



# Tree of Life Congregation B'nai Mitzvah Handbook



**Please Save This Booklet For Future Reference**



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## **INTRODUCTION:**

**Shalom!** You are entering an exciting and enriching time in the life of your family. Your child will soon be preparing to become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah: a son or daughter of the commandments, an adult in the eyes of the Jewish community. We hope that the information in this booklet will help clarify the procedures, requirements, responsibilities, and expectations involved in the process.

At Tree Of Life Congregation, the public celebration of becoming bnai mitzvah is an honor offered by the congregation to eligible individuals, as outlined in this booklet. The continuity of the Jewish people depends on a knowledgeable and committed Jewish community. Our congregation's educational program supports the development of Jewish identity, builds connections among participants and instills a sense of belonging in Jewish community. Furthermore, our program seeks to provide enrich our students' lives with exploration of Torah, values, tradition, and culture, all while making Judaism a part of their everyday lives.

All Jews 13 years of age or older are eligible to be called to the Torah. In the US Reform Movement, a child who has at least one Jewish parent, raised and educated as a Jew, or lives as a Jew, having undergone conversion, is Jewish.

The policy of the Tree Of Life Congregation is for our bnai mitzvah candidates to invite all of the students in their class to both the service and the reception. To help you do this, the Education Director or Rabbi will provide a class list. We encourage all students to attend their classmates' services and celebrations as a demonstration of their support and commitment to each other.

The family of the bnai mitzvah candidates must be members of Tree Of Life Congregation, in good standing according to the financial policies for bnai mitzvah as established by the Board of Directors.

This booklet is published to clarify the procedures and responsibilities for bnai mitzvah candidates and their families. Please feel free to contact our Rabbi with any questions.

## **TIMELINE/PROCESS:**

### **Late Winter Grade 5: On the Road to Bnai Mitzvah:**

#### **Assigning Bnai Mitzvah Dates:**

Late in the winter of the fifth grade, parents will receive correspondence from the congregation with general information about the bnai mitzvah process, a questionnaire, and a list of possible dates. The questionnaire will give families an opportunity to request dates close to the child's 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, as well as to share information about the number of anticipated guests.

There are occasions when two children from the same family are paired for the same date. It may be siblings or cousins that request the same date. Date assignments must be made with the Rabbi.

Many Shabbat mornings are available with the following exceptions: July, most of August, Jewish holidays, as well as other dates selected for temple programming. Most bnai mitzvah services take place on Shabbat mornings at 10:30AM. They are community events and all congregants are invited to attend. We also look forward to hosting guests of the b'nai mitzvah.

### **Grade 6: Continuing the Journey to Bnai Mitzvah**

**Family Workshop:** A bnai mitzvah family workshop is an opportunity for prayer, learning, and community building. Pertinent information about bnai mitzvah will be discussed and distributed. Forms such as the honors forms and a mock program will also be included.

**Moving Traditions Bnai Mitzvah Curriculum:** In the fall prior to their bnai mitzvah ceremonies, students in grades 6 and 7 will participate in two family sessions (on Sunday afternoon) and four pre-teen sessions (during religious school class time). These sessions are designed to create a sense of community and support among bnai mitzvah families and to acknowledge bnai mitzvah as a transition moment from childhood to teenager and as a psychological and developmental milestone.

**Tutor Assignments:** We, at Tree Of Life are dedicated to ensuring that the preparation for your children's bnai mitzvah is a positive experience for everyone involved. The tutor will be an important connection between the congregation and your family and will be the primary teacher leading up to your special day. Many students begin the study of their Torah and Haftarah portions with a private tutor nine months before the date. Meetings are generally held once a week and sessions may be added as the date approaches.

The decision on when to begin lessons with the tutor is a collaborative one, made by the parent, the Rabbi, the Education Director and the tutor. The student's fluency in Hebrew, knowledge of the prayers, individual learning style, and the student's schedule all need to be considered when planning the tutoring process.

**Tzedakah and Class Gift:**

As a class, you will choose a parent representative to coordinate a class gift. If your class chooses to donate a group gift, a "wish list" may be requested from the president(s) of the congregation. All items to be donated must be approved by the Board of Directors; anything for the sanctuary must first be approved by the Rabbi and Ritual Committee.

