

**Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation**  
**Annual Congregational Meeting**  
**May 31, 2023**  
**In-person at JRC and Online via Zoom**

The meeting began at 7:08 p.m. Emily Harris, outgoing President, confirmed that attendance satisfied the requirements for a quorum, pursuant to Article VII of the JRC By-Laws.

- I. **Welcome** – Emily Harris. Emily Harris welcomed all and outlined the agenda for the meeting. Rabbi Rachel Weiss, Cantor Howard Friedland, and the JRC Choir welcomed all with song, including Baruch Haba, written by Bob Appelbaum for the dedication of the JRC building 14 years ago.
  
- II. **Financial Report** – David Block. Treasurer David Block reported on the financial state of the congregation. David presented slides that summarize the revenues and expenses of JRC and responded to member questions about the summary report. David reported:
  - Fiscal Year (“FY”) 2023 was mostly a “good news story” but challenges are on the horizon.
  - In FY2023 JRC celebrated the completion of the Pillars of Chai capital campaign and the payoff of the building loan.
  - Financially, “money and membership” are key to JRC’s continued health. Before and during the COVID pandemic, JRC experienced a reduction in membership, dropping from a high of over 500 families in 2014 to fewer than 400 in 2021. Membership is now growing again, and we are above 400 households. While this reduction in membership impacted JRC financially, JRC was able to access two key COVID-era programs: the PPP forgivable loan program, and the Employee Retention tax credit (“ERTC”) program. Both helped us bridge the deficit and add to reserves. These programs have now ended, and there are no new funds available from them.
  - This past year the Board has focused on financial stability and planning, including increasing membership and marketing of JRC. The Board reviewed budget scenarios for the next 5 years and determined that to sustain our budget, JRC needs to add 12 households net per year, which translates to 35-45 new households per year, given normal membership attrition. The Board also created two working teams within the Board: the sustainability and growth team and the engagement and programming team. Both are focused on money and growth but also providing the programming, services and an environment that attracts and sustains members.
  - The leadership team also made some difficult choices, including the closing of our Early Childhood program, which dropped from 38 families before COVID to only 8 this last year. JRC is looking at other ways to reach and serve families

with young children, including the addition of parent-tot and preschool drop-off classes as part of Kehillah.

- Chicago's Jewish community is changing, and Evanston is no longer the geographic center of the non-orthodox Jewish community. Thus, we need to be creative to identify and attract new members.
- JRC's future is bright, and we are looking forward to Hannah Shearn's leadership.

### III. **State of the Synagogue Report** – Emily Harris

Emily Harris highlighted the following in her report:

- We need to make sure JRC is not the best kept Jewish secret in Chicago.
- A member recently described JRC as a place where people roll up their sleeves to tackle challenges with creativity and joy.
- This spirit permeates the following activities over the past year:
  - The capital campaign donors and volunteers who made it possible to pay off our building loan.
  - The Marketing team which brings professional expertise to help get the word out about JRC.
  - The Immigrant Justice and Racial Equity task forces who bring our members into the sacred work of repairing the world.
  - The lay leaders who bring us the incredible spiritual communities of Minyan and Rosh Hodesh.
  - The Chesed team who is there when we need them.
  - The search committee of educators who helped hire Lauren Reeves, the new Director of Education.
  - The Zoom Gabbaim who fulfill our vision of an inclusive community.
  - The choir and other musicians who fill us with joy.
- Our Saturday Kehillah education program is thriving.
- Twenty-five adults this year celebrated their Brit Mitzvah and came together as a close cohort.
- Teens and adult members made civil rights pilgrimages to Montgomery.
- There are too many individuals to thank, so Emily thanked and gave a Yashar Koach to all.

