

183rd ANNUAL CONGREGATION MEETING
Tuesday, May 20, 2025

The meeting began at 7:00 PM in the Schnurmacher Chapel and was made available via livestream.

Cantor Shayna De Lowe (SDL) led a niggun accompanied by **Cantor Stefano L. Iacono (SLI)**.

Stacy Kanter (SK), President, explained that the meeting was being conducted as a hybrid meeting, with members participating both in person and via livestream. She noted that those attending virtually could communicate questions via email to info@crsnyc.org, and **that Barbara Zakin (BZ)**, Executive Director, would monitor those messages and notify the group if a question or objection was raised.

SK called the meeting to order. She asked **BZ** to confirm that a quorum had been reached and she did so.

Rabbi Karol (JSK) and Rabbi Stein (AAS) delivered the invocation.

SK asked for a motion to waive the reading of the minutes from the previous year's Annual Meeting, and the motion was approved.

SK made remarks:

I would like to begin my remarks by reminding us of our people-focused vision and mission, which guide everything we do. Our vision is a world where every person thrives and lives a life of meaning. Our mission is that through Judaism we help people thrive through community, social responsibility, and growth of mind, body, and soul.

I am pleased to say that **the state of our synagogue remains strong.**

- **For the third year in a row**, we have welcomed the **largest number of new members** joining our community.
- Our overall membership — **1,839 families** — is the largest it has been, we believe, **in recorded memory.**

Our **almost 100-year-old building** continues to buzz daily with offerings across ages and demographics.

In addition to our meaningful worship opportunities:

- Young families flock to our **Sholom Sprouts programs**, Learning Together classes, and holiday programming, many of which continue to sell out.
- **Sholom Sprouts** has become an important **pipeline for RSS enrollment**.
- Between **RSS, Learning Together, Adventures, Discoveries, and Teen Programming**, we are educating and engaging **more than 950 children and teens**.

Our **monthly Shabbat Together program**, led by **Cantor Iacano (SLI)**, brings children and parents together for a joyful family worship experience and Shabbat dinner and regularly attracts **more than 200 people**.

Under the leadership of **Rabbi Goldberg (DSG)**, we continue to offer innovative programming for people in their twenties and thirties, from worship and celebration to bagel making and glass blowing.

Our **Adult Programming** continues to thrive as well, including:

- Torah and Talmud study
- Sholom Yoga on the terrace
- Mah Jongg and Canasta games
- Cultural outings such as the Anne Frank exhibit and a walking tour of local Syrian food and culture

We also continue to see **record participation in our Discovering Judaism program**, and each year many participants choose to convert to Judaism.

All of this activity is possible only because of the generous support of our members through:

- Membership dues
- Donations to the Annual Appeal
- Other fundraising efforts

This year we raised a **record amount in our Annual Appeal**, including a **generous matching campaign that encouraged gifts from 160 new and returning donors**.

You will hear more shortly from our Treasurer, **Eileen Kleiman (EK)**, but even with increased donations our expenses continue to outpace revenue. Our staff and board work hard to control expenses and keep membership dues increases as low as possible, **though dues will increase by 4% in the coming year**.

I want to turn now to the concept of **belonging** and the important work we have been doing in this area.

Last year we surveyed the congregation to better understand the sense of belonging at CRS. Earlier this year, specially trained congregant volunteers conducted in-depth interviews with more than 65 congregants about their experience of belonging.

In this context, belonging means:

- **Being noticed**
- **Being named**
- **Being known**
- **Being needed**

For example:

If Donna and Steve walk into Shabbat services and someone simply says “Shabbat Shalom,” that is being noticed.

If Beverly walks in and someone says “Shabbat Shalom, Beverly,” that is being named.

If Judy comes to services and someone asks about a recent trip with her kids, that is being known.

And if someone greets Henry and says, “Henry, the work you’ve been doing with our Israel philanthropy projects has been so important. I hope you continue,” that is being needed.

That is the sense of belonging we hope everyone feels at Congregation Rodeph Shalom.

