Gail Weinstein, President’s Address  
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As I embark upon the presidency of the Emanuel Synagogue I have hopes, dreams and expectations for our community; some will be realized, some may be tried and meet with failure, and some dreams may stay as just that - dreams unfulfilled.

Theodore Herzl said, "If you will it, it is no dream" and thus I “will “that each congregant find his/or her own place within the Emanuel. The portals of entry into the Emanuel are many; whether through learning opportunities - adult learning or participating in family life programs, whether it be finding comradarie and friendship through Sisterhood, or our Award winning Brotherhood; whether it be finding yourself at the time of your deepest loss surrounded by the caring and warmth of the Emanuel community as you gather with others to say Kaddish with the Minyonaires; whether it is through the support groups offered by the Emanuel to help you realize that you are not alone and there are others by your side to support you, welcome you, and truly care about you.

Join with the Chesed committee in performing acts of kindness, one hour of your time can mean so very much to those who find themselves alone. The B’Yadenyu committee widens the Emanuel’s outreach to areas of concern addressing our Greater Hartford community and beyond. Come to Shabbat services and stay for Kiddush - it is a time for friendship, kibbutzing, and sharing. But we can and must do better: how do we bring more of our members through our doors more often?

My aspirational goals for the Emanuel are to provide a diversity of offerings leading to broader congregational participation. One need not be at every event - some of us may never feel comfortable davening - but we must offer other substantive opportunities to help all of us to live Jewishly and pursue our individual and collective Jewish journeys.

When built, our suburban synagogues did not build a model of adult Jewish life - indeed once the rush to suburbia was on, synagogues became different from city synagogues. People joined as consumers: - bar mitzvah dates, kid’s schooling, and High Holiday seats - we allowed a consumer’s relationship to develop in our synagogues.

The question is how to transform the synagogue so that it becomes a model for adult Jewish life? I believe, here at the Emanuel, we have and continue to build a community beyond consumerism. At the Emanuel, on many levels, we have taken back the synagogue to what it should be, a spiritual home, where we, as congregants, and as lay leaders, are now performing the functions in our shul that we could not have imagined 15 years ago. Our lay leaders are conducting services, leading the minyan, and chanting from the bimah. We are singing the melodies rather than listening to a performance. We are taking back the heritage that is rightly ours, de-professionalizing Judaism, and melding it into a partnership between the clergy and ourselves. We are indeed a participatory congregation.

It is time for us to think creatively, to leverage our resources, to do and offer more-without additional costs. I am not looking for the one huge event that will attract our members for a one
time shot of Judaism. Rather, there are ideas we can share, learn from and implement - enhancing our mission. For example- how many of us actually enter the Emanuel ‘s Spivak Library? Probably not too many. Why then not bring the library up to our congregants? Within the not too distant future we will have a rolling cart outside our sanctuary doors- a lending library will come to you - as an additional service to our congregants –while not burdening our budget.

At the Emanuel, We consider ourselves a family - and so along with the dues billing you will find an insert requesting your birthdays and wedding anniversaries. We will encourage our members to come to the Emanuel to celebrate their milestones and be recognized with an alyah. This has no financial cost to the Emanuel yet our payoff will be a high grade from our congregants for responsiveness, welcoming and caring.

We must build upon what Alan parker has started – to develop further a cadre of committed lay Leaders - people who are engaged and will take upon themselves the responsibility for Emanuel’s well being and Emanuel ‘s future and -in the doing, new friendships may be formed.

Lay leaders who attend the daily minyan, are the backbone of our Synagogue- for by their being there - they insure that our congregants will find the necessary quorum to conduct services and say Kaddish. Not only do the Minyonaires nourish their own souls, but they are performing a mitzvah as well.

I envision a congregation that engages our members to have Jewish conversations in their homes. To facilitate such home based Jewish conversations, look for a Jewish conversation topic to be suggested in your It’s All Happening on Shabbat-e mails. Starting in the fall, each week we will suggest a topic which may ‘spur a Jewish conversation in your home. The topics will be suitable for both empty nesters and families with children. Herein again, our costs will be nil but the possibilities are endless. My sons, Alan and Philip who are with us this evening, can attest to the Jewish conversations we engaged in while they were growing up. These conversations were not for Passover only but rather were part of our familial structure. It is what we did and what we still do. The upshot of it, I am proud to say, is that I have 2 sons who are passionate about Israel and secure in their Judaism.

Look for a restylized e blast –and let us all blast out the news that the Emanuel will have a pre-school on Sunday mornings. Tell your friends and bring your children and grandchildren. We must learn to toot our own horn more. This year we are an award winning synagogue-USY Chapter #1, and our Brotherhood has been recognized as an award winner as well. Yet we don’t see much publicity about this in the general press. We must work harder to submit press releases extolling our accomplishments. The cost to our bottom line- nil in dollars and cents.

