

Adath Jeshurun Congregation  
2010 Annual Meeting  
June 17, 2010

Remarks by Incoming President  
Mike Greenstein

I am so honored to be standing here tonight, especially after growing up in this congregation and community. In the Talmud, Rabbi Eliezer instructs us to know before whom you stand, *da lifney me atah omed*, and here I am, standing before my family, friends and community as I accept the honor of becoming Adath's next president.

Several people have politely asked, "are you nuts for taking this on?" Well, the short answer is yes, I probably am, but the real reason is that like so many others, I am a product of this congregation and community. Now is my chance to give back and continue the work of so many others who have built such a wonderful congregation.

As a child, I attended Miss Dolly's summer camp as well as Adath's Sunday School and Shabbat Morning Program and the Minneapolis Talmud Torah. At services, I remember being mesmerized by Rabbi Goodman as he walked across the bema, his voice booming and his tallis flailing, and I was enchanted by the rich melodies of the choir and of Cantors Amsel and Kula. I remember marveling at the *aron kodesh*, the Holy Ark, and was convinced that when the doors were open and you looked up, you could see God looking down.

Life was simple back then because I was surrounded by family, friends, teachers, and clergy who cared about me and saw to it that my needs were being met. As I grew older and became a Bar Mitzvah, then married and became a father, the complexities of life became more real and I began to appreciate the value of this congregation and community. I am both gratified and humbled by it all and look forward to providing every congregant with equally wonderful experiences.

Tonight we mark the end of our 125<sup>th</sup> year—what a remarkable achievement. Through the years, our congregation has thrived because of the extraordinary work of so many people, many of whom are in this room. Their vision and dedication have created a strong and inspiring legacy that I am proud to help carry forward. Yet as we look ahead to the next 10, 20 or even 125 years, we face many challenges and tonight I'd like to share with you some of the issues our Board and congregation is grappling with:

- How does Adath foster a warm and welcoming community where no one feels like an outsider?
- How do we embrace inclusion and accessibility for congregants of all ages, backgrounds, abilities, and means?
- How do we cultivate an environment where Jewish education is valued and a priority that is shared by all?
- How do we ensure that the costs of being Jewish are within everyone's reach?
- How do we guarantee that no congregant goes hungry or is without shelter?

- How do we meet our responsibilities to Conservative Judaism, Israel, the U.S. and the rest of the world?
- How do we minimize our environmental footprint?
- How do we generate the funds needed to sustain our building and activities?
- How do we ensure we are a good employer and all of our staff is fairly compensated?
- How do we provide prayer services that are meaningful, vibrant, spiritual, and engaging?
- How do we make certain a minyan is at every service so that no one is prevented from saying Kaddish?
- How do we extend the energy and excitement of our Gan families into the years that follow?
- How do we instill in our B'nai Mitzvah the depth of what it means to be Jewish rather than just the mechanics of reciting a prayer?
- How do we inspire our teens to be lifelong committed Jews?
- How do we meet the diverse individual needs of everyone in our congregation: singles, families, intermarried's, GLBT's, seniors, empty nesters, the unemployed, the bereaved, the sick and so on?
- How do we ensure the success of the Adath Foundation and our community partners such as the Minneapolis Federation, Talmud Torah and the Day School?
- How do we commit ourselves to being a sacred, spiritually-relevant community where Jewish values, traditions and mitzvot guide our daily lives, bringing us closer to God and one another?

Clearly, there are no easy answers to these questions and they certainly won't all be resolved within my term, let alone lifetime. But, as Rabbi Tarfon teaches in Pirke Avot, "It's not your responsibility to finish the work, but neither are you free to abstain from it." My pledge to you tonight is to continue discussing these issues in a thoughtful and responsible way and to work together towards finding solutions that are right for this congregation.

