. The Religious School Committee also initiated the idea of having our students and their parents co-captain at the Lunchbox. The Lunchbox director was grateful to have the help and thought it was important that the kids assist in serving meals to the homeless.

In the area of Social Action, a very successful project initiated by Nancy Samson, involved raising funds and purchasing supplies to assist the parents of babies of Breezy Point, who were afflicted by both fire and water during Hurricane Sandy. \$950 was raised in phase 1 (Dec.) and, amazingly, even more in phase 2 (March), \$1236. Another new project, "Turkey Trot," initiated by Sandra Mamis, resulted in the donation of 17 Thanksgiving turkeys to families in need in the local community. In addition, the Talking Books effort has progressed, having produced a recording of its 77<sup>th</sup> book!

A mainstay of our Temple is our publicity committee, which has been undergoing changes with Doi Cohen's and the Lowry's plans to move out of the area. Having had to find people to handle the many publicity tasks that Doi has performed, I can tell you we owe her a great deal of gratitude for all that she's done for Temple publicity. I'd also like to bring particular attention to the work that Bob Ritter has been doing, increasing the Temple's presence on Facebook. By posting Temple events and advertising Vassar Temple in an attempt to reach unaffiliated Jews in the area, we have increased our presence on the web. In fact, if you do a Google search for a synagogue in the Dutchess County area, Vassar Temple's Facebook site comes up before our web site. We have also increased our presence on the web through the use of our blog to write out special activities, Religious School and Youth Group functions, and a regularly updated section by Lou Louis with Torah Study notes. If you haven't seen the Temple's blog, I encourage you to go to the web site and click on the blog link.

I'd also like to draw your attention to the work that Marianne Abrams has been accomplishing. You may have noticed a new Temple logo in the form of a "dancing star" with a Torah scene from one of the Temple's stained glass windows. It is used in Temple e-mails, the Friday Night handout and is also featured in the new Bulletin masthead. The logo will also be used on the new web site! We've also been fortunate to have Marianne's graphic and document layout expertise in the production of our Gala books.

Our new Temple web site has been under construction for a few months, led by Joel Kelson. The new site is being built based on support from the URJ, and will be hosted by the URJ as well. In a short while, we will demonstrate the web site so that you can see the layout of the information.

Finally, let's not forget the After Hours social engagement, and the many Shabbat dinners hosted at the Temple. They provide us opportunities to enjoy ourselves by mingling with other members. Many thanks to Bob Ritter, Perla Kaufman, and others who made the After Hours evening such a great success! Also, thanks to Wendy Marcus and Laura Brundage for hosting the Family Shabbat dinners.

Looking forward ... the Board has made growing Temple membership one of its highest goals. Over the coming months, we will be marketing many of the programs that we offer at Vassar Temple, with a special focus on our Religious School, intended to attract families with children, looking to affiliate with a Temple. New this coming year, Vassar Temple is engaging in a Temple-run Hebrew program for students in grades 5, 6 and 7, under the leadership of Joel Hoffman. This is a very important program, looking into the future, as we aim to improve Hebrew education for our students. We also will continue to focus on bringing fun events to the Temple, as well

So thank you all for being a part of this journey. As always, I welcome your thoughts, your ideas and most of all, your interest in helping to continue to make Vassar Temple the vibrant place that it is throughout the coming year.

Bob Abrams, President