

**President's Report for
CSZ Annual Congregational Meeting
May 22, 2006**

I. REPORT ON THE PAST YEAR

This has been a year of achievements, challenges and transitions for our community. Our religious school was given a new, beautiful name. We had a vibrant calendar of programming, inspiring holiday worship services and celebrations, and a record number of B'nei Mitzvot. We are preparing to say goodbye to our educator, and to renew our relationship with our rabbi.

The leadership was focused on several key priorities during the past year and I am pleased to report on strong progress and achievement in many areas:

Financial: Improving our financial health has been a priority for the past three years, and as our Treasurer reports, this was the third consecutive year in which we strengthened our financial position. We have increased our cash reserves, we project that revenues and expenses will be in balance for the fiscal year about to end, and we are once again proposing a balanced operating budget for the coming year. Increased dues revenue, continued strong fund development work, new sources of revenue and sound expense management all contributed to the result. This was our first year of implementing the new dues policy which the Va'ad and the congregation approved last May, and dues revenue for the year exceeded our budget, reflecting strong compliance with the new policy. I want to acknowledge the significant effort on the part of our amazing Dues Committee, led by Tiela Chalmers, and express gratitude for the commitment and generosity that the congregation has displayed in response to our dues effort. In the fund development area, our remarkable team of Marianne Balin and Tony Harris led us through another successful year of fundraising. We had a third year of strong results from both our High Holiday and Rainbow Fund campaigns, and we added the Chai Major Gifts Campaign to our development efforts. We also increased our revenue from other sources, including grants and rental income, and under the guidance of our Treasurer, Administrator, Finance Committee and Personnel Committee, we carefully managed our expenses.

Personnel: A key focus of our efforts this year has been to reach agreement with Rabbi Angel on the terms of a new long term contract, and I am very happy to report that that process is very close to completion. Both Rabbi Angel and I are hopeful that the Va'ad will be able to approve a new contract at its June meeting. Tiela Chalmers and Howard Herman have represented the Personnel Committee and the Va'ad in these discussions with Rabbi Angel, and I am grateful for the skill and dedication that they have brought to this effort. Another important focus of our personnel efforts has been in the area of expanded clergy resources and support. We took some small but important steps in the past few years, with the addition of our part-time counselor in residence (funded thru JFCS) and our summer rabbinic intern. I am very pleased to report that, for the coming year, we will have a year round rabbinic intern beginning in July, funded principally by our Chai Major Gifts Campaign. It is especially exciting to report that the intern will be our member and current HUC rabbinic student Reuben Zellman. We look forward to welcoming Reuben back to Sha'ar Zahav in this new capacity, and to worshipping and studying with him in the coming year. And looking out to next year, I expect in the next few weeks to announce the members of our Cantor Search Committee. This represents an exciting new development for us, an opportunity to strengthen and enrich our congregation in many ways.

Of course, the most immediate personnel need we are addressing is the search for a new educator to replace our beloved Sue Bojdak, who has served our community so ably for the last five years. The Educator Search is well underway, with a committee chaired by Alex Ingersoll and Liz Schaffer. We expect to have good news to announce shortly.

Membership/Outreach: Improving our outreach and increasing new membership and retention of existing members continues to be a high priority. At the Leadership Advance last July, we developed many good new ideas in this area, but we also needed someone to step up to lead the effort. Judy Schwartz raised her hand for that effort, and she has done a terrific job in getting this initiative off and running. Please see her report in the Meeting Packet, and note that the small committee she has formed could definitely use some more volunteers. Our membership has grown a bit in the past year, and now stands at 350 households, representing 480 adults and 155 children. More than 40 new families have joined CSZ in the last twelve months. See the next section of this report for more discussion of this topic.

Building: The physical aspect of our Mishkan Dolores is in definite need of greater attention. I am very grateful to Irene Ogus who stepped up to chair the Building & Grounds Committee this year. Irene assembled a stellar committee, and they have brought some important ideas to the Va'ad, most notably a plan to proceed with the much needed painting of our building. Several other building related projects will also likely come to fruition in the coming year, including the re-design of our Bimah platform.

San Francisco Organizing Project: The past year was our first full year of membership in SFOP, and it was encouraging to see how much sustained energy and commitment congregants brought to this important project. We can and must look for ways in which CSZ can make a difference in the world. Our involvement with SFOP is an important part of that endeavor.

