

It is a great honor for me to address you for the first time as the President of this extraordinarily vibrant and significant Jewish institution on this the Holiest night of the year.

I want to take this opportunity to introduce myself to those in this Congregation whom I do not already know, but also and much more importantly, to begin a dialogue about how to make this thriving community even stronger, more relevant, and more meaningful, to the needs of our 1,800 member families.

As some of you know, I am an attorney with a large firm in NY, specializing in litigation. Born and raised in the Bronx, I went to Columbia College and Harvard Law School. I am 64 years old; I am a lifelong Yankee fan; and have three wonderful children and a spectacular daughter-in-law.

My wife Ruth and I first joined Rodeph Sholom in 1976, a year before we were married. We joined after attending High Holiday services, having become captivated by the oratory of Rabbi Gunther Hirshberg. Our two older children, Martha and David, were both named at the Temple and attended the Rodeph Sholom nursery school. In 1986, we left Rodeph Sholom, in part because we felt that at that time Martha and David would receive a stronger religious school education elsewhere. We returned to Rodeph Sholom in 1994, and have been extraordinarily happy and committed to this institution ever since.

We immediately sensed a new vitality in the clergy, in its day school, in its religious school, and in the congregation itself – a wonderful mix of new and longstanding members, and a strong commitment to social justice – all of which exist to this day.

Since our return in 1994, we have become active members of the congregation, worshipping regularly on Friday night and participating in many of the congregation's wonderful programs.

Our youngest child Judy, who just started law school, attended religious school here, had her bat mitzvah in 2002, was a mainstay of the Youth Group for many years, and was confirmed in 2006. Ruth, who never had a bat mitzvah as a child, participated in and completed the year-long adult bat mitzvah program, a moving experience for our entire family.

My involvement at the committee and officer level at Rodeph began in 2003, when Ruth and I made a commitment to help bring a Holocaust Torah to the Synagogue. Working with then president Nancy Solomon on this project was a joy, and as a result of our efforts, Ruth, Judy and I travelled to London in November, 2004, and quite fittingly returned on the night of our Synagogue's Kristallnacht service, with the Holocaust Torah

that now sits so magnificently in our sixth floor Chapel. The dedication service almost 10 years ago – in memory of my father, a Holocaust survivor – was a truly memorable experience that cemented my commitment to this Synagogue.

Both my parents were Holocaust survivors, and I grew up in an area of the Bronx where Yiddish was the main language of the neighborhood. Yom Kippur was an exceptionally somber day in my shtetl in the Bronx. Our street was dominated by a small one-story Orthodox synagogue, and everyone, including the children, stayed either in or around the synagogue for the entire day. My strongest memory of Yom Kippur was the Yizkor service.

All of the children would be removed from the synagogue, and our parents would then spend the next one to two hours, not just praying, but crying and shrieking, and remembering the family members and friends they

had lost, and the horrors each had witnessed – horrors and memories that they never spoke about or discussed at home. As kids, we would hear our parents' wails from outside the building.

After the service, my parents and their friends would all emerge, wiping their red tearing eyes. My parents would give my sister and me a hug and a kiss, and then they would begin the process – as we are still all encouraged to do today on Yom Kippur – of not looking backward, but looking forward to the next year. For my parents and their friends, their goals were simple – they wanted to protect their children, and to make sure that each of them had a better life than they had experienced.

It was primarily the spirit and determination of those Holocaust survivors – my parents and their friends – that helped mold me. My parents' desire to create a better life for their children in this country, and to ensure the continuity and survival of their Jewish faith were key components of my

upbringing. Despite all of the pain and agony that they had experienced and witnessed, they had an overwhelming optimism that they would and could create a better life for the next generation.

And it is that optimism that we need to commit to here today.

It is not easy. There is incredible chaos and disorder in this world. You pick up the newspapers, you go online, and all you read and see is frightening chaos – Gaza, Syria, ISIS, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, the Ebola virus, the dysfunction in Washington.

The list is long and it can appear overwhelming, but I suggest to all of you here today that despite this litany of modern day horrors, we should still be optimistic; all of us in different ways can still push forward and each of us can make a meaningful difference for our children and for each other. And this synagogue – our spiritual center – remains vital to that effort.

Just as it was for my parents, the synagogue remains the most vital symbol of continuity in Jewish history, the source of community in a city where it is much too easy to feel alienated and lonely – a place to put your faith into action.

Great things – small miracles – are happening here every day and each of you can participate in and contribute to that effort.

We have exceptional clergy here, whose hearts are as big as this sanctuary, and who never stop urging us – through worship, education and discussion – to fill our lives with meaning and Jewish values that elevate all of us.

We operate one of the finest independent schools in the city -- the only nursery through 8th grade Reform Jewish Day School in the city – that teaches 600 kids each day rigorous academics alongside Jewish values and knowledge.

We have a first rate religious school program that educates an additional 450 children each week – not only preparing students for bar and bat mitzvah, but also providing each of them with a strong foundation for a lifetime of Jewish practices, and again Jewish values.

We have programs and services for toddlers, young children, teenagers and have just begun a new organization named Tribe for our college graduate millennials. Over 200 people attended the first meeting just two weeks ago.

We will have over 80 children celebrating a bar or bat mitzvah this year, and almost 20 adult b'nei mitzvahs, a record for this program.

And there is much more that we do. I am extraordinarily proud of this Congregation's efforts in helping to feed the hungry, provide shelter for the homeless, and to provide a nurturing worship environment for those with special needs. Our shereinu services for those with special needs now

serve as a model for congregations throughout the United States. These projects, and others too numerous to mention, not only make me proud, not only help define whom we are, but they confirm my optimism.

None of these programs – or the hundreds more that take place here each year – would be possible without your time, your commitment and your generous financial support. I urge you all to be exceptionally generous this year. Your dues only cover 65 percent of our congregational expenses.

The Yom Kippur Appeal is vital for us to remain the diverse, open, welcoming congregation that we all strive it to be.

Steering Rodeph Sholom through the next phase of its growth and advancement is a great honor. In three years, we will be celebrating this congregation's 175th Anniversary. The responsibility of helping to make this entire community – both synagogue and schools – stronger, for preserving the integrity of this great building, and the Jewish values that it so

magnificently represents, and for encouraging each of you to form more lasting relationships, not only with our clergy and our educators, but with each other, is one that I do not undertake lightly. If I do not succeed in achieving all of my goals, it will not be for want of effort.

The counting of the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and the accounting that one makes on Yom Kippur to God for one's conduct over the past year, provide a perfect theme for a new president of this great institution.

I have to count my blessings for this terrific opportunity;

In order to be successful on this journey, I have to count on each and every one of you for your wisdom, energy, dedication, and yes, financial support.

And most importantly, we all must realize that each one of us counts, that our success together can only be measured if this Congregation

as whole can help to enhance each of our lives with worship, education and meaningful relationships.

Ruth and I wish you a 5775 filled with good health, happiness, success and peace. Let us all look forward together.