



---

# CONGREGATION KEHILLATH ISRAEL

---

Annual Report 2022

JUNE 15, 2022

## Senior Rabbi's Report

Striving to meet daily spiritual needs over the past year for our KI family continues to be an honor.

It's as inspiring as ever to witness how members of our community have stepped up to lead. Worthy of particular appreciation again this year is the leadership of Larry Cohen who continues to masterfully convene and coordinate online and in-person services.

Torah learning has also thrived at KI this year, with Rabbi Starr's midday Mishna to Leann Shamash's precious poetic gems, along with new visits from Rav/Hazzan Scott Sokol, as vital components of our already busy educational offerings.

As we've grown our in-person service offerings, we continue to see significant expansion of Davening leadership both on Shabbat mornings and as part of daily services.

Teen takeovers expanded in frequency and reach this year and promise to continue to take center stage in the coming years.

Festival celebrations have remained robust as have our Israel engagement, our Tzedek and Hesed energies, and our communication upgrades.

Finally, we're most excited to be taking our KI Campus Vision to the next level as we continue to be a pacesetter for North American Jewish life.



Rabbi William Hamilton

## President's Report

Despite a second wave of Covid, KI remained open for shul business this past year, and actually expanded the number of in-person minyans. Shabbat service attendance grew and backlogged B'nei Mitzvahs now fill the calendar. Familiar practices like the Torah procession have been renewed, and our Kiddush lunches have been revived. On the cultural/programming side, KI Reads now meets in-person, we've hosted book talks in the Sanctuary (Atomic Anna) and a movie/director talk in the Social Hall (Late Marriage). Day-by-day, the campus is returning to life.

To accelerate, deepen and broaden our offerings, we were fortunate to hire Anna Winestein as KI's new Program Director this spring. Anna brings a wonderful package of scholarship, entrepreneurship, creativity, energy, and warmth. Working with our Executive Director, Barnet Kessel and Office Manager, Jodie Parmer, she has already

had a powerful impact on not just events planning and management, but on communications and organization as well.

Not only has our staff expanded, but our community has too. Through Rabbi Hamilton and Bonney-Cohen's outreach and personal touch, KI's in-person and virtual service and programming offerings, our website's information and inquiry functionality, KI's pre-school and religious school, and our new sustaining share membership model, membership units are up by 36 over the past two years. New members run the spectrum from young adults, young married couples, young families, empty nesters, and seniors (many from our campus partner 2Life).

More members and our new membership model have led to a year over year increase in revenues from sustaining share contributions. In addition, KI was fortunate to refinance its mortgage at very favorable rates reducing our interest costs. Thus, despite two years of a pandemic with the attendant reduction in physical campus traffic, and our ongoing infrastructure and staffing investments, KI's finance's remain sound.

It is also with sadness and pride, that we wish Rabbi Elizabeth Bonney-Cohen and her family well as she leaves us at the end of this month to take a position near her parents in Kansas City. "Rabbi EBC", as she has been affectionately known, started with us as a rabbinic intern and quickly became so integrated and beloved that she came on as Assistant Rabbi. She loved working with people of all ages, but was especially excited to spark and sustain a love of yiddishkeit in young adults. With her innovative work with BaseBoston, she introduced KI to many who otherwise would have been intimidated walking through our doors and was a source of spiritual strength to hundreds during the darkest and loneliest days of covid. We were blessed to have her within our community and look forward to watching her guide, enrichen, and expand her new/old Kansas City community.

In summary, we're still standing, and the cold lonely light of Covid is fading away.

L'KI,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gordon Bennett". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Gordon Bennett

### **Executive Director's Report**

As I am writing this report, I am reminded that I have been KI's Executive Director for 2 years almost to the day. During this past year, I enjoyed the benefit of already "experiencing" a full KI calendar, however, neither of the past two years have been close to typical. Nonetheless, I am immensely proud of the work this community continues to do in terms of keeping each other connected spiritually, socially, and in communal work. As your Executive Director, I continue to strive to keep the business

side of KI operating at efficiencies in support of these connections and work I just mentioned.

Excellent staffing is a large part of those efficiencies. This past year, we welcomed Jodi Parmer as Office Manager and she has been an enormous value add with her blend of friendliness and professionalism. We are fortunate to continue to have Lara Chicofsky part of the office team from halfway around the world! And the recent addition of Anna Winestein as KI's Director of Programs already has moved us closer to realizing the goal to be the central address for Jewish life and culture in Greater Boston for everyone.

Behind the scenes, I am always looking for ways to support KI's work with better systems and processes. To me, success is often measured in improvements that are both seamless and unseen.

Our plans for the upcoming year include a refocus on fostering the individual campus partner relationships for benefit of the entire whole, such as the recently established campus Shabbat family programs.

As we transition from one organizational year to the next, I am honored to be part of the KI community and grateful for your continued warm welcome of my family. Wishing health and strength to all of us in the coming year.

