

Good Evening

My name is Kathy Ruiz Goldenkranz. Thank you for allowing me once again to address you and serve as the president of Temple Beth El.

Generally when congregational presidents speak they ask for money, which we do always need, and they share the highlights and accomplishments of the congregation during the past year. It **IS** inspiring to hear about such accomplishments but even more valuable to experience them. Congregational Presidents often acknowledge remarkable office and teaching staff and applaud compassionate and creative clergy. I am grateful every day to know these people are here to serve, listen to our concerns and to offer much needed advice. But for me, the absolute best part of this congregation is all of you.

Allow me to draw upon some text that illustrate how and why each of you create such worth in my life.

One is from Torah, the book of Genesis and the others are from Pirke Avot or Ethics of our Fathers. They are:

1. "It is not good that man be alone," 2. "Do not separate yourself from the community" and finally, "Let your house be open wide." As I proceed with my remarks, please consider this question:

**How do these texts speak to my declaration that the greatest part of this congregation is ALL OF YOU?**

Well, when my husband Andrew and I joined this Temple exactly 20 years ago, we never dreamed how central it and the members would become in our lives. Temple life is a significant part of our family experience. It is our life's "Reality Show". We live it. Whether right here in Aptos or half way around the world in Israel.

Hard to believe but that wasn't always true. At one time it wasn't easy to belong. It took effort. It took time. It took courage to meet dozens of new people and fortitude to stay with it. I remember walking into the Bay Street synagogue, not just new to the Temple, but new to Judaism and new to Santa Cruz. I was going to have a baby. And from my background, baby equals some kind of religious ceremony. I needed a community.

In our early years as members, Andrew and I had a few "healthy, lively, discussions" over membership. In those days..... for which I am now very grateful..... membership was required for your children to be in Simcha Preschool. In some ways, the decision was made for us. A kind of divine intervention.

I have complete empathy for the newer, younger and Interfaith family members

of this congregation. It took me a few years of dedicated blocks of time, self and organized education and a lot of practice, to meet people, learn the rituals and to feel comfortable within these walls.

It wasn't because people weren't warm, they were and they are. Just as the Jewish community needs to have its house wide open, I needed to have my heart wide open. Open to a new life, a new faith, to new friends and build myself a new community.

One of my early Temple Beth El memories while our daughter Suzy was an infant, is of Deb Roisman in a Basic Judaism class. She was asking Rabbi Rick why some Seder plates had six compartments for the ritual foods instead of only five. I just remember sitting there thinking, what's a Seder plate? I was terrified and thought, I can't do this. But with your help, the help of our educators, my chavurah, our board members and presidents including my personal favorite Dr. Ed Spire, and with the superb guidance of our rabbis, I realized I **can** do this. I needed your encouragement, this Jewish community. And soon that changed to **How Can I NOT** be an active participant in my Temple?

Tonight I share like many of you the Yartzheit of a loved one. I remember my mother. A woman I barely knew. I was a very young child when she passed away at the age of 27, just two months before her idol, President Kennedy. I think my mother would be proud of me, proud of the person I chose to marry and very

proud of her grandchildren. I need you to help me say Kaddish for her. I need this Jewish community to remember her in the faith tradition we all share. For this experience, **“it is not good to be alone”**.

Since last year, my first year as president, much has happened in my life. Not unlike each of you. We attended weddings, graduations and supported friends and family through difficult illnesses and their dreams. There have been some major changes in my house. Both children have now left the safety and care of home to go into a wondrous and sometimes dangerous world. And, my senior parents came in. It brings to our household an adjustment period and a little heartbreak. I know I am not alone in this sandwich generation. I have heard this story before, from you.

This year unfortunately, we all shared the additional burden of being mesmerized by the tragic images of war broadcast to our living rooms, as our brothers and sisters in Israel fled to shelters while bombs flew over them. My daughter returned safely to Santa Cruz after nearly six months in Jerusalem, just before the war started. It was a tremendous relief for us, and impressed upon her an even stronger devotion to the land and a unyielding determination to soon return. Truth be told, we almost couldn't convince her to come home. But here in this place, we came together to share our love for Israel and to pray for peace.

There is one more pleasure in my life provided by this community. This is the Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrations, you bring. As I am the 7th grade TS teacher, I often attend. But, without the continued existence of community we could not together “kvell” with the parents at the remarkable job of **our students**.

I have to admit that even I sometimes feel overwhelmed by the challenges of being Temple President and I want to throw my hands into the air and say **I quit** but, I realize how empty my life would be without Temple Beth El. My Temple friendships are my family. I would miss our rabbis immensely. Even those pesky 7th graders, enrich my life and act as my teachers in their own right. And when sorrow or illness rears its ugly head, I can't think of any place I'd rather be or any other people with whom I'd want or need to share such experiences.

Let us listen to the texts just once more: “It is not good that man be alone”;  
(pause) “Do not separate yourself from the community” (pause) and “Let your house be open wide.”

These texts help to answer the question “**how can you and why should you build for yourself a community at Temple Beth El?**” For both new and old members alike, building community provides you with unsurpassed spiritual strength and nourishment.

As this year marches forward, our clergy Rabbi Rick, Rabbi Paula and Rabbi Shifra, the TBE Board and all our teachers hope you will not only look for opportunities to build your community, but act upon them. If you need help ask each of us. If we don't seem to have the answers, please ask again. And when you build that community...that precious extended family...then like me, you too will find it impossible to belong anywhere else. Thank you for being my family.

Shabbat Shalom and L' Shana Tova