Though this list is daunting, we have the capacity to successfully face these challenges. Note that I never once questioned the survival of Adath, or referred to divisive issues or to a building in utter disrepair. Nor did I speak of a complete lack of financial resources or of an inability to attract members, clergy or lay leaders. Unfortunately, many shuls today cannot make this claim. Yet we have the luxury of discussing not how to make it through another day, but rather how to transform ourselves from something good into something even better. That is the legacy we inherit after 125 years and one that we will continue carrying forward.

Rest assured, we do have difficult financial challenges and for the second year in a row our staff will be working without salary increases. We have also been forced to cut back certain activities and refrain from building up many important areas. In addition, we are more reliant than ever on successful fundraising.

Later this year, when you are asked to contribute to our annual L'Chaim campaign, please be as generous as your personal situation permits. This congregation is immensely blessed with generous donors of both large and small gifts and, for eight years in a row, we have managed ourselves to a balanced budget. This has not been easy, but is testament to our commitment to be fiscally responsible and live within our means.

Tonight, I would love nothing more than to tell you we have the resources to quickly and fully implement the bold statements Judy and Keri spoke about earlier. But we don't. That doesn't mean we shouldn't be any less passionate about our hopes and dreams; it just means it will take a little bit longer for them to come true.

These bold statements give us the roadmap to develop clear, actionable steps that we will implement over time and I encourage you to read and discuss them. They highlight our aspirations to be a warm and welcoming place where each of us feels connected to Judaism and to each other. They speak of the importance of Jewish education, teen involvement, Shabbat, Israel, and the Conservative Movement. The statements encourage us to utilize mentors and technology and they challenge us to reduce financial barriers and be intentional Jews. Taken together, isn't this precisely what we want from our synagogue?

Adath is blessed with extraordinary people who have the talent and expertise to turn these philosophical discussions into reality. Rabbi Kravitz, Rabbi Sadoff, Rabbi Kaufman and Hazzan Buckner continually bless this congregation with their spiritual guidance, lifelong learning, beautiful music, and inspirational leadership. Rabbi Kravitz in particular, has led this congregation exceptionally well for so many years, setting just the right tone and challenging each of us to be better Jews and human beings.

Our executive director, Bernie Goldblatt, together with our department heads and our amazing staff of teachers, administrators, maintenance, food service and office personnel work tirelessly to see that this congregation thrives. We are indeed blessed to have the caliber of staff and clergy we do to keep our building and operations functioning, our stomachs full, our minds educated, and our souls nourished, and I look forward to working with and learning from all of you.

As we face the challenges ahead, we rely not just on our staff and clergy, but also on many talented volunteers who generously contribute their time and expertise. Engaging so many first-class people in the activities of this congregation is inspiring. It pushes all of us to a much higher level and I am so pleased that our incoming Exec Board and Board of Trustees are filled with such high-quality, dedicated people.

I also want to acknowledge our past presidents. It's oftentimes rare for individuals who, after committing so much time and energy to a project, continue to be engaged. Fortunately, this congregation has a history of active past presidents who readily make themselves available to provide meaningful advice and I welcome your counsel and insight in the years ahead.

For me personally, I am so blessed to be traveling this journey with my incredible wife, Teri, my two wonderful children, Allie and Matthew, my parents, Betty & Jerry Greenstein, my in-laws, Marge & Ed Agranoff and the rest of my family and friends. Your support and encouragement is the bedrock from which I am continually (and sometimes undeservedly) lifted up and I love you and appreciate you all so very much.

So as we move forward, let us work together to face our challenges and to use our bold statements as our guide. Let us keep perspective on how blessed we really are and not

become overwhelmed or get bogged down in detailed minutiae or trivial disputes. Let us pledge to be a warm and welcoming community that educates and nurtures, bringing each of us closer to God and one another.

Let us be true to our name, Adath Jeshurun—community of the righteous, where we are emboldened by our traditions and values and conduct our affairs responsibly and with integrity, ever-mindful that we were created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in God's likeness. And let us pledge to fulfill our congregation's stated mission of being a progressive, egalitarian and sacred community dedicated to Torah, Avodah and Gemilut Hasadim.

I thank you for this special honor and the awesome responsibility you have entrusted to me.