



# BHBE

## YEAR IN REVIEW

*We've gathered to celebrate, mourn, nosh, nurture, and learn over the past year. In the following pages, this year's outgoing Board summarizes our life as a community.*

### MESSAGE FROM THE RABBI

Togetherness has been the primary source of comfort during these tumultuous times of antisemitism and anti-Zionism on an unimaginable scale. Starting October 8, our community has endeavored to provide ceremonies, rituals, programs, learning, words of Torah, opportunities to process emotionally and spiritually, and mutual support to ease the pain we have felt. Our support for Israel and each other continues to this day.

Our programming and fundraising around October 7 has been extensive. On October 12, we offered a prayer service and program in support of Israel and her people. As a community, we have joined together twice to process the current situation in Israel and the pervasive rampant antisemitism across the world with a panel of mental health professionals from our congregation. In a matter of weeks, our congregants and Sisterhood raised more than \$23,000 for the North & Northwest Suburban Conservative Synagogues' Magen David Adom Life Support Ambulance, which will be finished in August. Our synagogue will host a celebration of this wonderful gift to MDA and the people of Israel. Most recently, we acknowledged the challenging time our college students are experiencing on campuses around the country, and we collected funds for coffee gift cards that we distributed to our students. Our Jewish outreach to college students will continue when I join the Northwestern University Hillel for rabbi office hours in the coming weeks. In addition, our Sisterhood is sponsoring a bagel breakfast for NU Hillel students. Last week, the Israeli Consulate hosted a moving Yom Hazikaron service at BHBE in which Cantor Roytman and I were honored to participate. Finally, we were gathered to celebrate Israel's 76th year at our

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community Yom Ha'atzmaut concert and dinner, featuring Kol Zimrah Jewish Community Singers, the BHBE Academy Choir, reflections that I shared, and Cantor Roytman's melodies.

Of course, much of what we do here at BHBE extends beyond the current crisis in Israel. We

continue to excel in our efforts to engage lifelong Jewish learners, both within and beyond our Academy. Academy Director Hedva Yitzhak and I have worked in tandem to build the connection between the Academy curriculum and synagogue skills. We enriched our students' experience with special services, gatherings, field trips, and programs supported by our Men's Club, Sisterhood, and outstanding volunteers.



Our adult education program, which is outlined in this report, includes robust offerings such as a



review and analysis of Ethical Wills, an exploration of recent responsum from the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, a weekly Talmud class, an Introduction to Judaism class, and a weekly class on Psalms. I



am grateful to the thought leaders in our congregation who have so generously shared their time and insight with us through the special programs and classes outlined in the Learning Curve section of this report and including our new Rituals in Transition series. Finally, we are excited to share that our youngest learners, the Littles, have enjoyed eleven events filled with music, arts and crafts, songs and prayers, and even a petting zoo! These community-building events, which would not be possible without the extraordinary efforts of our staff and volunteers, give us all a resounding sense of *ruach* and hope for the future of Judaism.

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We continue to reinvigorate our approach to prayer and ritual to engage and build our Jewish community. Our new Friday night service offerings include special Shabbat services for the Academy, a Kehillah (community-led) Shabbat, an uplifting worship service known as Kol Tefillah, our communal Friday night dinners and Kabbalat Shabbat. On Saturday mornings, we have celebrated a wide variety of special themed Shabbatot, including our new Birthday Shabbat featuring special honors and enhanced Kiddushim for our celebrants. We are grateful to the volunteers who have shared their expertise and enthusiasm with us on Shabbat mornings, allowing us to emerge as leaders in the community when it comes to celebrating diversity and equal rights.



Over the past year, we also were privileged to celebrate many life-cycle events together, including seven B-Mitzvah ceremonies, baby namings, people choosing and affirming Jewish identities, weddings, brit milah ceremonies, and auf rufs. From our cabaret-style sing-along celebration of Purim to the joy-filled Littles in the Big Service, increased attendance at our events attests to the supportive and welcoming community we are building together.

In the year to come, we look forward to continuing to build our community spirit and the bonds between us by joining together at Camp Chi for our long-delayed retreat. We hope that you will



join us September 13-15<sup>th</sup> for a weekend filled with learning, musical and creative Shabbat worship opportunities, games and activities for all ages, and an opportunity to enjoy beautiful natural surroundings in the company of your BHBE friends.

