

On May 25, 2020, Minneapolis police killed George Floyd, sparking protests in cities and towns across the United States. During the trial of Derek Chauvin for his murder, another unarmed Black man, Daunte Wright, was shot and killed by Amy Palmer. Four days later, a video was released of a Chicago police officer, Eric Stillman, shooting 13 year-old Adam Toledo as he raised his empty hands. We are in the midst of a national reckoning on race, with many American Jews joining the call to reconsider whether they too have contributed to unjust racial structures and, closer to home, whether they have sidelined or marginalized a small but growing community of Jews of color. We believe Beth El needs to join this conversation.

Beth El is a pluralistic and diverse congregation that seeks to create a *kehillah*, a Jewish village, molding responsible citizens of our local communities and the larger world. Beth El is a *beit kneset*, a *house of gathering* where people feel a sense of belonging and want to be involved; a *beit midrash*, a *house of learning* that encourages its members to explore, to challenge and to grow; and a *beit tzedek*, a *house of righteousness* committed to the principle of *K'lal Yisrael* reaching out to all Jews, and to the principle of *tikkun olam*, which seeks to make the world whole through social and political action.

In light of our community's and nation's reckoning with racial injustice and inequality and recognizing our shared commitment to the principle of *tikkun olam*, we pledge to undertake a year of committee and congregation-wide programming focused on racial justice and equity that provides opportunities for learning, reflection, discussion, training, and action.

What Does that Mean for the Congregation?

In the spirit of this commitment, the synagogue has formed a Racial Justice Task Force. The Task Force will offer congregation-wide programming to create space for congregants to begin these difficult conversations, together and under the guidance of experienced facilitators. Further, in the spirit of immersive learning and practice, the Board of Beth El Synagogue and Rabbi Greyber are charging each committee to use a racial justice lens in planning and executing the coming year's activities; the Task Force will provide support. Race or racism need not be the primary subject of every conversation; the goal is to thoughtfully consider how race and racial justice do and can affect the work that we do, and the lives we live.

Racial justice work is both broad and deep. We have congregants of color; it is our commitment to thoughtfully consider how to create a truly inclusive space for worship and fellowship. We are a part of the larger community affected by issues of race; it is our commitment to carefully consider how Beth El listens to, learns from, and contributes to equity and success in our larger community. We are a diverse congregation existing in a multicultural and complicated world.

The Plan

Racial Justice And Committee Planning: Summer 2021

The RJTF partners with board committees, staff, and social groups to help with the development of a calendar that reflects a focus on racial justice.

Racial Justice and Reflection Kick-Off: September-October 2021

Drawing on the themes of reflection and renewal that are inherent in the High Holidays, we will kick off our year with a focus on racial equity and opportunities for community introspection. We encourage all congregants to join.

High Holiday sermons by the rabbi, Board president, and youth staff will include discussion of these issues. Readings, videos, and other resources will be provided for congregants to begin their personal learning and reflection. The Racial Justice Task Force will serve as a resource for selecting readings and providing information from the assessment to support the development of the sermons. As part of the kick-off, the Task Force will disseminate a survey that will allow congregants to share their beliefs and goals about race and racial equity.

Congregation-Wide Listening and Learning: September-October 2021

The Racial Justice Task Force will plan community-wide events, including a session on how to have difficult and brave conversations and a “level-setting” conversation that will help us begin this work on the same page. Additionally, the Task Force will provide resources for individuals to continue learning and thinking about racial justice.

Committee Programming, Communications, and Operations: November 2021-March 2022

Beth El committees, social groups, and staff will focus a minimum of 25% of their programming, communications, and operations using a racial justice lens. We hope that where possible, groups will exceed this bar by using a racial justice lens even when the topic isn't racial justice. Programming could include movies, discussion groups, book groups, study sessions, social action events, or visiting scholars. Communications could include messages from the rabbi, mailings, Beth El's social media, the bulletin, or the weekly dvar Torah. Operational decisions could include choices of vendors or investment strategies. Individual committees and relevant staff will make these decisions with support of the Racial Justice Task Force. Talmud Torah and youth programming will also participate in this year of learning and reflection.

Taking Stock and Next Steps: May 2022-June 2022

The Racial Justice Task Force will facilitate at least one reflection session on what comes next for individuals, the Beth El community, and the role that Beth El can/should take in the larger community. The Task Force will also distribute a year-end survey for comparison to the initial data gathered in the fall.

These are complex conversations with which we must approach with humility and grace. And, yet, they are of great importance to our future as both a congregation and community.

For more information on the Racial Justice Initiative or the Task Force, please contact Rachel Bearman at rbearman@mebtel.net