Regards,



Barnet Kessel

### **Assistant Rabbi's Report**

This year presented many challenges unique from the first year of the pandemic. Last year was consumed by the challenge of pivoting to the virtual world and figuring out ways to sustain our community from afar, while holding massive grief and loneliness. This second year of the pandemic brought more (and much needed!) opportunities to gather in person, but the many surges in infections rates meant that we were constantly reevaluating risk assessment, restructuring programming at the last minute, and working to engage community members with very different tolerances for virtual and in-person offerings.

Despite these challenges, Base BSTN engaged almost 300 unique participants, through over 1,400 touch points (Shabbat meals, Torah learning, holiday programming, peer support, and rabbinic care), including 422 one-on-one pastoral meetings. The pandemic has taken a particular toll on the mental health of these young adults, many of whom are single and experiencing crisis-level loneliness as a result of the sustained

isolation. They have demonstrated powerful resiliency, and they are eager to foster deep connection to each other, to Torah, and to Jewish tradition.

While generally in the same age demographic, parents of young children have had incredibly different needs during this time. Unlike their single peers who struggle with isolation, these parents never have time to be alone with themselves, let alone to find a spiritual center. The pandemic has put their life in a pressure-cooker, increasing the stress level of their professional and personal lives in a grueling way. Many of them have children too young to be vaccinated, so although they long to have support and community, public gatherings (such as Shabbat morning davening) come with added anxiety. In March, Jodie helped me send a pastoral note along with a copy of "Nurture the Wow" by Danya Ruttenberg to 150 households as a way of reminding these families that KI is here to support them and welcome them back whenever they are ready to return. The response to this was tremendous. So many people shared with me how meaningful it was to be seen in their struggle. In order to ensure a warm welcome when they do enter KI again, I also recently enhanced the back "Playing is Praying" corner of the Sanctuary, filling it with a lot of quiet and engaging toys for all ages to feel invited into the space.

As I wrap up my time at KI, I'm filled with a sense of gratitude for all this community has been for myself and my family. I feel blessed to have worked alongside so many inspiring lay leaders and professional staff who have all been such important teachers to me. It has been my honor to have this community call me Rabbi.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth Bonney Cohen".

Elizabeth Bonney Cohen

## **Membership: Shari Lecker**

This membership year it was wonderful to see our KI Community again come together to enjoy shared moments of prayer, learning, and celebration.

Our Kehilla grew by almost 40 new member households across all ages and stages- from BaseBTN to our neighbors at 2Life/Brown House, and many in between. The Sustaining Share model was felt to be a more transparent and approachable path to KI Membership.

We hope to be able to sustain this model over coming years (pun intended!)

Many new members have quickly embraced and been embraced by the community- supporting daily minyan, reading torah, joining our KI Chesed Team, and taking leadership positions.

KI LotsaHelpingHands continued to meet member needs through meal deliveries and reaching out to members glad to receive an uplifting visit or phone call.

Membership worked with the KI Medical Committee in the first half of the year to ensure our community could move forward with returning to in-person services and programming. It's wonderful to see friendships form around the kiddush tables on shabbat!

KI READS celebrated its 3rd year and held two in-person Author Evenings.

New Member Welcome Events were held Fall 2021 with Simona DiNepi of the MFA and Spring 2022 at the KI Cornerstone 100 Celebration.

Looking forward to the 5783 KI Membership year, belonging@KI 2022-2023, being one of continued growth, strength, and connection for our KI Community!

## **Administration: Jennie Roffman**

My goals for this year in Administration centered around supporting our Executive Director, Barnet Kessel, as he envisioned and began to build a strong, functional main office staff. I am deeply grateful to Barnet for his tireless work this year on behalf of KI. He was met by obstacles around every turn as COVID continued to pose a huge challenge to programming, and the office was understaffed for much of the year, but he faced every new hurdle with humor and energy. He is a tremendous asset to KI and I know we're all thankful he's on our team.

We were delighted to welcome Jodie Parmer as our Office Manager early this year, and she has also been a huge asset and a wonderful addition to the staff. More recently we filled the role of Director of Programs with Anna Winestein, who has ascended a steep learning curve quickly and energetically - we're delighted she's here and looking forward to building a strong, vibrant calendar of programs for our community, both around our congregants' s'machot and more broadly, in the year to

come. We continue to be grateful to Ira Cohen, our Facilities Manager, Craig Byer, and Lara Chicofsky (still remotely from Eastern Europe!) for their hard work and dedication, as well as all the volunteers who support our administrative team regularly with a broad range of essential functions.

Another goal for the year was to build back a strong culture of regular communication between and among the senior staff. We have worked hard on this, and while it remains a challenge to find times to meet weekly that work for everybody, we have arrived at a place where we have a critical mass of senior staff meeting regularly every week - we will continue to build on this in the coming year, as it is crucial for all the different corners of KI to feel coherent and collaborative.