Emily also encouraged members to become engaged in the work of JRC. JRC has a small staff, and our community only survives and thrives when all pitch in. For example, she listed the following needs: organized people that can write agendas and manage tasks; people willing to oversee building repairs, projects and tasks; and people who can build web pages or write copy. If you are interested, please contact Emily or Hannah Shearn at [president@jrctogether.com](mailto:president@jrctogether.com). Emily also asked members to be sure to list skills and interests when they complete their membership commitment form.

Emily thanked Rabbi Rachel, Cantor Howard and Executive Director Micky Baer for their hard work over the past year and wished Rabbi Rachel a good and well-deserved sabbatical this summer.

IV. **Board of Directors Election – Robin Trilling**

Robin thanked the outgoing Board members for their service to JRC: Rebecca Sperling, Elias Marciano, Celia Osborn, and David Tabak. Robin and Sandy Spatz also thanked the continuing Board members for their ongoing service. Robin introduced the slate of members nominated to serve as JRC's Board of Directors for FY24, which starts July 1, 2023. The following slate, along with a reminder of the annual meeting date, was published to members via email on May 11, 2023, as well as being published on JRC's website:

**Proposed Slate of New Board Members**

**President:**

Hannah Shearn

**Immediate Past President:**

Emily Harris

**VP of Administration:**

Reese Gratch

**VP of Strategic Development:**

Position open

**Members at Large:**

Edie Canter

Chai Wolfman

**Youth Member:**

TBD

**Returning Board Members**

**Secretary:**

Nancy Katz

**VP of Education:**

Robin Byster

**VP of Ritual Practices/Programming:**

Marie Davidson

**VP of Membership:**

Rick Kulp

**VP of Financial Development:**

Gail Luxenberg

**Treasurer:**

David Block

**VP of Tikkun Olam:**

Anne Wildman

**Members at Large:**

Luke Adams

Andrew Segall

Hanna Seltzer

Irv Miller

A motion to accept the slate was made by Robin Trilling and seconded by Nancy Katz. Emily called for a show of hands in the room and a yes/no vote in the chat function for those participating via zoom. The motion was passed by all members except for one no vote and one abstention, and the slate was approved.

- V. **Celebration** – Rabbi Rachel Weiss and Rabbi Deborah Waxman, Sally Gratch, Jonathan Markowitz and Ruth Wenger

Rabbi Rachel thanked Emily for her service as President of the Board of the Congregation over the past two years. She introduced Rabbi Deborah Waxman, President of Reconstructing Judaism, and Seth Rosen, Chair of the Board of Reconstructing Judaism. Both commented on the importance of JRC to the national movement of Reconstructing Judaism. Rabbi Deborah introduced JRC member Sally Gratch, celebrating her years of activism on behalf of peace, feminism, and Judaism, including the founding of Project Keshet. Sally recently was awarded the Reconstructionist movement's 2023 Keter Shem Tov award. Sally thanked Rabbi Deborah and the JRC community for its support. Seth Rosen introduced Jonathan Markowitz and Ruth Wenger. Jonathan serves on the Board of Reconstructing Judaism and in early 2023, Ruth and Jonathan made a one-million-dollar commitment to Reconstructing Judaism to create the Wenger-Markowitz Family Education Initiative. The initiative seeks to develop Reconstructionist curricula and a library of best practices in Jewish education on liturgy, practices and Jewish values. Both Jonathan and Ruth thanked Seth and Rabbi Deborah, and commented on their vision to establish best practices to create materials and resources to build education models that inspire and motivate children and families from a Jewish lens.

Rabbi Deborah gave Rabbi Rachel a blessing as she starts her summer sabbatical.

- VI. **Concluding remarks** - Hannah Shearn

Hannah described JRC as a joyful, spiritual, intellectually curious community committed to social justice. She asked members to “show up” for JRC this summer, whether it is bringing guests to the lakefront Shabbat services, being a greeter, joining minyan or the meditation group, or staffing a JRC table at a summer festival. She stated we intend to continue the creative work and programming JRC is known for, and she encouraged members to help us grow our community.

The choir performed a closing song, and Emily adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Katz

Secretary