This concept informs many of our initiatives, including:

- **Rabbi Spratt (BHS)**’s podcast, “**Belonging**,” which has already featured 16 members of our community
- A **daily midday minyan** on Zoom created and led by congregants
- **Shabbat dinners** following services, which have **welcomed more than 400 participants this year**
- Our new Shabbat morning “**Resoul**” service, a joyful music-filled service each Saturday morning

During the **High Holy Days**, we will once again worship as one community on Erev Rosh Hashanah in the sanctuary and conclude Yom Kippur together with Havdalah on 83rd Street, another meaningful way to strengthen connection.

Following the events of **October 7**, we remain deeply committed to Israel. Some of the ways we have expressed that commitment include:

- Hosting hundreds of Israeli first responders and their families as part of the Project 24 initiative
- Congregants **hosting eight Israeli families** in their homes
- **Inviting speakers** with diverse perspectives on Israel
- Establishing a **new Israel Council**, guided by **BHS** and **JSK**

We will also continue the work of the **Israeli Hug Center**, supporting Israelis living in New York.

Earlier this year **BHS led a mission to Israel**, and we expect another mission later this year.

Looking ahead, several exciting initiatives are planned:

- The return of the **Hootenanny on November 13**, bringing together leading Jewish song leaders and raising funds for **Eisner and Crane Lake camps**

- The hiring of a **Communal Responsibility Manager** to coordinate our social action, social justice, and advocacy work

This role will help expand important programs such as **CRS Feeds**, including:

- **Backpack Buddies**
- Our food drive for the **West Side Campaign Against Hunger**

We will also be making important **building improvements**, including:

- **Upgrading the street elevator**
- **Replacing the cooling tower**

These projects may not sound glamorous, but they are essential to maintaining our **nearly 100-year-old building** and ensuring **accessibility and comfort** for our community.

I want to close by thanking you for entrusting the Board of Trustees with the synagogue's vision and mission. I am deeply grateful to my fellow board members, who give so much of themselves to this community.

A special thank you to:

- **Dina Bakst and Annette Orenstein, who are completing their board terms**
- **Michael Sand, who is completing his term as RSS Board Chair and trustee**

We also look forward to welcoming **Talia Day as the next RSS Board Chair**. In accordance with our bylaws, **she will become a trustee on July 1**.

I also want to acknowledge our clergy for their vision, inspiration, leadership, and care, and our staff, who somehow take all of our ideas, needs, and suggestions and turn them into the meaningful experience of being part of this community.

This week, we'll finish the Book of Leviticus and then say *Chazak, Chazak V'Nitchazaek* – Be Strong, Be Strong, and Let us strengthen each other. We have seen in these difficult and uncertain times, the strength that comes from being together as part of this extraordinary community. May this continue. Thank you very much.

SK invited Eileen Kleiman (EK), Treasurer, to present the Treasurer's Report.

EK presented the Treasurer remarks.

Thank you, Stacy. You may hear some of the same themes repeated in my remarks because many of the initiatives Stacy mentioned have a direct impact on the budget.

Each year our budget is developed with our mission and values in mind and with careful consideration of where the synagogue is within our ongoing strategic plan. Although I am presenting the budget tonight, it represents the work of many people. The process begins with **Barbara Zakin** and **Rabbi Spratt**, who outline our strategic initiatives, and includes significant work from our CFO

Marc Fried, our Controller **Yelena Rozenblit**, our synagogue department heads, the Budget Committee, and the Board of Trustees. I'm the one standing here presenting it, but it is truly a collaborative effort.

Our fiscal year runs from July 1 through June 30, and we are approaching the end of FY25 on June 30. FY25 is currently expected to finish with much more positive results than the conservative estimates we made when the budget was developed in spring 2024. Originally, we expected to use \$1 million in accumulated surpluses from prior years to balance the budget. However, our current projections show that we will not need to use any of those surplus funds.

