Congregation Beth Elohim — Who we are

Congregation Beth Elohim (CBE) is a warm, haimish community synagogue. Located in Acton, a suburban New England town twenty-one miles northwest of Boston and just west of historic Concord, Massachusetts, we attract people from over a dozen surrounding cities and towns.

CBE is committed to fostering an open, diverse community that acts as a place for spiritual development, as well as the celebration of Jewish culture and values. We forge a unique balance between preserving Jewish traditions and embracing progressive ideals, creating an environment that is inclusive to all. Since its founding in 1969, CBE has been independent and non-affiliated.

With approximately 275 member households (of which roughly 80% are families), our congregational practices are diverse. Our members are able to connect to Judaism in a variety ways — traditional and non-traditional, through services (in-person and zoom), music and meditation, social, educational and cultural programming, as well as, through participation in our active Sisterhood and Brotherhood.

We connect across generations

We have some members who have been here for 50 years, many of whom remain active as volunteers and congregants. And we are always welcoming new members and families. One source of new members is the CBE Early Learning Center — a professionally accredited, Jewish-oriented early education and care program for children ages 15 months through five years, that we house and have run since 2002.

We are interfaith

Interfaith families comprise about one-third of our members. They are welcomed in all aspects of synagogue, social, and religious life. Care is taken by our rabbi and cantor to involve interfaith families and their guests in B’nai Mitzvah celebrations in halachically sensitive ways. Our synagogue honors both matrilineal and patrilineal descent — if a person has at least one Jewish parent and is raised in the Jewish tradition, we consider that person to be Jewish.

We are volunteers
We have a deeply committed volunteer board of directors which oversees the strategic direction, fiscal health and viability of the synagogue. Our ritual committee is fully engaged with clergy to support our rituals and practices. Our adult education committee helps provide robust programming which includes but isn’t limited to a yearly scholar-in-residence weekend, a Jewish book month author presentation, an ever changing variety of classes taught by clergy, and a wonderful Shavuot night of study and discussion.

Our Brotherhood sponsors monthly breakfast speakers, a softball team, a yearly bagel drive, pastrami day, and the annual Purim carnival. They build our sukkah every year, and have organized hiking, bowling and even curling trips. Similarly, our Sisterhood offers a varied and always creative array of activities such as a monthly book club, mah jongg lessons, wine tastings, snow-shoeing, as well as fundraisers, and a holiday fair. Sisterhood decorates the sukkah and our congregants enjoy its beauty and gather under it annually with hot cider, wine and cheese.

Our high school students participate in ongoing education and volunteer as madrichim. We also support an active chapter of BBYO, and our teens hold regional offices.

Our yearly Purim shpiel attracts dozens of participants. Original scripts and secret themes, elaborate sets and costuming, an all-ages cast of singers and dancers, and a live band typically (pre-pandemic) pack the house.

Our adult volunteer choir brings the richness of our Jewish musical heritage to services, accompanied by piano, guitar, flute, or clarinet as is warranted. Originally formed in 1980, the choir prepares music for high holiday services and numerous Shabbat morning services, including an annual “Shabbat Shirah” — a creative and well-attended program of varying musical themes from the medieval to the modern.

We are socially conscious

Our social action committee provides for those in need in the larger community, including serving meals to those less fortunate and organizing food and clothing drives. In 2016, Na’aseh — meaning “we will act” — was born, heightening our community involvement by creating 4 areas of action: Racial Justice, Immigrant Justice, Environmental Issues, and Food and Poverty. Na’aseh marches outside ICE detention centers and has housed and supported a family of Afghan refugees. It also spear-headed the construction of one of the largest solar canopy installations at a house of worship in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that provides renewable energy for CBE and low income families.

We take care of each other
Our *Chesed* committee is here to support a member in need or when there is a family loss. We prepare meals, give rides, and provide organization and helping hands for every shiva. Our chairperson volunteered to assist our older members get Covid vaccines when it was seemingly impossible to get an online appointment, then moved to helping any CBE member – and then to people in need who were not members of CBE, eventually helping hundreds of people to get their appointments.

**We offer a variety of religious services**

Our services combine traditional and contemporary prayer and music. We offer weekly Kabbalat Shabbat and Shabbat morning services, Mincha and festival/holiday services. Services are held in person, online and in a hybrid (live and zoom) venue. They are highly participatory and often involve our all-volunteer choir. We have capable lay leaders to help fill in during the summer and other times. Our siddur is non-denominational and has both Hebrew and English text, enabling all congregants to participate. Our services, practices, and siddur are egalitarian.