Some other items of note:

Israel: I think we had more Israel-related programming in the past year than ever before, including the first Rabbi Angel-led CSZ trip to Israel last summer. While our congregation no doubt embodies a wide range of viewpoints about Israel, it has been encouraging to see our community becomes more engaged on this topic.

Rental to First Mennonite Church: At last year's Annual Meeting, we announced that we were discussing renting space to FMC on Sundays. That relationship began in November 2005, and by all accounts, it has been a success on all sides. We look forward to this ongoing relationship and to our growing friendship with the FMC community.

II. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

As might be expected, many of the key areas in which we have had achievements in the past three years are also our challenges for the future. We have made progress, but our work is not yet complete.

Financial: As indicated above, we have made good progress, but we are not "out of the woods," and there is much work to be done. In particular, our financial strength in the

next several years will depend upon our ability to maintain the momentum that we have established in fund development. We must continue the success of our High Holiday and Rainbow Fund campaigns and build the Chai Major Gifts Campaign into an important part of our fund development work. In addition, we need to revitalize the next phase of our Building Campaign, and further our efforts with regard to outside grants and planned giving. I am very encouraged by the efforts of the newly expanded Fund Development Committee. Second, we must build on the success we have had with our new dues policy. I thank in advance our new Dues committee Chair, Lisa Katz, and the entire committee, for all of their work that will sustain us in the coming year. And I thank the entire congregation for the commitment that your dues represent.

Membership/Outreach: We have begun to strengthen our efforts in this area, but there is much more we need to do. A recent demographic study of the Bay Area Jewish community indicated that there were more than 10,000 households in five counties (including San Francisco) that identify as Jewish and LGBT. And as is true of the Jewish community as a whole, only about 25% are affiliated with a synagogue. We need to understand more clearly why these families are not our members, and if there is a path that might motivate even a fraction of them to join with us. To this end, we have applied for a grant that would enable CSZ to participate in the "Synaplex" program, a program that will provide us with enhanced resources for programming and advertising. (More to come on this topic if we are chosen to participate.) Perhaps even more important, it is clear that outreach in the 21st century requires an attractive, updated website with compelling content. I am thrilled to announce that our website has been completely re-designed and is now ready for use. We all owe a debt of gratitude to our talented and dedicated website committee: Sara Haber, Steve Mazer, and Noam Szoke. Please visit www.shaarzahav.org soon and take a tour of your congregation online.

Who Are We? -- Much of our recent discussion about membership and outreach has intersected with another related and important conversation. Over the past three years, we have had a lot of dialogue in different settings about who we are (or who we ought to be) as a community. At last year's Leadership Advance, we agreed upon a statement of who we are, which I have attached, that we now utilize on our website and in other publications. But we need more than agree about words on a piece of paper. We need to discuss how these words inform what we do: in programming, in ritual, in our curriculum, in outreach. We need a bit more clarity on the institution we are trying to build, so that we can more effectively harness the energy needed to build it. I look forward to being a part of this conversation, but I leave it to Ora to lead the way.

III. ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND GRATITUDE

I have learned over the past three years that being an effective president of our congregation is made possible primarily through the wisdom and service of others. The list of people I need to thank for their advice and support to me and/or their service and commitment to our congregation is too long to enumerate. It includes everyone that has served on the Va'ad or chaired a committee in the past three years, and all of the Past Presidents, whose guidance has been so valuable. But a few individuals deserve a special mention:

Rabbi Angel – It has been an honor to serve in partnership with Rabbi Angel these past three years. I have benefited from her guidance and insight on countless occasions, and the relationship of mutual trust, respect and friendship that has developed has

enabled us to work through challenging issues, and has been one of the sweetest blessings I have received from my service in this role.

Two officers served together with me for all of the past three years. They are **Alex Ingersoll**, who has served as Vice President, and **Karen Schiller**, who has served as Treasurer. I cannot imagine what the past three years would have been like without either of them. Alex has been the “rock” that I have leaned on for just about everything and it would be his speed dial button that I would usually press to help me think through the most difficult issues. He has provided great leadership as chair of the Personnel Committee. And Karen has simply been the best treasurer our congregation has ever had – she rolled up her sleeves and brought much needed clarity, discipline and confidence to our financial procedures and reporting. She has put in countless hours over the past three years and been an invaluable resource to the Va’ad, our staff and committee chairs in so many ways. I know that Alex and Karen each need a bit of time off from the Va’ad, but I hope they will be asked to serve again soon – they would each make a great president for CSZ!!