Beyond our own community, we continue to engage with social action and service. Our interfaith work with the New Trier Multifaith Alliance exemplifies our approach to honoring Jewish ideals of tikkun olam within the broader community. Watch for an announcement soon about our upcoming June interfaith service event. Thanks to our

Kulanu Committee, we are also making strides to ensure that our events continue to be accessible to all. Personally, I am pleased to share that I continue serving as rabbi on the Board of Directors

of the Solomon Schechter Day School of Metropolitan Chicago. This year marks my fourth year on the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, the central authority on *halakha*, as a voting member.

Through our efforts within and beyond our congregation, we are building the BHBE we envision for the future: a caring, supportive, strong, sacred community that welcomes all who wish to engage and grow Jewishly.



### MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

What a year this has been.

Thanks to our dedicated and

hardworking Board and committee members and our countless volunteers, we have traveled a long way towards our future destination of financial

sustainability. We have sold our property to the Wilmette Park District (see the photo below of me signing the contract) and have already begun actively looking for our future home.

Ninety seven percent of our membership voted on the sale of the property, a super majority that expressed faith in our leadership and our vision for the future of BHBE.

When I sit in on our weekly staff meetings, I am always amazed at the number of activities our congregation supports, from classes to services to holiday celebrations and commemorations. Our Sunday morning Board drop-ins have been an on-going source of communication between our board members and our congregants.

Our Friday night Kabbalat Shabbats have been revitalized and throughout each month, we offer a variety of prayer services for our members. This past year, we also celebrated “Rituals in Transition,” programs that offered the opportunity to explore age-old Jewish rituals in a new way.



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Many of the activities that we offer here at BHBE began with a request and/or suggestion from a congregant.



As we move into the future, as we create our future BHBE, I invite each of you to get involved in a way that is meaningful to you.

Please call, text or email me with any questions, comments or suggestions you might have.

May we continue to go from strength to strength!

### FINANCIAL SUMMARY

This past fiscal year was a busy one for the Budget and Finance Committee. A significant amount of financial data stretching back several years was assembled, studied, and summarized in order



to articulate the state of our finances at the Sale of the Building Congregational Meeting in February.

Additionally, the Committee carefully monitored current year spending and diligently worked to only use the line of credit (with a >9% interest rate) when needed.

For this upcoming fiscal year, the Budget and Finance Committee will continue to monitor our cash flow needs and will strive to make the state of our finances even more transparent and understandable, including through the use of comparative financials (financials that show year-over-year amounts), which should result in more thoughtful discussions about where and how we spend our money.

## BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS REPORT

We faced many challenges in the building this past year. Some key items included:

- We spent approximately \$50,000 repairing the drywall on the ceiling of the sanctuary. Parts were falling down and it was determined, after an inspection, that we needed to replace large sections of the ceiling.
- Repair work on the sound system in the fall of 2023. This required us to rent a sound system for the high holidays through December.
- Ongoing roof issues forced us to get quotes to repair/replace a good part of our roof. Given our pending move, we are doing only the minimum to maintain the roof – and only as needed.
- Our HVAC required work on one of our units – the coil needed to be replaced. This process required us to remove some portions of the asbestos in the attic in order to properly access the HVAC unit.
- Later in 2023 our HVAC boiler needed extensive work.
- In January, 2024 the controller system for the HVAC failed – rather than replacing it, we decided to adjust these manually by each unit
- It was determined that the lead content in our water fountains was greater than acceptable levels. We made the decision to close off all water fountains.
- The fire department held its annual inspection of the building and found many items that needed our attention in order to be compliant with the code. One item remains to be resolved – the fire retardancy of our drapes in the sanctuary and Spak need to be recertified.
- In March 2024 we needed to replace the actuator in one of the HVAC units.
- In April 2024 we faced a drainage issue forcing sewage into our parking lot.
- Several other issues remain either on hold or to be determined if we will make the needed repairs.



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### WAYS AND MEANS

We are pleased to be completing a successful year of fundraising. Our Gala, Blue Suede Shul, is just weeks away. You still have a few days left to buy tickets, which will help sustain and support BHBE!



This year, we completed another successful High Holiday appeal, supported by over 200 families—most of whom qualified for a match from our two generous matching donors. In addition to our annual Mishloach Manot

program for Purim, we also welcomed the Cantor's Concert, *Let There Be Light*, during Chanukah. Joined by Kol Zimra and our Academy's youth choir, the Cantor and the Shul Sisters entertained an educated a packed sanctuary. Thanks to the Dr. Herbert and Elaine Losef Jewish Cultural Center and the generosity of sponsoring congregants who underwrote the event, we brought festive and inspiring music to our congregation, just weeks after October 7.

