

Annual Meeting Report

Rabbi Jasper · Temple Ohev Sholom

It still feels a little unreal that I am already here, trying to sum up a full year at Temple Ohev Sholom. It feels like yesterday that I was nervously picking out an outfit for the open house interview, convinced that somehow the right blazer would determine my entire future. What I did not know then, what I could not have known, was that there was nothing to be nervous about at all.

From our very first meeting, you welcomed Yonah and me with open arms. You shared your favorite restaurants, offered thoughtful feedback, and surrounded us with an abundance of support as I learned what it meant, not just to be a Senior Rabbi, but to be *your* Senior Rabbi. That distinction matters more than I can say.

Getting to Know One Another

This year has been, at its heart, a year of meeting. It began with the wonderful meet-and-greets that so many of you kindly hosted or attended. From there, the coffee kept flowing through one-on-one conversations where I had the privilege of hearing your stories, your memories, and your hopes for this community. We celebrated the holidays together. We navigated a successful school year together. And we leaned on one another through moments of grief. That is what it means to be a kehillah kedosha, a sacred community.

A Temple Full of Life

You may have noticed that every time we gather, whether for Shabbat services or a community program, one of the most common things people say is: "Rabbi, I don't know anyone here!"

What a blessing that is.

In the past year, Temple Ohev Sholom has welcomed eleven new families, including ten new children. Stop by on a Sunday morning and the buildings are absolutely buzzing: Religious School is in session, Adult Ed classes are convening, Book Club is gathering, Brotherhood and Sisterhood boards are meeting, Mah Jongg classes are underway, the new Peace and Love Garden is being tended, and parents are connecting in the hallways. This is a shul that is thriving.

And that energy is not an accident. With the help of our Executive Director, Reyna, and the Board of Trustees, we have worked intentionally to create multiple pathways for involvement, whether you are more ritually inclined or culturally connected. The goal has been simple: make room for everyone at this congregation. And it is paying off. So many of you have shared that you feel a renewed energy surrounding Temple Ohev Sholom, and I feel it too, every single time I walk through our doors.

Renewing Our Spaces

Some of that energy comes from the way our physical spaces are being transformed. Our buildings are beginning to feel the way they should: warm, alive, and full of purpose.

We now have a Moadon (moh-ah-DOHN), a lounge just outside my office and a place to gather, to schmooze, and to breathe. Downstairs, the art room behind the chapel has been moved upstairs into the school, and that space has been beautifully renovated into the Peace and Love Care Center, a food pantry and clothing closet that will serve as a satellite location for Jewish Family Services (JFS). The lobby has received a lovely makeover, and this summer the school will be treated to a fresh coat of colorful paint. These are not just renovations. They are a statement about who we are and who we aspire to be. Our community is not a thing of the past; we are looking toward our future.

Looking Toward Our Future, Together

Temple Ohev Sholom has always been a space for our people, sustained by our people. This year, I have gotten to experience this firsthand. I have witnessed a remarkable willingness to volunteer, to step into leadership, and to work together to build something lasting.

And how fitting this all is, as we stand on the threshold of our 175th anniversary. Together, we are building the congregation we want for our children and their children. With the help of a dedicated and diverse committee, we have launched our Capital Campaign, which will help secure our financial foundation. The upcoming anniversary celebrations will honor our history while walking us boldly into the future, and it will all culminate in what promises to be a musical and joyful gala next fall! The celebration begins this Erev Rosh Hashanah, so stay tuned for all the details.

Serving the Greater Community

While we grow in strength and revitalized energy, we are also navigating a significant moment in our broader Jewish community, with the loss of the Jewish Federation of Greater Harrisburg. Many of you have come to me with questions about what comes next and what our role might be. My answer has been, and continues to be, that we open our doors wider.

We are already in conversation about supporting senior programming, working in collaboration with JFS, and the various other Jewish auxiliaries. With our abundance of space, we are well-positioned to host more community-wide events, just like our recent Leil Shavuot, which welcomed nearly one hundred people from across the community through our doors. That night was just a glimpse of what we can do together, and what a joyful night of learning, laughter, and gathering it was!

Temple Ohev Sholom already does a beautiful job of opening our doors. This past year, the Market Street Concert Series used our Sanctuary, the LGBT Center rents Sisterhood Hall for their Aging with Pride monthly luncheons, Leadership Harrisburg used our space for one of their workshops, Camp Ramah hosted a Shabbaton here, and the Transition Committee for the Federation held their listening sessions in the Lehrman Chapel just last month. These are only a few of the ways Temple Ohev Sholom has been serving our greater community this year.

Through my own work this year, I have also had the privilege of building relationships throughout Harrisburg. I collaborated with the Interfaith Council on several meaningful projects: the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, an interfaith panel at the Women's Auxiliary Meeting at Hadee Mosque, the Freedom Seder, the Harmony Walk, and the Harrisburg Peace Pilgrimage. I led a Coffee and Conversation Adult Ed class at Little Amps Coffee, a wonderful program created by Gila Ogle of Silver Academy. I threw the first pitch at our Senators' Shabbat last summer and almost made it to home plate! In each of these moments, our community was

invited along, as we continue to build our name in Harrisburg as a collaborative and caring partner.

A Word of Invitation

All of this brings me to my ask, and it is a heartfelt one.

Show up. Not only for the greater community moments, but for the Temple Ohev Sholom ones too. This building is just a building without you in it. Each of you transforms this space into a congregation, and dare I say it, a *mishpacha*, a family.

I have loved every moment of learning about this Temple and about each of you this past year. The vibrancy here is real. The dedication to our present and our future is real. With the help of our incredible committees, we have a calendar ahead of us that is full of meaning and joy.

Thank you for trusting me to be your Rabbi and thank you for becoming my home.

B'Shalom U'v'ahava, with love and peace,

Rabbi Jasper