Marianne Balin and Tony Harris -- They stepped up to create a new era of fund development here at CSZ and they have worked tirelessly over the past three years to sustain and expand it. The financial stability that we have achieved over the past three years would simply not have been possible without their efforts. I am grateful to Tony for agreeing to be nominated as Treasurer and to Marianne for continuing to stay involved in our expanding Fund Development efforts. Marianne and Tony are two more individuals who I hope will someday serve our congregation well as president!

Steven Angelides and Gabby Volodarsky -- It has been a joy and an honor to work with Steven and Gabby these past three years, to see them grow in their roles and take on the expanded responsibilities we have given them. The administration of our synagogue is in strong and capable hands with Steven as Temple Administrator. And Gabby, in addition to providing strong support to Rabbi Angel, has done outstanding work in her role as Membership Liaison, providing strong support to the Keshet and Membership committees, and to our efforts at outreach.

Sue Bojdak – I want to add my own personal appreciation and thanks to the many others that have already been expressed for Sue’s outstanding leadership of our school for the past five years. Sue brought so many strengths to this role, both professional and personal, and she will truly be missed here at CSZ. And because I knew our school was in such capable hands, I was able to focus my attention as president on the issues that did need the attention of the officers and the Va’ad.

Howard Herman and Debbie Levy – The past few years have been a time of great change, loss and transition for our school, and Howard and Debbie have provided strong and steady leadership to our Children’s Education Board. Our educational program is stronger than ever, and their leadership has helped to ensure that.

Steve Mazer -- For several years now our congregation has been blessed because Steve has brought his remarkable planning and organizational skills to both our programming and High Holidays. His effort represents a volunteer contribution of unparalleled commitment and service to our community.

Sara Haber – Sara has completed her first year as an outstanding Vice President, but her contributions go far beyond the duties of that office. She has become, mostly working behind the scenes, CSZ’s “great mobilizer”: cultivating, harnessing and

organizing the remarkable volunteer energy of our community. And she would be another terrific future president!

Rose Katz -- Rose served as Vice President for two years, and continues to contribute to CSZ in countless ways. Her friendship and counsel have meant a great deal to me.

Tiela Chalmers – Tiela has been a trusted friend and advisor throughout the past three years, taking on one challenging project after another. Her work as chair of the Dues Committee for the past many years has been a vital contribution to our community at a critical moment. It will be a pleasure to honor Tiela with a special presentation during our Annual Meeting.

Lisa Katz -- Lisa has served for the past three years as Immediate Past President, which followed two years of service as president, two more as Vice president, and three years on the Va'ad. She has served for several years on the Dues Committee, and has now taken over as chair of that important committee. Few individuals have served our community with such dedication over the past decade.

Ora Prochovnick – It has been a joy to work together with Ora these past two years. She has been a valuable voice on the Va'ad and the Executive Committee, and her calm and reasoned approach to issues has helped us to forge consensus on complex issues. As a congregation, we need to build on our achievements, but we also need some fresh perspectives and new beginnings, and Ora is uniquely skilled to lead us at this time. I am excited about where her leadership will take us, and I look forward to supporting her presidency in any way I can.

Gerry Llamado -- My partner Gerry has been a source of strength, patience, encouragement and love. And in his typically quiet way, he has done a great deal so that I might have the time to serve our community most effectively. I am looking forward to our having more time to spend together.

It is a pleasure to say thank you to so many remarkable people. They have strengthened our community in so many ways, and working together with them has made serving as president one of the sweetest experiences of my life.

Respectfully submitted,

**Arthur Slepian,
President**

Who We Are

Congregation Sha'ar Zahav is a progressive Reform synagogue, established in 1977. We are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and heterosexual Jews, together with lovers, families and friends, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Our membership includes about 500 adults and more than 100 children. We come from a wide range of religious, ethnic, class and cultural backgrounds to worship God with an egalitarian, feminist and gay-positive Jewish liturgy. Together we celebrate Shabbat, festivals and life cycle events with simcha, song, laughter and compassion. Our Rabbi, lay-leaders and members join together to bring meaning to Torah and Jewish observance. We are committed to creative prayer, study, mitzvot and tikkun olam. We welcome all who wish to join us for worship, education and celebration. CSZ is a member of the Union for Reform Judaism and the World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Jews.