

VA'AD HARABANIM RABBINICAL COUNCIL OF BERGEN COUNTY, INC.



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Dear friends:

The holiday of Purim pervades our community with its warmth, friendship, joy and the obligation to fulfill the *Mitzvot* of the day in the optimum way. As Purim approaches, the Va'ad Harabanim-Rabbinical Council wishes to commend our community for the significant strides we have taken in recent years to refine our performance of the *Mitzvah* of *Mishloach Manot*.

Not too long ago, *Mishloach Manot* was an extravagant and expensive process, with some people feeling pressure to distribute hundreds of elaborate *Manot* each Purim. Since then, our community has taken several admirable steps to fulfill this *Mitzvah* in a way more faithful to its original intent. Our Shul sisterhoods have mobilized to distribute *Manot* to every family in our community, and there are community organizations that deliver simple but tasteful *Manot* with the balance of the proceeds going to *Tzedakah*. Additionally, a significant greater percentage of our community members are using cards from *Tzedakah* organizations in lieu of sending actual *Manot* to mass numbers of people.

Although the message of this letter is always vital, this year it carries a greater sense of urgency. Many members of our community, as well as people around the world, are experiencing severe economic stress. We as a community must exercise greater care to limit extravagance and avoid waste.

As such, we are turning to our community and urging a careful review of each family's plans for *Mishloach Manot* this year, with an eye to limiting excess and properly fulfilling the *Mitzvah*. We encourage the community to expand on the trends of the last few years by continuing to "downsize" the *Mishloach Manot* effort in favor of sending simpler *Manot* to fewer people. Remember the basic *Mitzvah* is to give two items of food to one person (*Orach Chaim 695:I*), as the basic *Mitzvah* of *Matanot L'evyonim* is to give money to two poor individuals (*ibid 694:I*). Conveying warm wishes to friends and family by using cards, and larger donations to the poor, are certainly more desirable options to pursue. Rambam notes (*Hilchot Megillah 2:I7*) That it is far preferable to augment our gifts to the poor even at the expense of decreasing our *Mishloach Manot* or Purim meal.

In this way, we will be building on our progress of the last few years in consonance with the true spirit of Purim, giving gifts to each other with our hands extended in generosity to the needy of our community. And may we all thereby merit a most festive Purim and a month of Adar filled with *Smachot*.

Rabbi Larry Rothwachs
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Rabbi Shalom Baum & Rabbi Kenny Schiowitz
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