- Revenues are projected to be more than **\$900,000 higher than budgeted**
- Operating expenses are projected to be approximately **\$100,000 lower than expected**

In addition to the revenue we collect each year, we maintain several funds that support both the annual operating budget and capital needs. These funds are invested through SEI, our investment advisor, based on the guidance of the CRS Investment Committee. This committee includes board members and community members with significant financial expertise and follows an investment policy designed to maintain a well-diversified portfolio with a long-term investment perspective.

Because we are not using surplus funds in FY25, we expect to enter FY26 with **\$1.5 million in accumulated surpluses from prior years**.

Under the reserve policy established by the Board in 2011, we expect the following balances at the end of FY25:

- **Operating Reserve:** approximately **\$2.1 million**, slightly above the target of \$1.99 million
- **Capital Reserve:** approximately **\$1.1 million**, slightly above the target of \$1 million

Our **Foundation Fund**, which functions as a board-designated endowment for the synagogue, is expected to be approximately **\$14.5 million**. These funds are generally treated as an endowment, with withdrawals typically limited to **5% annually** according to our spending policy. The Board does retain the ability to withdraw additional funds if necessary for important initiatives.

The **L'Dor v' Dor Capital Campaign**, which began about eight years ago, created an **Accessibility Fund** to provide dues abatements for congregants who cannot afford full dues.

- Originally funded with **\$2 million**
- Projected balance of **just over \$700,000 at the end of this year**
- Enough funding for approximately **two to three more years**

The campaign also included **\$1 million in seed funding for Sholom Sprouts**, which has been very successful. The remaining funds will be used in FY26, after which the program will continue to be funded through the synagogue's operating budget.

Two funds support the maintenance of **Union Field Cemetery**:

- **Perpetual Care Fund:** approximately **\$13 million**, which is about \$6 million above the required level
- **Endowed Care Fund:** approximately **\$550,000**

Cemetery plot sales also contribute to supporting cemetery operations.

In addition, the synagogue holds approximately **\$5.1 million in specific-purpose and endowment funds**, which support various programs, travel, equipment, and supplies each year.

I will now turn to the **FY26 budget**, which begins July 1 and which we are asking the congregation to approve.

As always, the Board aims to keep membership dues increases modest. For FY26, dues for a two-adult membership with unreserved High Holy Day seating will be **\$4,990**, representing a **4% increase** from the current year. We are also planning a **4% increase in tuition** for our Sholom Sprouts, Adventures, and Discoveries programs.

The **Annual Appeal** provides a significant portion of our revenue each year. In FY25 the appeal was extremely successful.

- More than **\$2.5 million was raised**, compared with the **\$2 million originally budgeted**
- This was supported in part by a **matching campaign funded by a generous anonymous donor**

For FY26 we are projecting **\$2.2 million in Annual Appeal revenue**, which we believe is a responsible and conservative target.

Consistent with our reserve spending policies, the FY26 budget includes:

- **5% draws from the Foundation Fund**
- **5% draws from operating and capital reserves**
- **5% draws from cemetery care funds**
- Partial support from the **Accessibility Fund**
- Use of the remaining **Sholom Sprouts seed funding**

In addition to these standard withdrawals, the Board has approved several strategic uses of funds:

- A **principal draw from the Foundation Fund** to support **Phase II of the synagogue's new CRM system**
- Use of **Cemetery Capital Reserve funds** for necessary improvements at Union Field Cemetery
- A draw from the **CRS Innovation Fund** to support audio upgrades in the Schurmacher and Eisner spaces

- Use of **\$840,000 from accumulated surpluses**, which will leave approximately **\$660,000 available for FY27 and beyond**

One additional note is that CRS recently received **Employee Retention Tax Credit funds**, often referred to as ERTC. These funds are **not included in the FY26 budget**, but they were received and represent an additional financial benefit to the synagogue.

Turning briefly to expenses, the FY26 budget includes the following assumptions:

- **3% salary increases** for most employees, with some targeted increases for merit and retention
- A projected **10% increase in medical insurance premiums**

We are also planning to hire a **Communal Responsibility Manager** to oversee our social justice and social action programs and support the many congregants who volunteer their time to lead these initiatives. In addition, we expect to add **one administrative position**, along with some restructuring of the current administrative staff, to strengthen our operational support.

