

**L'dor Vador: From Generation to Generation**  
**Congregation Children of Israel**  
**Athens, Georgia**

This is an updated version of a publication originally designed by the CCI Sisterhood for parents of children who will become *B'nei Mitzvah* (children of the commandment) at Congregation Children of Israel in Athens, Georgia. As you go through this process, please ask questions! There are many families who can assist you during these years.

***Mazal Tov!***

You and your family are an important continuation of Judaism's amazing 4,000-year-old tradition.

There are many milestones on that journey; birth, consecration into Hebrew school, celebration of the Jewish holidays, and of course, the *Bar or Bat Mitzvah*. Before you know it, there will be weddings and baby namings as well!

*Bar mitzvah* means "son of the commandment." *Bat mitzvah* means "daughter of the commandment." At our *B'nei Mitzvah* celebrations, our young men and women lead services, read from our sacred *Torah* and give a *D'var Torah* (words of *Torah*.) A *Bar or Bat Mitzvah* celebrates Jewish learning and living. The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* service exists so that we can celebrate the Jewish identities of our young adults. After becoming a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, a child assumes adult responsibilities within the community.

The Rabbi and the religious school work in close partnership to ensure the integrity of our *B'nei Mitzvah* program. We have created a *Brit*, a covenant between CCI and each family. This will be given to families at the 6th grade mandatory meeting, entitled *Putting God on the Guest List*.

We ask our students and their families to think about the commitment of becoming a son/daughter of the commandment. We strongly encourage you to sign this *Brit*, taking another step in the process of Jewish learning and living. That being said, we realize that there may be other time commitments or responsibilities that may preclude your child from following some of these requirements. If you feel that you are not ready now, your child can have his/her *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony anytime after the age of 13. As a matter of fact, if you have never had one, so can you!

On our end, we promise to provide our children with the best Jewish education that we can, and to ensure that each child succeeds in developing a strong Jewish identity filled with pride, knowledge and joy. We also strive for a personal and meaningful relationship between our Rabbi and your family.

The Religious School Committee takes these goals very seriously. Students will be evaluated periodically. Failure to adhere to these guidelines may delay the *Bar/Bat mitzvah* ceremony and prohibit students from advancing to the next grade level.

The expectations set forth below are part of our *Brit* previously mentioned. Please note that the Rabbi and Religious School Director reserve the right to deviate from these preparations and make necessary changes to accommodate individual families as necessary. You will receive a copy of this *Brit* at the 6th grade parent meeting which will take place soon after Hebrew School starts.

Lastly, we want to thank you for the gifts and blessings that you bring to our community. We look forward to celebrating many *simchas* with you, and wish you continued strength and *mazal* as you continue your Jewish journey.

## **Education Timeline & Requirements**

### ***Thoughts on Service Attendance***

Regular attendance at our Religious School is only one part of your child's Jewish education at CCI. Attendance and participation at our Shabbat services is crucial, as it helps our students (of all ages) formulate different thoughts and opinions on God, prayer, Shabbat, amongst others. Attendance at our Shabbat Services is the experiential partner of our Religious School and is just as valuable as our classroom education.

Starting in third grade, there are service attendance requirements that each student needs to meet. A *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* will not be scheduled until students have fulfilled these requirements. Lack of attendance at our Shabbat services may also affect your child's progress to the next grade level.

We value participation at various prayer centers (Hillel, Chabad, different congregations). That being said, we expect that the majority of service participation occur at our home synagogue here at CCI.

### **Third-Fifth Grade**

- Students are expected to attend a minimum of 75% of all classes on both Sundays & Wednesdays. The Religious School Director and/or Rabbi will contact the family if a student has missed 6 classes, and will meet to resolve the issue.
- Students must attend Friday night Shabbat services at CCI at least six times (6) each year. Attendance will be noted at the *oneg* following services.

### **Sixth Grade**

- Students are expected to attend a minimum of 75% of all classes on both Sundays & Wednesdays. The Religious School Director and/or Rabbi will contact the family if a student has missed 6 classes, and will meet to resolve the issue.
- The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* candidate must attend Friday night Shabbat services at CCI at least once a month. Attendance will be noted at the *oneg* following services.
- There will be a mandatory meeting with the Rabbi and religious school director scheduled in the fall, *Putting God on the Guest List*. At this meeting, the *B'nei Mitzvah Brit (covenant)* will be given to families.
- The office administrator will set up a private meeting between the rabbi and your family. The rabbi will facilitate a brief assessment of your child's Hebrew and Judaic knowledge. Assuming that your child is at an age/grade appropriate level of understanding, a date for the ceremony can be set.

- If the student is not at his/her appropriate level, the family will need to work with a tutor. The student will be re-assessed when the student and family feel ready. When the student is at the appropriate level of Judaic & Hebrew competency, a date for the *Bar/Bat mitzvah* ceremony will be scheduled.

