



# AGUDAS ACHIM CONGREGATION

קהילת אגודת אחים

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*Fair Share letter 2023*  
*Rabbi Esther Hugenholtz*

Dear Congregational Family,

Every year when I sit down to write the letter accompanying the Fair Share form, I re-read last year's letter. It's an interesting snapshot where we get to reflect on what has changed over the last twelve months. Last year's letter tone was solemn; we were starting to come out of the pandemic and COVID still cast a pall over the wellbeing of our community.

While I have stopped pretending to know what will happen with COVID, there is no denying that the mood feels lighter this year. We are moving with the times, to a 'new normal', each at our own pace, each with our own emotions. We can look back on a year with successful innovating programming and engagement. Few things gave us as much exuberant joy as having in-person High Holiday services. Our Rosh haShanah reception was a smash hit. As we kicked off 5783, we went from strength-to-strength: we had a Hanukkah Bazaar, live music at our Hanukkah Party, a successful Purim and Second Seder and a unique and vibrant Urban Shavu'ot Retreat. We paralleled alternative services, catering to the different needs of the community, and rallied to *tikkun olam* causes. Senior brunches are gathering the community in warm-hearted ways and our membership is growing. We are developing our congregational life in many different directions: seniors and families, LGBTQ individuals and children's education, cultural Judaism and spiritual engagement; from yoga to Introduction to Judaism classes, Warm Up America to gardening, pickleball, book club and much more.

If I could have taken you along our synagogue's participation at the annual Iowa City Pride Parade, you would have felt the palpable joy. In a time when many of our human rights are being questioned, including the right of who we can love and how we can be in the world, our synagogue delighted in showing compassion and allyship as a faith community. It cemented the bonds between our congregation and the

*(Continued on page 2)*



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## קהילת אגודת אחים

*(Continued from page 1)*

Iowa City community. It was affirming for us to march confidently with our synagogue banner, to feel connected to the wider world while at once deeply rooted in our Jewish culture, tradition and faith.

My pitch as your spiritual leader in this year's Fair Share form is less solemn and more joy-filled. We have weathered a great storm and it is time to steer our ship to clearer waters, with a stronger sense of our common purpose and mission as a congregational family. Please support us for the good works we are able to do: combatting isolation and building friendship, drawing on the wisdom and leadership of our elders, inspiring the next generation of Jewish youth in Iowa, pursuing justice, offering deep learning, spiritual growth and celebrate the many ways we are invited into being Jewish. The longer I serve as your rabbi, the more apparent it becomes what a blessing we are and can be to our corner of the world. We are unique, vibrant, diverse—and ready to face the future.

I am grateful and humbled that your support allows us to face it together. Now more than ever.

*L'chaim*, to life!

*Shalom uv'rachah*, peace and blessing,  
Rabbi Esther Hugenholtz