**12-18 Months Before the Service:**

At this time, families begin to make plans for the celebratory meal following the service. Congregants are welcome to host a kiddush luncheon at the temple. The facilities at TOL are also available for an evening reception for an additional charge. Any caterers need to be arranged and approved by the Rabbi in advance.

**9-12 Months Before the Service:**

The student begins to meet with his/her tutor to begin individual preparation of the Shabbat morning service, including Torah and Haftarah portions. The student is encouraged to lead as much of the service as possible. The Torah reading is chanted in Hebrew; the Haftarah reading is chanted in Hebrew or read in English. Students also have the option of choosing a creative prophetic reading in consultation with the Rabbi. Recordings of the prayers are available on the TOL website (member log-in required). The individual portions will be provided. It is the student's responsibility to practice his/her prayers and individual Torah and Haftarah portions. We also encourage all families to attend other b'nai mitzvah services so that you can observe what other families do.

**Three Months Before the Service:**

The student and Rabbi meet to study and discuss the student's Torah portion. The student writes and shares a d'var Torah, a learning or insight based on the Torah text studied. There are also opportunities to do a creative d'var Torah, which may take the form of a project related to a theme from the Torah portion, to be presented during the service. In consultation with the Rabbi, there is also the option to do a creative Haftarah reading by choosing a text or a multimedia presentation that relates to the prophetic themes of tikkun olam and social justice.

**6-8 Weeks Before the Service:**

If flowers or other arrangements for the bimah are desired for the service, the family provides them. We recommend not using overly fragrant flowers, as some people are allergic. Please contact the temple office to arrange for delivery of the items.

We have kippot available, but you may provide personalized ones. Jewish guests over the age of 13 are encouraged to bring and wear a tallit (prayer shawl). We do not have sufficient tallitot for the whole congregation.

It is traditional to give out honors at the service. It is our wish to help you include people who are important to you, in order to make your day as meaningful, inclusive, and joyous as possible. Some Torah honors are exclusive to our Jewish members. Still, there are many opportunities for parents who are not Jewish to be involved: reciting the blessing before and after the Torah reading, holding the Torah as it is passed from generation to generation, English readings, and opening the ark. There are a group of readings that you may choose from and the Rabbi will also review any other readings you might like to include.

**Two Weeks Before the Service:**

Parents will have the opportunity to come to the bimah to bless their child at the service. At this point you should start working on your blessing. Guidelines will be provided by the Rabbi. At the Tree Of Life Congregation we do not throw candy but rather rejoice in the success of our b'nai mitzvah students through song.

**Guidelines for Ushers:**

As you are going to be busy on the morning of your child's service, please ask for help with certain tasks. Each family assigns at least two adult ushers, who are temple members. They will greet guests, pass out books and programs, direct seating arrangements, and maintain decorum in the sanctuary. They are also responsible for returning the books, kippot, and tallitot to their respective storage places.

Ushers are also asked to help with the kiddush. This may include setting up food in the social hall, clearing any unused food, and wiping down tables. Families in the class often help each other out by serving as ushers for one another.

**Responsibilities for the Kiddush:**

Families are expected to provide and host a Kiddush (wine, grape juice, challah and/or other refreshments such as small pastries) following the service. The food for Kiddush may be as simple as challah and grape juice, or as elaborate as a whole meal. This is up to you.

Two weeks prior to your service, a temple representative will contact you to discuss your arrangements for the day on behalf of the Board of Directors. The representative will also assist the ushers with any questions.

**Week of the Service:**

The final rehearsal for the whole family will take place in the sanctuary with the Rabbi. Usually pictures are taken before the service. The family should make arrangements with the temple representative to open the temple early for pictures. No photos may be taken during the service. Kindly coordinate any deliveries with the office with the office manager, [info@tolsc.org](mailto:info@tolsc.org)

**Friday Night: Erev Shabbat:**

Having your family come to Shabbat Evening services gives everyone the opportunity to spend sacred time together, as well as to take a moment to pause and show your gratitude before your child's service. It also allows your child to be on the bimah in front of a congregation. As part of the service, the child will lead prayers previously selected in coordination with the Rabbi.

**The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Day:**

\*\*\* You and your family must come to services dressed appropriately (no short pants/skirts or bare shoulders). Men are asked to wear suits or business casual attire. The service may be postponed until suitable attire for those leading the service is found. Please also keep in mind that a Tallit (the prayer shawl) is for praying and does not double as a piece of clothing for covering bare skin.\*\*\*

Family photos may be taken before the service. A stationary video camera may also be set up in the rear of the sanctuary.



