

Building Community...One Chicken Dinner at a Time!



(Note: Challah

baked by Bryn Biren)

Bryn Biren, Community Leader

I have lived in Staten Island, New York my entire life. I love my community and have worked throughout my life to find solutions for people and to make interpersonal connections.

The Covid pandemic caught everyone off guard. We have had to put past practices on the shelf and create new alternatives. I have spent a lifetime worshiping at Temple Israel Reform

Congregation. Having Shabbat (Sabbath) dinners was nothing unusual for us. It would not be unusual for 100 people to gather for dinner on a Friday night in our building's social hall. But what do you do when people cannot be together?

Having Zoomed for the past seven months it was time to take a chance and try something new. I will admit that it was a long shot but we took a chance.

I contacted a diner that has a number of locations on Staten Island and arranged for people in different 9 zip codes to receive complete chicken dinners. Between the hours of 4:00-6:00 PM our congregants were told to be at their homes ready to receive their meals. The dinners consisted of fresh baked challah (bread), salad, roasted chicken and stuffing, mixed vegetables and seven layer cake for dessert.

At 6:30 PM our Rabbi, Michael Howald, admitted each of us to the ZOOM gathering where we blessed the wine and challah, heard lovely songs from our student cantor and then, by random computer selection, we were placed in break-out rooms for the next 90 minutes. What evolved was intimate conversation, socializing and laughter. I actually think that it was more intimate than it has been inside the synagogue. At 8:00 PM we were all brought together for Friday night services.

Yes, there were a couple of snafus. One couple did not receive their dinners. The diner rectified the situation within 30 minutes. A second couple was missing a salad and a dessert. Again, within 30 minutes the problem was resolved.

What you must know is that it was worth every bit of effort. People felt connected, energized and they are hoping that this will be the beginning of a trend.

Do you know what I am thinking? Perhaps we can organize ZOOM THANKSGIVING!!!! After all, where will I be going this year? Maybe I will be giving thanks with my Temple family.

Give something like this a try in your local community. People need connection now. Take the lead and act!



Bryn cooking with her granddaughter, Genevieve Lopez (12). [Pre-covid]

About the Author: *Bryn Biren was born and raised in Staten Island, NY. She graduated from the George Washington University, Washington, D.C. and earned a Master's degree at Richmond College. She was an elementary school teacher for 34 years, serving as the Project Arts coordinator for her school. Bryn and her husband, Richard (a retired administrative law judge) are the parents of two children and have five grandchildren.*

She has spent her life involved in community activities. Bryn has served as the past President of Temple Israel and has been on its Board of Trustees since 1989. She has been on the Board of Trustees of the JCC of Staten Island for 25 years. In addition she is involved in the Hillel of the College of Staten Island, Project Hospitality, the UJA, and is currently a Trustee and coordinator of the Dr. Ronald Avis Foundation at Temple Israel.

In her spare time she loves designing and making beaded

*jewelry, doing wirebending, taking yoga and Pilates classes,
and "Helping people to find solutions to their problems".*