

The Temple Emanuel Story
From the Annual Meeting Speech
Rabbi Fred Guttman
May 23, 2016

First of all, the membership of Temple Emanuel currently stands at 564 families, with an additional 35 affiliate families for a total of 599 families. In the past year, we were blessed with 6 new babies, celebrated 6 marriages and 16 B'nai Mitzvah, and welcomed 28 new families. We mourned 15 deaths, and it is now our loving responsibility to reach out to their families with love and compassion.

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Temple Emanuel is viewed as being one of the most outstanding congregations in Reform Judaism for its size. A recent article by the President of the Union for Reform Judaism, Rabbi Rick Jacobs, cited our successful teen program. This fall, under our leadership, there will be a regional Shabbaton hosted at Temple Emanuel. This will be the second time in four years this has been done, and like last time, it will occur the Sabbath after the presidential election. This is very important for us as Reform Jews because it will bring people together on a regional level for the exchange of ideas, learning, worship, camaraderie and movement building.

I wish, however, to take this opportunity to speak about three specific aspects of Temple Emanuel. They are our social justice activities, our role in the greater Greensboro Jewish community and how we are a large family.

Among those things of which I am most proud of is our social justice activities and advocacy during the past year. Temple Emanuel rabbis and congregants participated in the NAACP sponsor America's Journey for Justice this past summer. Along with other members of our congregation, we marched with a sacred Torah Scroll as part of a march from Selma to Washington DC for voting rights for all. A film of this event was shown at the Union for Reform Judaism Biennial convention this past year.

It had been seven years since the faith institutions in Northwest Greensboro had held an interfaith service to raise money for the poor during the Thanksgiving season. Under the leadership of Temple Emanuel's Rabbis, such a service was held here on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving last year. Significant funds and food were raised for hunger relief. We are already working with First Baptist Church on this year's service which will benefit the development fund of the Interactive Resource Center. Here at Temple Emanuel, we believe that given the plight of

the poor in Greensboro, Thanksgiving is a time for action, not merely platitudinous statements about brotherhood and sisterhood.

Once again, this year we held an amazing MLK Service. Our speaker was Reverend William Barber, the President of the North Carolina NAACP and one of the most important civil rights leaders in our country.

I am extraordinarily proud that our congregation was one of the first congregations, Jewish or otherwise, to issue a formal statement against the pernicious HB 2 Bill. The statement, which was well crafted by many in our leadership, was approved by our Board of Trustees. Because of this statement, your rabbis were responsible for organizing a communitywide anti-HB 2 rally. Purposely, the rally took place at a downtown church venue, College Park Baptist Church. More than 1000 people attended this rally.

We continue our pro-Israel advocacy through our work with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee or, as it is known, AIPAC. Again this year, our high school leadership attended the AIPAC High School Summit. Rabbi Koren and I attended the AIPAC Policy Conference along with Victoria and Ron Milstein, and Victoria and I just last week attended the AIPAC National Council Meeting. In Washington, we met with Senator Burr, a representative for Senator Tillis, and Representatives Mark Walker and Alma Adams. We expressed to them our concerns for Iranian behavior and its compliance with the recently concluded nuclear deal. We lobbied them for support for a renewal of the ten-year Memorandum of Understanding between the US and Israel which is designed to maintain Israel's qualitative military edge in that very dangerous part of the world. We also expressed to them our concern that peace can only be obtained by means of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians and may not be achieved though attempted imposed settlements from the United Nations or anyone else. By the way, did you know that the French are planning a Middle East Peace Conference next month? The only problem with this conference is that they have purposely decided not to invite the Israelis or the Palestinians! Finally, we expressed our concern about the attempts at Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions, or BDS, directed at Israel by non-American companies and on university campuses. In short, it is Temple Emanuel, its congregants and its rabbis who are the voices for a strong US Israel relationship in Greensboro.

Tomorrow night, Temple Emanuel will host an incredible legal briefing. Our guest speaker will be Professor Michael Gerhardt, UNC Samuel Ashe Distinguished Professor of Constitutional Law. Our congregant, David Levine, a law professor at Elon University, will be the

moderator. They will lead a briefing about the Supreme Court and other legal aspects, including, I have been told, HB 2.

The bottom line is that Temple Emanuel, led by its rabbis and congregants, continues to be an incredible force for social justice in our community.

My second thought tonight concern our role in the greater Greensboro Jewish community. In terms of Jewish education, we are educating some 200 of Greensboro's Jewish children. This is double the amount of any other Jewish institution in Greensboro as far as local children is concerned.

Our Hevra Torah on Saturday morning is regularly attended by 40 to 50 people.

In 2015, 23 young people went on the March of the Living, 20 of whom were from the Temple.

Rabbi Koren will tell you about how Temple Emanuel, this past year, took trips to Washington DC and to the mountains with our middle and high schoolers.

Just eight days ago, some 500 people participated in Greensboro's annual Mitzvah Day. Originally started by our congregation, this annual event has become a day of caring and sharing for the Jewish community at large. The interesting thing is that it was Temple Emanuel's members who organized Mitzvah Day. Eleven out of the twelve members on the committee were from Temple Emanuel with Brenda Henley representing the Temple, and our congregant David Frazier representing Jewish Family Services. The bottom line is that, without the staff and the members of Temple Emanuel on the Mitzvah Day Committee, there would have been no Mitzvah Day this year!