## **REQUIREMENTS, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND POLICIES:**

### **Religious School Education**

Educational requirements for bnai mitzvah include satisfactory completion of at least five years of the Tree of Life School program. This includes maintaining the standards for attendance (85%) set by the Education Committee. For students in grades 5-7, absences in excess of 15% of classes, with no prior arrangement made with the Education Director, may result in the removal of your assigned date from the temple calendar.

Bnai mitzvah candidates must be enrolled and participate in the religious school during the year of the service, at least through the end of seventh grade. We encourage all students to continue through Confirmation and our teen programs.

With the approval of the Rabbi and Education Director, credit will be given for attendance at Jewish day schools or other congregational religious schools. In order to measure the progress of those students, standards are applied which students attending our religious school for five years, four hours per week, accomplish.

Additional tutorial instruction in religious school material may be required. All candidates are expected to know how to chant and have an understanding of the themes of major prayers and to be literate in the Judaic curriculum of our program.

### **Shabbat Service Attendance**

Attendance and participation at Shabbat services is a proven way for bnai mitzvah students and family to learn the workings of the prayer book. It is expected that the student and the family will attend at least seven Shabbat services during the year before the date of their ceremony. We strongly recommend attendance at as many Shabbat services as possible.

### **Synagogue Life**

We encourage students to be fully involved in life at Tree of Life Congregation. This includes participation in special congregational programming, as well as in our youth group activities. Similarly, we encourage parents to take advantage of the many spiritual, social, and educational opportunities our synagogue offers. All families must be members of Tree of Life, in good standing, for the two years preceding the bnai mitzvah service. Exceptions to the required length of membership will be discussed on a case-by-case basis.

## **SPECIAL CONCERNS AND FURTHER QUESTIONS**

Please always direct any special concerns or pressing questions to the Rabbi. We want to help make this a joyous occasion for you and your family.

## **ADDENDUM:**

**Tree of Life charges a flat b'nei mitzvah lifecycle fee of \$360.00 that must be paid in full prior to the service date.**

**In addition, all b'nei mitzvah families must be in good financial standing and current in their payment of all dues and fees. Families are responsible for all financial obligations associated with the luncheon (recommended) immediately following the service which may include but is not limited to: food, tablecloths, decorations, plates, cups, napkins, and silverware.**

If you have financial difficulties, please contact our finance chair for a confidential discussion regarding options that may be available to you at (803) 787-2182.

## **KASHRUT POLICY**

The kashrut policy of a congregation not only deals with the food that is served, but, just as importantly, it speaks to the values of the community. Tree of Life is built on the traditions of the Jewish people, and food has always played an important role in Jewish ritual and celebration. Food has been used to connect us to our ancestors, to holidays, and to one another. Jewish eating customs assert the holiness of food and guide us, as we determine what we eat.

This Kashrut Policy of Tree Of Life is meant to be inclusive of all people by not serving premixed meat and dairy, pork products, or shellfish.

We support Israel by serving Israeli products when appropriate. We support the ethical production of food, and we recognize the need for educating our members about this policy.

For specific guidelines, please check with the Rabbi.

## **Tree of Life Photography Guidelines**

### **Pictures and video on Shabbat (Friday and Saturday) or Holiday evenings:**

Pictures may be taken in our building and on our grounds before evening services have begun. On Saturday, pictures may be taken in our building and on our grounds until 10:00am. Please remove all photography equipment by 10:00am.

#### **1. Video**

- A video camera may be set up in the rear of the sanctuary, with advance permission and should be in place by 9:30 am. The camera is not to be moved during the course of the service.

#### **2. Pictures in the Sanctuary**

- Please do not open the ark or touch the Torah scrolls. The rabbi or a board member will take a Torah out of the ark for photos.
- Please do not stand on the furniture.
- The microphones on the podium are fragile; please handle them gently.
- If you move anything, please make sure that it is back in its original location by 9:30 am.

**If photographs are going to be taken during the week, the sanctuary space has to be reserved in advance. The use of the sanctuary must be approved by the Rabbi. The Rabbi or a board member must also be available to assist the family.**