

A Message from the Rabbi, Summer 2018

Rabbi Sokol's Annual Report (Highlights)

Sunday, May 6th, 2018

Report (Highlights):

We have had another fantastic year filled with tradition and innovation, strength, compassion and community, and I cannot believe we have reached this plateau. The atmosphere at Temple Sinai has been very special and peaceful and we have accomplished so much together.

We orchestrated a number of special Shabbatot, including Shabbat Malachim, where we each randomly picked a Jewish angel card that we got to ponder over in relation to our lives. We learned new Hebrew words and Jewish concepts through this creative service I introduced.

I also compiled sources and put together a new Service of Healing. It was a labor of love that took several months. I received very touching feedback from you all on those new forms of worship.

I arranged for guest speakers to make presentations following services. They were educational and engaging and enhanced our Shabbat and holiday celebrations.

One of them, which even drew fans from far away to our synagogue, was Grammy Nominated Artist Ben Sidran, who talked about Jews, Music, and the American Dream.

We enjoyed preparing and partaking in Shabbat luncheons whose main courses were Sephardic dishes from my family. Those classes and luncheons brought us together and allowed us to socialize around delicious meals.

My family and I celebrated Mazal's Bat Mitzvah and were blessed with your presence and well wishes. We now look forward to Samuel Chenkin's Confirmation. May we have many more joyous events!

As in previous years, we welcomed Confirmation classes from different churches on various occasions. I talked to them about Judaism, our sanctuary and our services, and we exchanged meaningful thoughts

about our respective faiths, discussing the things we have in common and what makes us who we are.

On a weekly basis, congregants and students from outside the Jewish community have been participating in my Hebrew class, which helps them read and gain a better understanding of Hebrew prayers and scriptures.

We have nearly come to the end of our first workbook and will start studying from the second book soon. Learning a language is not easy, but my students are very committed and are excelling.

Along the lines of interfaith dialogue but also for Jews who may want to refresh their Jewish knowledge or people who might want to convert to Judaism, I plan to develop an Introduction to Judaism course, which will cover different aspects of our faith. The class will be free for members of our Temple and there will be a tuition fee for non-members who choose not to join our congregation.

The Religious School curriculum this past year was more experiential. The children enjoyed participating in unique projects with artists, from crafting their own glass Seder plates to writing their own songs. They also took part in a mitzvah project to help with the upkeep of the Jewish cemetery in Hampton.

We were privileged to attend a special program led by Richard Michelson, on his dear friend actor extraordinaire Leonard Nimoy, which benefitted both our Religious School and Rodef Sholom's Religious school, as well as our congregation and community at large. His books this year won the National Jewish Book Award, a Gold Medal from the Junior Library Guild and a Sydney Taylor Award.

Grammy Nominated artist Paul Reisler and Cheryl Toth came and helped congregants and Religious School students write songs that premiered our amazing Chanukah concert. Everyone did an outstanding job at writing the songs and singing them, and had a phenomenal time!

Another wonderful event, which we owe to our Fundraising Committee, was the fundraising brunch featuring the Simcha Klezmerim band and street food of Israel prepared by our very own Gholam Farrokhpour.

I am planning more intergenerational programs for this coming year...One of the things I want to work on with you all is our Biblical Garden restoration project.

Let's all remember the important midrash:

“When God created the first human beings, God led them around the Garden of Eden and said: “Look at my works! See how beautiful they are—how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it.” (Midrash Kohelet Rabbah, 1 on Ecclesiastes 7:13)

Our Biblical Garden, which is part of God's beautiful Creation, has changed quite a bit over the years. We used to have 115 plants and trees. Only about 40 of them are still viable today, and from one year to the next, more species disappear. We have a duty to do our best to save our beloved garden and preserve God's precious nature.

The priority at this point is twofold:

- 1 - Addressing frailties in the garden.
- 2 - Cleaning up the garden by pulling weeds and picking dead branches, sticks and pine cones.
- 3 - Nurturing the plants and trees we have so that they do not die out, by pulling weeds, picking up sticks and dead branches and pine cones and cutting the ivy that is interfering with the growth of the trees and plants.

I was advised that taking care of the garden should be done every two weeks.

We will need to give the garden a lot of attention and tender loving care. We wouldn't want to mistake actual plants for weeds or damage trees in any way, for example.

I have been gathering information and advice from gardening experts, including master gardeners, and we all will further our gardening knowledge and education through special speaker events and workshops.

As my report draws to a close, I want to mention another major highlight of this past year: my being invited to give the invocation at the

beginning of a meeting of the House of Delegates, a tremendous honor for me and Temple Sinai, which we owe to Delegate David Yancey. Everyone at the Capitol was so welcoming and kind. I cherish those unique memories.

Our Temple continues to have a strong presence in the media through coverage of special events our synagogue hosts as well as various articles I submit to the Daily Press, for which I receive wonderful feedback, both from you all and from others in the Hampton Roads community.

I want to thank you all for participating in our programs and services, for your loyalty to our beloved Temple, and for your renewed acts of lovingkindness.

Rabbi Severine Sokol