In the coming year I will work with Barnet to shift human resources functions, especially periodic performance reviews, from a mostly lay-led endeavor to one overseen by the Executive Director. I will continue to participate in weekly senior staff meetings, helping to facilitate communication and collaboration across KI's various departments, and supporting the senior staff members' shared objectives for their work in our community. And the Administration team will continue to look forward, developing and implementing systems, policies and practices which enable our community to gather safely and celebrate, learn, and daven together alongside our campus partners.

### **Development: Lauren Pyes**

During my second year as a Board member, I continued to develop an annual giving program that is robust, responsive, and primed to evolve with KI's needs.

At the core of these efforts was re-engaging previous donors. Their support is critical to the long-term health of KI and helps form a financial baseline which KI can operate from.

Looking to the year ahead, the priority will be growing the pool of those who support KI philanthropically. This will be done via a multi-pronged approach that includes creating streamlined and expanded processes to engage with potential donors, thanking those who do give, and putting together a larger fundraising committee.

### **Advisory: Jill Altshuler**

During my third year as VP at Large, I continued my focus on evaluation – both of lay leadership and clergy – as well as contributed to projects relating to membership, development and strategy. I designed and implemented a first-ever Board of Trustees self-assessment, to improve board effectiveness, and conducted a second annual evaluation of Rabbi Hamilton, codifying the approach so it can be used in an ongoing way in the future.

### **Early Childhood Education: Aliza Saivetz Glasser**

KI happily welcomed children ages 5 and under back into the building this year.

Under the leadership of Lisa Redisch, the Director of Family Engagement, KI provided ample opportunities for our youngest members to be part of the larger community. In addition to family programming, Nitzanim (for ages 0-5) regularly met in person throughout this past year. Additionally, we were also pleased to provide a welcoming space for our youngest congregants in the sanctuary during Shabbat. As the pandemic continues to wane, in-person programming for both Shabbat and Holidays will only expand.

The Judge Lewis and Mrs. Mildred Goldberg Preschool welcomed 47 students for the 2021-2022 School year. Pandemic safety measures continued to keep classrooms on the smaller side, however, the school is eager to increase enrollment for the upcoming school year and is once again offering a summer program. This past year Elyssa Schick, the Director of Early Childhood Education, also expanded the administrative team of the school by welcoming an Assistant Director. Lastly, the preschool is pleased to announce a return to 9am-5pm programming for the 2022-2023 school year.

### **Programming/Events: Anna Winestein**

Having started in KI in early March 2022, I can only report on 4 months of activity; however, the pace and reach of programs is definitely picking up. For the rest of 2022 and into early 2023, as I both continue to become familiar with the annual cycle of KI, and as the world continues to lurch around different phases of pandemic disruption and concern, I envision doing a variety of different programs (talks, readings, concerts, screenings, spirits/wine tastings, dance nights, yoga and fitness classes) to test out the logistics and marketing, grow outside audiences and develop repeatable processes. However, I do not believe it makes sense to map a thorough strategy and distinct programming series until I have had the opportunity to gather more data points and insights. I believe that I will be able to start doing that in the second quarter of 2023, so as to have a detailed roadmap in place for the July 2023-June 2024 year.

In terms of internally focused social events, I've helped organize and carry out the Suddah on the second night of Purim in March (together with Talia Laster), which drew about 40 people (a good mix of kids and adults) for food and cocktails, music and singing, as well as Lag Ba(r)Omer for 75 or so adults and children (together with Barnet, who valiantly manned the grill alone). Another KI community event that has had good response is the outing to the Red Sox's Jewish Heritage Night coming up on June 22. The culmination of these is the Cornerstone 100 Event on Sunday June 12th, honoring the historic building's birthday, which I initiated and which looks to welcome 60 or more people to celebrate the milestone with music, speeches and birthday cake.

For outwardly focused programming, I programmed and carried out a film screening and Q&A with an Israeli producer and editor on April 10th with the support of the Israeli

Consulate and presence of the Deputy Consul that attracted nearly 100 sign ups, and 70 actual attendees. It also received press coverage in The Jewish Journal. Another collaboration with the Consulate is currently in the works for July 28th featuring a jazz quartet playing Israeli and Jewish music transposed into jazz, for which the Consulate is providing significant support. On May 24 we had an in-person KI Reads event in collaboration with the Brookline Booksmith, featuring Rachel Barenbaum; another in-person book event is slated for July 12th featuring journalist and author Mel Laytner. On April 27th we hosted a Yom Ha'Shoah concert organized by the Terezin Foundation with support from the Brookline Interfaith Clergy Association that received attendance of over 100. We were not deeply involved in the planning of this event, but based on the productive working relationship I had with Terezin Foundation's director Mark Ludwig, the plan is that next year Terezin will work directly with KI on developing and carrying out the program. June 26th KI will present a classical chamber music concert featuring a piano, clarinet and cello trio, which can both serve as a program and a showcase for our spaces to raise visibility among the classical music community and potentially encourage other groups to reach out for collaboration.