



March 14, 2021

Dear Friends,

Just over one year ago, we knew a few things about Covid-19. We knew it was contagious; we knew it was dangerous. But we also knew that here in America we have the best doctors and nurses in the world, the best hospitals, the best scientists. In the end, it is these things and these people who will save us—but how little did we know how much was going to change. Schools were closed; parents became teachers; homes became offices; neighbors became disease vectors. We began wearing masks, ordering groceries, letting our hair grow, having our younger adult children run our errands, and listening religiously to Covid Task Force Reports.

At Temple Shir Shalom, we had our last face-to-face service on March 13, 2020. We became a Zoom congregation, all our services, all our meetings, all our connections being made on an electronic checkerboard of tiny rectangles. As time went on, we became proficient, even innovative. Our service attendance increased; we welcomed new friends and old from across the nation and across the globe. It was not what we wanted, but it was what we had to do to keep our members connected and supported. We depended on our Jewish values, Pikuach Nefesh (safeguarding life) and Kol Yisrael Aravim Zeh Bazeh (we are responsible for one another) to help us make hard decisions. And we will continue to make these hard decisions until it is safe to return to the brick and mortar home on NW 8th Avenue.

It is hard to fathom how many have died, 500,000 and counting: young and old, healthy and unhealthy, sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, grandparents, best friends. May the memories of all those we have lost come to be a blessing.

It was the great Rabbi Hillel who wrote, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?” We must take care of ourselves, but we also must be concerned for our community, and if not now, when? This is not the time for complacency. We will return to what we remember, maybe with a different look, but only when it is safe to do so. For now we continue to wear our masks, stay out of crowds, practice social distancing, get our vaccinations, and be patient.

Temple Shir Shalom will continue to be the spiritual home for Reform Jews in Gainesville and the surrounding areas. Our true strength lies in our hearts, and no pandemic can take that strength away. We will continue to do what we do best: rise up together in community and move forward from strength to strength. Wishing you all well.

Marcia Storch
President, Temple Shir Shalom