SK then invited Judy Gallent (JG), Chair of the Nominating Committee, to present the Nominating Committee’s report.

JG reported that the following Officers were nominated to serve one-year terms ending in June 2026:

- Stacy Kanter – President
- Eileen Kleiman – Treasurer
- Judy Gallent – Assistant Treasurer
- Scott Alter – Vice President
- Scott Bernstein – Vice President
- Cara Lown – Vice President
- Suzanne Waltman – Vice President
- Peter Ehrenberg – Chair of the CRS Board of Trustees

JG further reported that Scott Bernstein was nominated for reelection to serve a third three-year term as Trustee.

JG noted that the following officers would continue to serve as Trustees during their proposed one-year officer terms:

- Stacy Kanter
- Eileen Kleiman
- Judy Gallent
- Scott Alter
- Cara Lown
- Suzanne Waltman
- Peter Ehrenberg

The motion was made and approved by the congregation.

JG then reported that the following incumbent Trustees were nominated for reelection to three-year terms ending in 2028:

Candice Braun
Janet Cohen
Adam Rosman

The motion was made and approved by the congregation.

JG then announced that **Bob Coven (BC)** had been nominated to serve as a new Trustee for a three-year term ending in 2028. Before the vote, **Cara Lown (CL)** introduced Bob Coven to the congregation:

CL shared that **BC** and his wife, **Joanne Zaiac** have long been active members of the CRS and RSS communities, where their three children attended and graduated from the Rodeph Sholom School. She described **BC** as a dedicated volunteer who has become increasingly involved in congregational life, including hosting a Havdalah gathering in the Hamptons and supporting various synagogue initiatives. **CL** noted that he brings professional experience in public finance and investment banking, as well as nonprofit leadership, including serving as Treasurer of the National Eating Disorders Association. Within CRS he has served on the Investment Committee, participated in Annual Appeal development outreach, contributed to the Membership and Engagement Council, and supported community service efforts such as Backpack Buddies. She expressed confidence that **BC** would be a valuable addition to the Board of Trustees and strongly recommended his nomination.

The motion was made and approved by the congregation.

SK then invited **Rabbi Ben Spratt (BHS), Cantor Shayna De Lowe (SDL) and Bob Coven (BC)** to come forward for a blessing.

BHS offered special thanks to **SK** for her leadership as President and recognized the support of her husband, **Eric Kornblau**, noting the important role that family members play in supporting those who serve in congregational leadership roles.

BHS then invited the congregation's officers, members of the Board of Trustees, and members of the Emeritus Board to join him at the front of the sanctuary for a blessing.

Rabbi Ben Spratt (BHS) and Cantor Shayna De Lowe (SDL) then **presented a Memorial to the Departed:**

Fred Rudd
Louis Bornstein
Fred Rothschild
Dick Fagan
Beth Holland

Alan Rosenthal
Arne Harkavy
Howard Kelzer
Sandy Bin
Richard Botnick
Hannah Altman

SK asked whether anyone had any special matters to bring up and then noted that it is possible that **amendments to the congregation's bylaws may be presented at the next Annual Meeting**. She explained that the congregation regularly reviews its governance structure to ensure it reflects best practices, and that any potential bylaw changes must be announced **one year in advance**, which is why the possibility was being mentioned at this meeting.

SK asks for someone other than a member of the Board of Trustees to make the following motion:

Resolved that all actions taken by the board since the last annual meeting of members, including all actions taken by the executive committee and nominating committee and each of such actions hereby is approved and ratified.

The motion was made and approved by the congregation.

SK invited **Rabbi Goldberg (DSG) and Cantor Stephano L. Iacono (SLI)** to join her for the **closing benediction**.

DSG and **SLI** delivered the benediction.

The **183rd Annual Meeting of Congregation Rodeph Sholom** was adjourned.