

Yom Kippur Speech

Shana Tovah! These are my first High Holidays as President, and it is a privilege for me to represent the congregation's Officers and Board of Trustees this morning. In the year just ended, there have been substantial changes to North Shore Congregation Israel. If you have taken the opportunity to wander around the building, or just looked out the window to the north, you have noticed that we have added several new facilities. The Tross Family Education Center, Goodman Terrace and Amphitheatre, Rosenthal Family Gathering Place, and Beverly Gross School Administrative Offices are now complete because of the generosity and dedication of so many of you, and your commitment to North Shore Congregation Israel. As a result, our members of all ages, as well as the generations to come, will have beautiful new places in which to worship, gather and study. It is heartwarming for me to realize that our members feel so strongly about this building and its programs, and the place they hold in all of our lives. We are thrilled that our Building for the Generations Campaign, which will cover the construction costs of these facilities, is close to a successful conclusion. We also received a Homeland Security Grant, which will allow us to add other security improvements into these new areas. However, we still need to raise funds for the Campaign's Endowment, and we want to be sure that everyone has had the opportunity to participate. You may have already heard about our brick and bench campaign; these bricks will be installed in the Hirsch Family Rose Garden directly in front of the center driveway. In the coming weeks you will be hearing more about the brick and bench campaign, and we hope that every member will take part in this project.

Not all of the changes in the last year have been so welcome. The world-wide economic downturn, which had just begun to manifest itself last year at this time, has had an enormous impact. The consequences for many of you, both in terms of financial loss and anxiety, have been severe. We have a large number of members who are unable to pay full dues or religious school tuition. We have responded by providing dues assistance to those in need, and we are not turning away a single member based on inability to pay. We feel a sense of responsibility to provide support to each of you, as part of our congregational family; our clergy and staff have reached out to help during this time, and continue to do so. Because of the impact of the economic situation, we made the decision to increase dues for the year by only 3%.

North Shore Congregation Israel has also been affected by the recession. As I mentioned, dues and tuition revenue have declined significantly in the last year. And, as one would expect in times like these, our endowment income is also substantially reduced. In addition, during the past year, we have had to make significant repairs to the building roof and to our magnificent organ. North Shore Congregation Israel ended the fiscal year June 30, 2008 with a deficit, and during the year ended June 30, 2009, that deficit widened by almost \$174,000, with our balance sheet continuing to deteriorate this year. The modest increase in dues does not begin to cover this gap. As a result, we have been forced to decrease our budget for this current fiscal year by more than half a million dollars. In the face of these financial issues, we have taken advantage of the opportunity to institute some creative changes; we have revamped certain aspects of the operation of the religious school, and we believe the result is an improved educational program for our children. You are also seeing some cost-cutting adjustments in other areas. Our bulletin now goes out to a significant portion of our members via email, and we are incurring very few

other postage costs. Also, you may have noticed that the ticket services which have traditionally been in the tent out front have been moved to the offices. The costs of maintaining this building and its day-to-day operating expenses have risen, despite our efforts to keep them at the lowest level possible, which included the renegotiation of agreements with each of our contractors.

On the positive side, the financial crises have brought out the best in people. Every one of our staff members has doubled their efforts, without any financial incentives. There has also been an outpouring of volunteer support which we have seen from all of you, and we thank you for your offers and your time. Everyone is committed to continuing our programming, including our religious school and our preschool, which are amongst our biggest membership draws, at the level you have come to expect.

Even with the present-year budget reduction, the challenges will continue. As you know, in 2007 we began a sustaining membership program, with the intent that it would provide a more stable base for our annual financial needs. The hope was that sustaining members who are able to give more than their regular dues will help to ensure that we continue the wide array of programming that we are all accustomed to—educational, social and religious—without the need to conduct a separate fundraising event during the year. Now, in the third year of our sustaining dues program, it is not clear whether we will be able to keep that promise of no additional fundraiser. Just as dues and tuition are coming in slowly, so are our anticipated sustaining dues payments. And, despite the operational efficiencies we have been able to achieve, we still need to

maintain our physical plant, including the need to begin major repairs on our parking lot, which I'm sure many of you have noticed over these Holidays.

In this light, we are asking that those of you who are able to pay full dues please continue to do so, and we also request that those who can please support our sustaining dues program at this time. I am so proud to be part of the leadership of this institution whose cornerstone is to be here for our members; and to continue the work of my predecessor, Rob Olian. I hope that each of you will choose to make North Shore Congregation Israel a priority in your lives, and join those who have already given. Please make this an "Amen" moment, and show your hope, faith and trust in North Shore Congregation Israel, as you choose to act—know that you can make a difference for our community.

On behalf of my husband Bruce Menkes, and our daughters Lena and Margo, I wish each of you a peaceful, healthy and sweet new year!