It is Temple Emanuel which maintains and manages the holy Greensboro Hebrew Cemetery. Thanks to our dedicated Cemetery Committee, we have made significant improvements to the cemetery in the past few years. I truly believe that our cemetery is one of the most beautiful that I have ever seen. It is extraordinarily well maintained, and our Perpetual Care Endowment Fund continues to grow as we continue to implement our long-term plan for development.

Again, the point is that Temple Emanuel's leadership in so many areas of our Jewish communal life is critical. We are a very strong institution in terms of our programs, and we should be very proud.

But now I want to shift gears and give you an idea about another aspect of our life at Temple. I want to share with you what the past few days have been like for me and for our congregation.

This past Friday, we buried a young baby who died in childbirth. After the burial of the baby, we buried the remains of Eugenia Frank, the beloved wife of our past president, Barry Frank.

From there, I went to women's hospital to visit Karen and Eric Kaplan who on Friday were blessed by the birth of their new son.

From there, I returned to Temple Emanuel for a Bar Mitzvah rehearsal followed by a wedding rehearsal. This was followed by services at 6:30 during which the Bar Mitzvah boy, Noah Regal, helped lead. At the service, we also blessed the young couple who was to be married.

On Saturday morning, I taught Hevra Torah and then preached at the wonderful Bar Mitzvah of Noah Regal.

On Saturday evening, I stopped by Temple where a group of young families were holding a wine and cheese reception and Havdalah. From there I went to visit Roy Bargebur who had just recently returned from the hospital and who, thank God, is returning to health. From Roy's house, I went to the Regal Bar Mitzvah party.

On Sunday morning, because the mother of the baby, Vanessa Oldham, is a beloved teacher in our religious school, we held a briefing and prayer service with her students. From there, I went to the Greensboro Jewish Federation Allocation Committee to urge them to sufficiently fund trips to Israel and the Jewish camping, for not only our children, but for all of the Jewish children of Greensboro. I also urged them to do more designated giving abroad in order to insure that our giving reflects our values as a pluralistic and egalitarian Jewish community.

This was followed by a wonderful closing assembly in our religious school which was attended by more than 250 students and parents.

Later that afternoon, I officiated at the wedding of Scott McInnis and Mariya Tabin. Both of these young people had grown up in Temple Emanuel. Mariya was born in Siberia, Scott in Reidsville. Love has an amazing power to bring people together from the most unlikely of places! By the way, both of them had attended the March of the Living.

What a few days, but these days were all about Temple Emanuel as an extended family!

I am also really excited by the fact that this June more than ten of our families will be attending a wonderful Shabbaton in the mountains with services, games, good food and hiking.

Given the mobility of modern society, I am absolutely convinced the Temple Emanuel has become, for many, an extended family. It is Temple Emanuel which celebrates as a family the birth of a child, the Bnei Mitzvah of our early teens, the graduation of our High School seniors though our 12th grade Confirmation and the joyous weddings of our members. It is Temple Emanuel that provides support to families when one of our members is sick. It is Temple Emanuel's rabbis who are there in the hospitals with prayer to visit the sick. It is this Temple and its rabbis who are pillars of strength for our members in times of sorrow. It is Temple Emanuel which educates more Jewish children than any other institution in Greensboro and organizes educational trips for young people. It is Temple Emanuel which is doing so much to insure a strong Jewish future for our community in Greensboro and elsewhere. Our young people are often leaders on their campuses in Hillel. It is Temple Emanuel which brings our young families together for wine and cheese and Havdalah and for Sabbath experiences in the mountains.

Temple Emanuel is simply, *mishpocha*, family.

Because we are family, we need to speak honestly with each other about our future. Friends, we are facing some of the most significant financial challenges that we have faced in the past twenty years since I have been here. We are now facing challenges not because we spent too much money; our expenditures remain stable. We are facing challenges because of the death and illness of some of our older members who have been significant financial supporters of our congregation.

Most of us are quite charitable as families. Many give to Jewish and non-Jewish charities. However, because what we are speaking about here is our family, I would maintain that when it comes to charitable giving, the first check that we need to write should be to Temple Emanuel. Especially, given the challenges of which you will hear, we should not take Temple Emanuel, all that it does and all it means for us and our community, for granted. Some of the times, I have felt that there is a feeling in the community that, no matter what, Temple Emanuel will be fine. This is simply not the case. Our challenge is very real, and we will all need to find an appropriate way to respond. I know we can do it! Frankly, too much is at stake for us not to rise to the occasion.

We have had a great year, and next year promises to be a great one as well.

We will continue to be a congregation that reaches out to the community and seeks to make a difference. We will continue to be a vibrant force for pro-Israel advocacy in our community and nation. We will continue to be a place of education and spirituality, a bastion of compassion, a beacon of hope and a source of meaning for our members and for our community.

All of this is happening and will continue to happen because of people like you, people who support this holy endeavor and participate in its activities.

I am so very proud of Temple Emanuel. It is an honor, a privilege and a blessing to be the rabbi in such a vibrant congregation. Thank you so much for this wonderful opportunity to serve you, the Jewish people and God.

May God bless you all with a safe and restful summer, and may God bless this wonderful and holy congregation with continued vibrancy and life!

Hazak ve amatz. May we go from strength to strength!