

Dear NFTY-MAR *mishpacha* (family),

I love you all so much. I really do. Each of you brings so much life and light to NFTY, and the fact that we have such a wonderful, diverse community is what brings me back, event after event. It's not the programs, it's not Big Fun, it's not even the services, although I love all 3 of those things. It's you. Our community is built on the love and respect we have for one another and the amazing things we can learn from each other. With that said, **I, Noah Simon, would love to be your president for the 5780–5781 NFTY year**, because I think we have the potential to become an even closer community.

I cannot write this letter and ignore the situation that we're currently in. Our last and biggest two events of the year were unfortunately canceled, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, simply because we can't meet in person doesn't mean we can't see each other at all. Lately, we have seen the success of virtual programming in bringing our region together. I have thoroughly enjoyed singing with you in virtual services and hanging out with you during March Madness programs, and I am so excited for all of our other virtual programming coming up. After all, we like to call ourselves a parking lot region, the idea being that we would be able to have an amazing event in a parking lot if necessary. Why not a Zoom region?

Even after we return to normalcy, four regional events per year isn't all that much. Two or three months is a long time to go without seeing some of my closest friends. So, to get to the point, as president, **I will plan various virtual programs in between our regional events so that we can keep our community strong and close**. This might take the form of discussions, services, fun activities, or even just organized times to hang out. They would also be really easy, low-risk, free ways for new members to meet NFTY-MAR before committing to a full weekend. While it's always better to see our friends in person, there is much to be said for the flexibility offered by virtual programming.

Another amazing thing about MAR is our diversity. We have people from Baltimore and people from Raleigh and everywhere in between, and everyone comes with their own experiences and knowledge. That being said, I think we can do even better. **I would love to work with smaller TYGs and synagogues without TYGs to help grow their teen presence and get more teens to MAR events**. We are better when we collectively have more unique ideas, stories, and personalities. Also, NFTY is a rare place where one can be totally surrounded by super passionate Jewish teens, especially for someone who comes from a less Jewishly populated area, and I think it's important for MAR to work to provide that experience for as many people within its borders as possible.

Events can be a lot to handle, especially for newer members, and it can be difficult to build relationships with people during structured time when the focus is on the content and during unstructured time when everyone is off doing their own thing. MAR used to have a program called the *mishpacha* (family) program. *Mishpachot* would meet once or twice every event, with the objective of being small enough and intimate enough groups where participants could feel comfortable decompressing from the stress of NFTY events and also building relationships with others in a lower-energy environment. The program eventually petered out due to the logistical challenges of maintaining these groups from event to event, but I believe that I have a solution. If MAR families continue to check in and hang out between events, MARites will know that their community is always there for them, and it will be easier to keep track of who's in which family even if people can't make it to every event. **As president, I will bring back the *mishpacha* program stronger than ever with the goal of holding our community together between events.**

All of these ideas tie back to community. As I said before, each one of us makes up a vital part of our MAR home, and in my opinion, the president's goal is to hold our amazing community together so that we can all benefit from what we all bring to the table. As I'm sure many of you have realized by now, keeping in touch with friends is vital when we're isolated at home, so please, keep joining Zoom activities, FaceTiming your friends, and finding innovative ways to stay connected to your community, and I can't wait for the day when I get to see each of you in person again.

It has been such a privilege to serve as your Religious and Cultural Vice President this year, and I hope that you all will consider me when you choose who will guide the region forward for the coming year.

*B'ahavah uv'rachah* (with love and with blessing),  
Noah Simon