

Temple Beth El

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May 1, 2017

Dear Temple Beth El Member:

Almost two years ago, the Temple Beth El Board began the process of looking at the Temple's dues structure to assess how the current structure was working and to decide whether some type of alternative structure might better meet our community's needs and objectives. We reviewed a substantial amount of literature on the topic and read reports from other congregations. We also heard from more than 50 of you – at seven house meetings we organized last year. Our goals at those meetings was to learn from you your thoughts about how to meet the financial needs of the synagogue and what makes TBE a vibrant and welcoming Jewish community with a meaningful future.

The Board has decided to **implement a new system of support** that is based on individual commitments by member households in lieu of the current fixed dues membership structure. Some things will *not* change:

- We will be sending out **commitment letters in June** seeking your financial support of TBE for the fiscal year ahead that runs from July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018.
- You can make your payments at **one time or in monthly installments** – by using your credit or debit card.

Terumah, Not Dues

Currently, the Board sets the dues structure based on the number of adults in the member household (\$720 for one adult, \$1,200 for two adults/family), and asks members who may need dues relief to request it of our Treasurer.

Instead, you will be asked to make a firm financial commitment by June 20, 2017 to the Temple for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2017. Your financial commitment to TBE will be ***your self-defined "terumah" or offering***. There will not be a set fee established by the Board. We believe that this ***terumah*** approach will help meet TBE's annual costs of operating the synagogue while reducing the need for additional appeals throughout the year.

How do I determine what my terumah should be?

If the Board is not setting the dues amount, how will I know how much I should contribute? We believe that there are several factors for you to consider in setting your ***terumah***.

First, it is important to know that the Temple's annual operating budget — the amount needed for Rabbi and staff salaries, utilities, insurance, religious school expenses, etc., — is about \$166,000 per year. Considering our current number of member households and other regular sources of support (Hebrew School, Yizkor book, wine tasting event, yahrzeit gifts, etc.), the Temple's resource needs translate into what we are calling a ***sustaining terumah*** level of about \$1,650 per household or family, or \$137 per month

(based on the need and the number of members we had this past year—about 85 households. See the attached guidelines).

The second factor that you need to consider is your household's financial resources and abilities. We hope that you consider your annual support of TBE to be either a core living expense or one of your primary discretionary expenses. We recognize that some member households will not be able to contribute at the **sustaining terumah** level. We want you to contribute at a level that is meaningful to you. And some of you may be able and willing to contribute to TBE above that **sustaining terumah** level.

In looking at options to our current system, the Board considered, but ultimately rejected, assigning dues assessments based solely on each member household's income level. While the Board rejected this option, we believe that the income guidelines used by other temples can provide some useful guidance to congregants in assessing what your **terumah** should be. *As a point of reference*, we are enclosing the income guidelines and suggested giving levels used by Congregation Beth El in Bangor.

Why this approach?

In deciding to go down this new road to support our Temple, the Board was guided by two basic principles:

- First is our belief that people should not be excluded from our community based on their ability to pay a membership fee. We believe that by expanding our membership base, the Temple will be both spiritually and financially stronger.
- Second is our belief in you, the members of the Temple Beth El community. In many ways, the adoption of the **terumah** methodology is an act of faith. The Board ultimately concluded that when given the flexibility and responsibility presented by this new system, each member of this congregation would do the right thing and continue to support Temple Beth El so that it will be here for the Central Maine Jewish community today and in the years to come.

Should you have questions about the new **terumah** support system, please feel free to contact one of us either by phone or e-mail. The Board will also be available to answer questions on this topic at our **annual meeting on Sunday June 4th**. We look forward to seeing you there.

Sincerely, and on behalf of the Temple Beth El Board of Directors,

Anya Goldey, President anyafgoldey@gmail.com

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