

New London Synagogue
Chair's Annual Report 2020 - 2021

I am delighted to present this report of the third and final year as your Chair.

This report covers the period from our last AGM in September 2020 to this AGM in July 2021.

In effect I am outlining the position which I am delighted (and a little sad) to pass on to my worthy successor and very able council and fantastic professional staff. I could not have anticipated in 2018 the extent to which we have all been tested by the pandemic, but I think it has revealed strength and breadth in our community and opened up some really positive possibilities for the future.

In practical terms our activities and energy have been divided between the physical, the online and the hybrid world. (I'll let the Rabbis give the spiritual analogy). In the building we have perfected multiple versions of covid safe worship, meetings and even cupcake kiddushes. We have become expert in reading the runes and interpreting the guidelines. We have positioned and repositioned guide ropes and Perspex screens and succeeded to create an environment that was safe, practical and welcoming. Once we were able, we hosted shabbat services, Bar and Bat mitzvahs, Auf Raufs and the feeling of coming together as a community in a physical space. We also managed to grow our cheder numbers by 15% and for the last four weeks of the school year returned to the building culminating in a prize day including parents in the Sanctuary.

Of course, for most of the year, Cheder was online, and we received really positive feedback from parents about how motivated the staff and even the children were despite the challenges that the technology presented. In that online domain we had noticeable success with our Wednesday evening salons, our Kabbalat Shabbat and Havdalah dependent on seasonal Shabbat timings. Weekday Shacharit continued its strong showing. Overall, the online space allowed us to reach thousands of people nationally and internationally while allowing our members to feel a sense of participation and community. We have even brought funerals and Shivas into the online realm, which has been heart-breaking but also heart-warming. Rabbi Natasha and Chazan Stephen have been instrumental (vocal) in bringing humanity to this artificially constituted space.

We are all now experimenting with hybrid working where some people come together physically while others dial-in. Our Masorti way has once again offered a stimulating and creative context to examine these questions, particularly given the restrictions on the use of technology on shabbat and Yom Tovim. We engaged in extensive lay and rabbinic debate over the question of livestreaming shabbat services. From a community perspective the possibility of doing a Shabbat service without leaving your home was exciting but also presented a threat. Why bother schlepping to synagogue if you don't have to!? I've been pleased to note how many have returned to the building as soon as that was possible. But Rabbi Jeremy demonstrated his unique mastery of Halachah and broadcasting technology to innovate a live stream from the building that could be enjoyed without breaking shabbat.

Once the pandemic is over my successor and members will have to consider whether to turn that technology off. We have seen clear benefits for grandparents abroad being able to watch live their beloved grandchildren being called to the Torah (and we had a record 26 BMs this year). Whatever the future I have been proud of how our community has responded. We have learned a lot and emerged stronger.

Council and the professional staff led by Phil, have succeeded to deliver two important changes. One has been the move to the Jewish Joint Burial Scheme (JJBS) after many years with the Western. This has raised complex financial, logistical, and emotional challenges and I am very pleased with the outcome and grateful to my predecessor as Chair, Ian Green, who began those conversations. We have also managed to transfer our back-office contact and financial operations to 'ShulCloud'. This has been mostly behind the scenes and it therefore gives me pleasure to thank our treasurer, Brian Linden, and our former council member Ellen Trager, for their monumental work on this.

You'll recall from my last address that a special process was required to allow me to serve my third year given my previous long service on council. I'm pleased that this process will now be incorporated into a new and improved constitution that is better fit for purpose. I'm confident that my successor will bring this forward at an EGM later in the year.

As I hand over the reins, I am confident that New London finds itself in a strong and stable position. Members showed extraordinary generosity in response to our appeal last year and we have balanced the books despite the lack of in person contact. We do and will continue to need further funds to deliver the amazing work the Shul does every year. We also need more volunteers so do give your time to help our wonderful community.

I began my time as chair around the time of my father's funeral and my eldest daughter's bat mitzvah. We have just celebrated number two daughter's BM although the party is still pending. My family has supported me through these last three years, and I have felt proud to have been the chair through such tumultuous times. Hope to see you over a fish-ball soon.

Yours sincerely,

Nathalie Glaser

Chairman