

Changes to Shabbat Morning Services November 2012

Dear Friends,

For the past three years, our synagogue has undertaken a remarkably thorough and democratic project to understand how our members experience Shabbat at Kane Street.

Over 2009-10, hundreds of Kane Street members completed two surveys: first, a broad questionnaire about all community activities, and second, a survey focusing on Shabbat. In 2011-12, a diverse, twelve-member Shabbat Committee -- chaired by Laurie Lieberman, Charlene Visconti, and Jessica Schoengold -- met to consider the implications of the surveys and to understand our members' experiences more deeply. In March 2012, the Committee organized a series of focus groups. All Kane Street members were invited to attend, and 78 participated.

The surveys and focus groups provided the Synagogue Board of Trustees, Ritual Committee and Shabbat Committee with thousands of items of data. What did we learn? That our members greatly respect and appreciate core aspects of our Shabbat services, including the traditional style, lay leadership, and opportunities to meet other congregants. At the same time, members had broad areas of dissatisfaction, especially with the Shabbat morning sanctuary service. They noted a lack of spirit, inconsistent leadership, and poor orchestration.

Based on these findings, synagogue leaders proposed ways to enhance the decorum, spirit, coherence, and consistency of the Shabbat morning service:

- * We will implement changes to improve the flow of the service, including more expeditious choreography of the Torah service, moving the sermon to follow the Haftarah, and starting services at 9:15 A.M. rather than 9:30 A.M.

- * Members want more consistent and energetic lay leadership. Every focus group affirmed that Music Enrichment Director Joey Weisenberg should play an integral role in training lay prayer leaders. As a first step, we will focus on the part of the service from Y'kum Purkan (immediately after the Haftarah) through Adon Olam. As we begin this project, from November through February, to enable the Congregation to build a more familiar and spirited service, Joey will lead this part of the service twice each month. On the remaining Shabbatot, this portion of the service will be led by members who will meet together in training sessions led by Joey and Rabbi Weintraub.

- * Members also expressed a desire to alter the physical configuration of our sanctuary into an environment that will foster a stronger sense of engagement and community. Our plan is to create a smaller "sanctuary within a sanctuary." We will create a space for leading Tefilah and reading Torah at the front of the middle aisle. A new, portable Amud "on wheels" will be used by prayer leaders and Torah readers. To create a sense of focus and community, we will place attractive, movable 5-foot screens in all four sections of pews (about eight rows up from the rear), which will define a new, smaller space for davening. This area will offer seating for 320. The side pews will remain open so that those who prefer more space and privacy will have that option. Finally, a much-needed new sound system will be installed. We realize that these architectural re-configurations will require some members to change their seats, and all members to change their physical orientation in shul. These consequences are serious, but warranted by the community's need and desire for a more spirited and compelling prayer environment.

The Board of Trustees were informed of the ritual changes and reviewed and approved the architectural changes on October 18, 2012. The non-architectural changes will be instituted on Saturday, November 17, and the architectural work will be completed as soon as the contractor finishes the necessary renovations, likely in November. To allow all changes to "take root," we will

keep them in place until Shavuot in May 2013, at which point the entire community will be invited to evaluate them in an open, participatory fashion.

To hear your questions and concerns about these changes, Rabbi Weintraub, Joey, and lay leaders will hold two open, informal discussions: Saturday, November 3, following Shabbat Kiddush luncheon and Thursday night, November 8, at 7:30 P.M. The Rabbi will also talk about these changes during the Shabbat morning service on November 3. We are also very interested in your feedback as we implement these changes. We encourage you to send comments or questions to Shabbat@kanestreet.org.

We want to thank our lay leaders and staff who formulated these recommendations, as well as all who participated in surveys and focus groups. You gave us prodigious amounts of information, but more important, we were inspired by your devotion and commitment. You shared openly about one of the most intimate aspects of your lives-your relationship to prayer and religion. You listened respectfully as others shared their own experiences and journeys. Thanks to your open hearts and minds, we are confident that as we institute these changes, we will create with you a richer Shabbat experience of prayer, study, celebration, and community-building.

B'Shalom,
Rabbi Sam Weintraub

Harry Chevan, President