July 17, 2020

Dear Rockdale Temple Family,

As the New Year 5781 quickly approaches, we are deep in preparations for the High Holy Days. Given the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic, our leadership, clergy, professional staff, and Safety and Security Committee chair have been working together to develop a plan for this year's High Holy Days that is safe and in keeping with our Jewish Values.

After much research and careful deliberation, we have reached an agreement, including a unanimous vote by the Board of Directors, that this year's High Holy Days services will be held online. This decision was guided by our core Jewish values of inclusion and pikuach nefesh, saving human life.

COVID-19 is a highly contagious virus. It can infect anyone, and it has killed 138,000 Americans (as of July 16, 2020) from infants to the very aged. There is no vaccine and no definitive treatment. Many of us fall into one or more of the categories that puts us at higher risk of getting severe disease if infected. And all of us have the ability to spread the virus to someone else. The only way to reduce the spread of COVID-19 is by reducing exposure to the virus. We know that social distancing, wearing masks, frequent hand washing, and sanitizing surfaces all reduce exposure and spread, but we also know that these measures do not adequately combat spread of the virus in gatherings that includes singing, like our High Holy Days services. Communal singing, central to our worship together, is considered a super-spreader activity. It is not safe or keeping with our values to share a meaningful High Holy Days experience together in person. Instead, providing our High Holy Days services for 5781 online will be most inclusive, protective of our individual and collective health and safety, fiscally responsible, and logistically feasible.

Observing the High Holy Days virtually allows us to experience the full range of services, learning, and programming without the significant limitations COVID-19 places on in-person gatherings. Our main services, complete with the music and liturgy we know and love, will be broadcast from Rockdale's Messer Chapel. We will also offer special services, activities, and engagement materials for young children, youth, and families. We will hear the call of the shofar and participate together in tashlich the casting away of sins. We will provide opportunities for congregants to meet and greet one another, study together, and celebrate the New Year - all virtually. Rest assured that we will be reaching out to those congregants who need technological support and resources to ensure that this experience is truly inclusive.

While this decision may come as a relief for many, it also carries a sense of frustration and loss for all of us. We yearn to be together in person, to see one another's faces, to hear each other's voices in prayer and song. We look forward to gathering in person as soon as it is safe, healthy, and inclusive of all. Until then we are grateful to be able to observe the coming Days of Awe together online as a holy community, trusting that this too shall pass. We will continue to share with you our exciting plans and unique opportunities for experiencing the High Holy Days

5781. We thank our community for your understanding, care for one another, and for your dedication to our Jewish

values.

Rabbi Meredith Kahan Acting Senior Rabbi

John G. Cobey President

Laura Wright Executive Director

Dr. Edward Herzig MD, FACP, MACR Safety & Security Committee