We must welcome innovation and experimentation. We must be unafraid to take risks, to toss balloons into the air. Some will take off and fly high while others may simply fall to the ground. We have the resources to make small changes that will enhance our spirit and our culture. We must move forward to develop a culture of assessment, reflection and improvement.
I look forward to working with Rabbi Small, Cantor Cohen, our Ritual Director, Mr. Pinchover our Educational Director, Judye Fox, and our good friend, Rabbi Lazowski to welcome change—both great and small. Our Executive Director, Laurie Leader has worked hard to envision for us, a new way in which the administrative wing of our synagogue may function. We thank her for her vision and she has set a new path upon which her successor may embark—all with a mindful eye of being responsive to our congregants, without incurring additional costs.

My expectation is that our Congregation build a closer relationship with Israel. Do we even realize how blessed we are to live at a time when there is a State of Israel? Perhaps we take it for granted, but as we gather in prayer (prayers that are 2000 years old) the longing for Zion has always been at the very core of our liturgy. At a time when the world seeks to isolate Israel and deem it a pariah nation, it is up to each of us to stand up for Israel—to read, to learn, to be Israel’s advocates and staunch defenders. We must “Teach our children diligently” so when they may be confronted by groups challenging Israel’s legitimacy they are able to rally around Israel armed with both knowledge and passion. We must encourage our congregants to visit Israel for it is truly intoxicating—You may travel the world over, but never will you feel as at home as you do in Israel. As our families visit Israel, let the children return to our school and tell others of what they saw, what they ate, who they met and most importantly how they felt.

Ok the big question for this evening is why did I take on the role of the presidency and all the responsibilities and headaches that I have been told this job will entail? My answer is quite simply here I am—heneni—To me, being Jewish requires that one step up to the plate and take responsibility. I believe that Israel, the people and the nation, can indeed be a light unto the nations. We have been given a moral code—the Torah—it is a self-contained guide to life. Rabbi Yochanan Bag Bag had said: “delve into the Torah and continue to delve in it—for everything is in it; look deeply into it, grow old and gray over it, and do not stir from it, for you can have no better portion than it.”

My expectation is that our Congregation act responsibly, for responsibility and obligation are the very essences of Judaism. As “the chosen people” we were never given any special rights. In America we are told that we have “rights” but Judaism instructs us that no—we have obligations and responsibilities—to ourselves, to one another and to G-d.

GIVING is at the very heart of our tradition, of our obligation and responsibility. We will continue to strive to build a culture of giving—something that has been lost along the way. Think back to a time when your grandfather was given an aliyah. To him and his father before him, this was the highest of honors. Chances are that your grandfather recognized the honor bestowed upon him by sending his shul a check—probably not large by today’s standards—but he understood that the honor came with an obligation and responsibility to support his shul.

And we shall all be called upon to support the Emanuel and to GIVE to the Emanuel…. Our building is large and has served us well for the past 50 plus years yet it is now in need of some TLC. Our sanctuary, so warm and inviting, has thankfully undergone much foot traffic and our seats are worn from use. (that’s the good news)!! But in a synagogue, SHABBY IS NOT CHIC!!! It is now time for us to spruce up, so that we and future generations may more fully enjoy our spiritual home.
As you came into the Emanuel this evening, you will have undoubtedly noticed that our parking lot and driveways are undergoing much-needed repairs. When Rosh Hashanah arrives you will find a new parking lot, one with improved lighting and devoid of potholes!!

To finance these necessary interior and exterior renovations we must embark upon a Capital Campaign… (You’ll be hearing more of the Capital Campaign in the months ahead.) This campaign, will require each of us to step up the plate and demonstrate REAL financial support for our Synagogue. We must be audacious - yet polite.

We shall all become BOTH solicitors, and givers - imaginers of what can be. The people who founded the Emanuel in 1919 were not better off financially than we are today, but they had passion. They realized that Judaism - its morals, its values, its teachings - are worth protecting, knowing, feeling and giving from one generation to the next. Our Menorah Society has the pledge of over 20 families to remember the Emanuel as part of their legacy. These families realize how much the Emanuel means to them and they desire to have a positive impact upon the future financial well being of our synagogue for generations yet to come. Please consider learning more about and joining our Menorah Society.

Think about it, for most importantly, Judaism is joyful. We love to celebrate - just look at our calendar and then marvel to think how our sages devised a calendar with no slide rule or computer. that still lives and helps to guide our comings and goings..

As I conclude a special thank-you to my husband, Ray (who served as president of the Emanuel from 1987-1989) for always being patient with my comings and goings. I am lucky to have an in- house counsel - one who always presents sound advice borne of his passion for our synagogue and love of Judaism. Who would have guessed that when we first met 45 years ago at UVM’s Hillel House, we would find ourselves here? But I should have known that ultimately our journey would bring us to this place, at this time. You see our first date was attending Rosh Hashanah services in September, 1966.

So I have begun to lay out a path, that we, together, as Emanuelites are about to embark upon.

Let us work together, to go and to grow from strength to strength.