In addition to services, our religious leaders officiate at life cycle events, including baby namings or B’rit Milah, B’nai Mitzvah, funerals, Shiva, conversion of adults and children, and weddings.

**We take pride in our professional religious school**

Our religious school fosters passionate and conscious Jewish students. We seek to inspire them to lead lives as identifying Jews and ethical human beings, and to become constructive citizens of our community and country. We aim to create a learning environment that is warm, challenging and enticing, and to create a love of learning and a strong Jewish connection that will stay with our students throughout their lives.

**We embrace Jewish values**

Our board of directors, clergy, and a group of volunteers formalized a set of Jewish values to help inform and guide decision making in our congregation and allow for transparency and explanation. Selected from among the many Jewish values we take pride in practicing, this core set reflects the priorities of the community and include:

*B’tzelem Elohim – All Human Beings are Created in God’s Image*
Because we see ourselves as containing a spark of the divine, we understand that every person has infinite worth, and we should always attempt to see the humanity in those we encounter. This attitude underlies many Jewish values.

*Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh baZeh – All Jews are Responsible for Each Other*
The Jews are one people with a shared history. We are responsible for each other regardless of differences in ideology or practice. We need each other, not just for survival, but to make the world a better place.

**Gemilut Chasadim – Acts of Loving Kindness**
Members of our communities and our families deserve caring action simply because we share the bonds of interpersonal connection. Caring for each other is part of what makes us fully human.

**Tikkun Olam – Repairing the World**
Judaism has always had a vision of a world characterized by justice, sufficiency, harmony and peace, and Jews bear responsibility not only for their own moral, spiritual, and material welfare, but also for the welfare of society at large. There are various forms of action intended to repair and improve the world, and each good thing we do makes a difference.

**Talmud Torah – Learning and Study**
We are a learning community and value lifelong education.

Our Professional Leaders

Reporting to the CBE Board of Directors, the synagogue and associated religious education programs and ELC are led by:

**Rabbi:** Braham David, our interim rabbi since 2022, received his ordination and Master’s degree in Jewish education from the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Ordained as a Conservative rabbi, he is the son and son-in-law of retired Reform rabbis. He has previously served as Rabbi of Temple Shalom in Medford, MA, and Executive Director of the Jewish Discovery Institute, a resource center for interfaith couples and others who are interested in Judaism. Rabbi David is the spiritual and religious leader, officiant of life cycle events, and educator – including supporting the B’nai Mitzvah process – and pastoral counselor for the congregation; and a liaison to the community regarding Jewish holidays, antisemitism, and hate speech.

**Cantor:** Sarra Spierer joined CBE in 2007. She was awarded her Cantorial degree from Hebrew College in Newton, MA. Cantor Spierer earned a Master’s degree in Jewish education and completed a training program in Clinical Pastoral Education at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston. She serves as a pastoral and spiritual resource for our community, supports B’nai Mitzvah preparation, coordinates with our volunteer choir, enhances our prayer through music, and creates opportunities for congregational participation on the bimah.

**Director of Education and Community Engagement:** Beth Goldstein, RJE, joined CBE in 2018. A graduate of Brandeis University, Beth holds a Master of Arts in Jewish Education from the Rhea
Hirsch School of Education at Hebrew Union College Institute of Religion and a Master of Arts in Jewish Communal Service from the School of Jewish Communal Service at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Beth believes her role as a Jewish Educator is to help each person find his or her own Jewish path while connecting to others in the community. In this role, Beth develops and leads programs to enhance community engagement, develops and ensures teaching of the Religious School programs, and develops and runs early education religious services.

**ELC Director:** Samantha “Sam” Valente-Phillips assumed the role of Director of the CBE ELC in early 2022. Previously, she served as Assistant to the Director and a teacher in ELC’s Parparim (preschool) class. She received her Bachelor’s degree from Brandeis University, where she also worked at the Lemberg Children’s Center.

**Synagogue Administrator:** Shoshana Zuckerman joined our staff in April of 2021. As a former Acton resident and CBE member, Shoshana has a rich history with the synagogue community. She is a graduate of Prozdor -- the four-year Judaic and Hebrew Studies high school program at Hebrew College. She attended college at Clark University in Worcester, MA where she received her Bachelor’s degree in Psychology. She is also a seasoned religious school educator with over eight years teaching Hebrew School at a temple in Winchester, MA.

Please refer to our website ([www.bethelohim.org](http://www.bethelohim.org)) for a more in-depth view of CBE’s religious and community life.

**Anti-Racism Statement**
We commit to building and maintaining an anti-racist Jewish community. We commit to working in an honest, transparent and inclusive way to continually assess and improve our CBE practices and programs and infuse anti-racist practices into all that we do.