Smadar Shalom,

Thank you so much for the lovely welcome letter you were so kind as to send us. We are as well excited about the possibilities which our collaboration can lead to.

Our community was founded in 1954 as part of the Progressive movement and dwells on a beautiful campus at a strategic and convenient location in Johannesburg. Our facilities are made of two buildings. The one is the sanctuary which contains the praying hall with some 360 sits, a function hall, the kids and the youth clubs and reception. The second is the education centre which has an auditorium of 144 seats, communal library, children library and classrooms, boardroom and kitchens. Other than that, we have big functions garden and large parking. As you can imagine, these are large facilities which demand intensive maintenance. It was built in another era, when the community was much larger than today, and when money wasn’t an issue.

Today we have little more than 350 membership units which make some 750 people, but there are many more people who go via our campus or participate in one of the many activities who are not formal members. We are also rather active in the Interfaith local scene, so there are many non-Jews who visit us regularly or are in touch with us for a variety of programs.

In terms of how we operate, there are 4 clusters of activity - the Admin/Governance, The Jewish Identity, **the Community Center** and the Tikkun Olam unit. In the first cluster, you will find the treasury, Campus, PRAM and security volunteers, in the second the Ritual, Shamas, Lay Readers and curriculum teams. The third realm - which is the community centre - hosts at the moment a wide spectrum of “all that is not strictly Jewish” activities. So, at the present program, one can find Cinema, book club, Yoga Class, occasional walks in the city, Anonymous Eaters group, Big Band Orchestra fans and so on. Also, the Youth, Young Adults and Families Club should fall under this auspice. This area is yet sporadic and unsettled, which is one of my reasons to approach Global JCC. Finally, the Tikkun Olam unit is responsible for all the in and outreach
activities, from care and immediate aid to congregants in distress to wider involvement in social endeavors. This is, in short, how we are structured and function.

Our team is very small: Myself - the rabbi, The Chief operations director Russell Cohen, The Financial Administrator, Christine McIntosh, A choirmaster/Musical director, two Hebrew school teachers, reception and ground stuff. The team is just the facilitator for most of the activity which is done by the many volunteers. The volume of our span is depending on those diligent and committed individuals.

Like most organizations in our field, our challenge is to reinvent ourselves in a manner which will be sustainable for longevity while enabling our people a platform for self-expression. It needs to be a space where people can learn about their realms of interest, but not only as consumers of culture but also as practitioners of the art activity operating from our premises - music, theatre and dance, plastic arts - creating and exhibiting. I’d like to see our community centre offer courses related to mind-body balance and mindfulness conduct. This is very needed here in Johannesburg. Finally - I’d like our community centre to be a dominant player in the field of social and cultural transformation so that fruitful collaboration will be created with other fellow organizations who are active in this field. I’d like Beit Emanuel to become known as a Hub for those who stand at the encounter point of Art and Activism, for Young people who are involved in projects of education and advocacy for the environment, Human Dignity, Community building and Healthy Society.

As said earlier - we are very happy to be introduced to the Global Jewish Community Centers network and looking forward to learning which Jewish centres around the world are close to our model and how we can both support and be supported, enrich and be enriched.