The breadth of support from our congregants this year has been wonderful and meaningful. Since dues do not cover all of our costs, donations ensure our members' consistent access to Jewish life through prayer, education, community, social action, and lifecycle events.

Thank you for your support!





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### RITUAL

This year, we conducted a High Holiday review and had an in person ritual committee meeting.



B-mitzvah celebrations and other simcha celebrations, including our monthly birthday Shabbats, led to many very festive gatherings.

New ideas in making our Friday evening services have also enhanced our Shabbat celebrations.

We look forward to continuing to bring *ruach* and community-building gatherings as we move toward next year.



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### ACADEMY

2023-2024 Academy school year kicked-off with our new Principal, Hedva Yitzhak. We welcomed 57 students including 10 new kindergartners. The theme for this year was community. Hedva and our amazing teaching staff worked to build a sense of community throughout our school each week.



Some highlights from the year included our grade-level Shabbat dinners, field trip for the 7/8 grade class to the Illinois Holocaust

Museum, social action activities, Sisterhood Tu B'shvat event, Men's club World Wide Wrap, monthly Wednesday night all school gatherings at BHBE, and much more.

In addition to the weekly Sunday mornings, grades 3 and up met virtually twice weekly for 25-minute tutoring sessions and a 30 minute group classroom sessions to study Pirkei Avot (ethical teachings from Rabbinic Jewish tradition). In the fall, parents were invited to meet with teachers and learn about the curriculum, Shalom Learning.

The BHBE Academy Board was busy fundraising. We began the year with our Affy Tapple sale for Rosh Hashanah, collected sneakers for those in need, and had our first ever epic Spaghetti Dinner led by the students and featuring our clergy band along with the BHBE Children's choir. All together we raised \$1,500 and kept around 100 sneakers from being placed in landfills. Due to the amazing efforts of all of you, the Mishloach Manot sale raised around \$13,000 to donate to the Academy. Amazing effort by all!



Huge thank you to Hedva, our teachers and madrichim for all of your passion and efforts this year. And a special thank you to the BHBE Academy Board who volunteer their time to ensure success for our school and students. We are grateful for our community and looking forward to another fabulous school year to come.

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## MEMBERSHIP

This year was exciting as we worked to better engage our current members. I had several conversations with existing members to get to know them a bit better and to make sure they were being utilized in the ways they wanted. We tried to be thoughtful and strategic, inviting them to serve on different committees depending on their interests and family makeup.



We also worked to recruit young families. This year since July 1, 2023 we brought on 18 families as members! About five of these are younger families, and most are very active with our Tot Shabbat, Mini Minyan, and Junior Congregation sessions.

I delivered welcome baskets to all of our new members—a total of 10. There are two additional families that are ready to join this coming August or September. In addition, we ordered BHBE onesies and plus Torahs for new baby gifts, which were delivered to members who had babies.



Lastly, as members moved away or left our congregation, we called them to thank them for their involvement and go through an exit interview - their feedback is important for many reasons and we'll be able to improve BHBE because of it.



### ADULT EDUCATION

This year, we were privileged to learn from our clergy, congregants, and scholars from the broader community. Rabbi Nate Crane taught classes in Talmud, Psalms, and Introduction to Judaism. Cantor Pavel Roytman taught a class entitled Stories of Jewish Music.

Rabbi Allan Kensky, congregant and Past President Sandy Goldberg, and congregant and Rabbi Barry Friedman taught classes as well. Our Scholar in Residence Program, featuring Rabbi Pamela Barmash, was sponsored by the Teibloom Family. A tour of works at the Art Institute by Jewish artists was provided by docent Janet Horwood. There was so much interest we had to turn some people away.



Yom HaShoah was commemorated with a program called From Despair to Hope, which honored Shoah survivors who created new lives in Israel. Our own congregant Lane Rubinstein spoke about his experience as a hidden child during the war in Poland, and then his service in the army in the newly-founded state of Israel.

Plans for Tikkun Lael Shavuot are underway now. Last year was a combination of formal presentations and small group discussion. And cheesecake, of course.

### KULANU

This committee is working to revitalize itself after the previous leader left. We have gained some new members. We are waiting to schedule our next meeting after Pride Shabbat. We want to participate in the parade without co-sponsoring. Kulanu is currently helping out with accessibility of events.