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Dear Congregants and Guests:

One of the books that I love to recommend is called *The Jewish Dietary Laws: Sanctify Life*, by Rabbi James M. Lebeau. It is a great introduction to Kashrut, and raises many issues that we, contemporary Jews, deal with when deciding to keep Kosher. One of the points Rabbi Lebeau brings up is that we grow in holiness when we observe the laws of Kashrut. Eating is a “holy act.” We closely examine what we eat, making eating a conscious act, not a routine opening of the refrigerator or mindless consumption of everything that is in front of us. When we say a blessing before and after eating, we acknowledge that food is a gift, which God and people worked together for our enjoyment. For Jews, food does not exist simply for consumption. Food, in our tradition, is a way to connect with God.

Yet, food is also a way in which we build community. I believe we all have heard the idea that Jewish holy days are all the same, based in the following idea: *someone tried to destroy us, we survived, let's eat!* While this is not necessarily true, most of our celebrations revolve around food. And, also, there is hardly a synagogue gathering that does not involve food.

Because our tradition, food, and community building are so intertwined, we hold potluck dinners on the first Friday night of each month at the synagogue immediately following kabbalat Shabbat services. Some people have expressed concern that their kitchens may not be "kosher enough" to participate. The Ritual Committee and I developed some “ground rules” so that those who wish to bring food will be comfortable doing so.

- Everything should be dairy or vegetarian and brought in a disposable pan/vessel.
- Food will not be heated in our kitchen.
- After dinner, we won't carry anything out of the building (our custodian will do that).
- All utensils will be disposable and all tables will be covered.

By following these rules, we minimize the chances that food from outside sources will have contact with the synagogue, avoiding problems with Kashrut in our building. Furthermore, knowing that not all of our congregants' and guests' homes are kosher, we ask that anyone preparing food for the potluck only cook with *hekshered* ingredients. Following these simple rules, we can all feel comfortable with the food being served.

What does *hekshered* mean? It means that all food has to have a Kosher symbol. One of the symbols that is not acceptable is a simple letter K. That only means the factory thinks that the item is kosher, based on their own interpretation of Kashrut. This is not acceptable for us. Cheese does not require a *heksher* symbol, nor does wine.

We hope you will join us for one of our potluck dinners.

B'Shalom,
Rabbi Lia Bass