### **Seventh Grade**

- Students are expected to attend a minimum of 75% of all classes on both Sundays & Wednesdays. The Religious School Director and/or Rabbi will contact the family if a student has missed 6 classes, and will meet to resolve the issue.
- The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* candidate must attend Friday night Shabbat services at CCI at least once a month. Attendance will be noted at the *oneg* following services.
- There is a mandatory parent's meeting with the Rabbi and religious school director that will be scheduled in the fall.

### **Nine-Twelve months prior to *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony**

- CCI will schedule a meeting between the family and the rabbi to determine if the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* candidate needs an additional tutor.

### **Six-Nine Months prior to *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony**

- **It is an expectation that parents will respond promptly to *B'nei Mitzvah* related communication from CCI.**
- *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* candidate must attend Friday night Shabbat services at CCI at least twice a month.
- Child plans a *Mitzvah* project which must be approved by the Rabbi.
- Child meets with Rabbi consistently to prepare Torah portion, Haftarah and speech, and to develop a deeper understanding of Judaism. If necessary (as deemed by the Rabbi), the child will need to work with a tutor consistently to learn Hebrew prayers. CCI will work with the family to schedule meetings that are convenient to the Rabbi and fit with the family's schedule.

## **Planning Timeline**

### **Six Months prior to *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony**

- Inform out-of-town guests about the date.
- Reserve a block of hotel rooms.
- Reserve reception location.

#### About Receptions:

There are two receptions that are open to the entire congregation – the *oneg* after the Friday evening service and the Kiddush after the Saturday morning service. These receptions are a chance for the congregation and families to join in the celebration of a child becoming a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. Families that have experienced a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* are your best resource, and will be happy to help!

In addition, you may choose to have an additional private reception for your families and friends. If this reception is held at the Temple, it needs to be in accordance with our *simchah* policies, which include guidelines on foods that are allowed and not allowed.

- Hire a photographer if you so choose. Please remember that taking photos is not permitted during the service. Video is allowed if it is done from the back of the sanctuary and done inconspicuously.
- If you are planning a Friday evening dinner for your guests, secure a location. Keep in mind that your family needs to be at services at least 15 minutes before they start.

### **Three Months prior to *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony**

- Order invitations. Options include your child or you making them, creating an e-vite or ordering formal invitations.
- Order Kippot, Tallit, and kiddush cup if you so choose. It is customary for a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* to have a special Tallit for the occasion.
- If you are having your reception at the Temple, arrange for someone to run the kitchen and clean up after the event. Many families hire the Temple housekeeper, Melanie Causby. She is familiar with the Temple policies and workings of the kitchen equipment and can be hired to assist you during the reception and to clean up after.

### **Six weeks prior to Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony**

- Send out invitations to those invited to your private reception. Keep track of your responses so that you will be able to give a count to caterers and other vendors. Excel spread sheets work great for this task. Tip: assign each invitation a number and pencil the number inconspicuously on the back of the response card. That way if someone forgets to sign it, you'll know who sent it.
- Please contact the Office Administrator for information about how to place your child's Shabbat Bar/Bat Mitzvah service invitation in the Temple Times. As mentioned above, the Friday night service and the Saturday service are communal CCI events. They are open to anyone in our congregation or community.
- **It is extremely important to invite all children in your child's B'nei Mitzvah class to your private reception.** Consider inviting their parents as well. We suggest that you invite the Rabbi and the president of the congregation to the Bar/Bat mitzvah reception. Additionally, please consider including your child's past and current Religious School teachers and members of the Board of Trustees.
- The number will add up quickly. You can send out more invitations than the number you intend to have present. There are 140 seats in the sanctuary at present, but folding chairs can increase capacity up to 400 people, if needed. Not everyone invited will accept the invitation. When in doubt, be inclusive!
- **Young Friends Attending Without Parents**  
Most B'nei Mitzvah invite friends from outside the CCI community. Please provide guidance to these families about proper dress (covers for strapless dresses), expected behavior, time to pick up, and any other arrangements. Most will attend without parents. Make arrangements for these children to get to the private reception and advise parents where children should be picked up. The rabbi will make sure to explain various parts of the service and will ensure that guests feel welcome at CCI.
- **Buy clothes**  
While one need not invest in haute couture for a Temple life-cycle event, one should not come to Temple looking like he/she just cleaned their house or just came back from the park. The operative word here is decorum. Please advise your extended family members of our tradition of proper dress. Each family member should select what they will be comfortable wearing, including comfortable shoes, so that this is not an issue at the last minute.

### **Four weeks prior to Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony**

- **Organize the Friday evening Oneg**  
We expect that the other *B'nei Mitzvah* families help with your *Oneg*, just as we expect that you help with others. There should be a 'lead' person for each *oneg*. Contact the Temple person in charge of *Onegs* to find out what you need to provide.
- **Organize Saturday Kiddush**  
Each family should plan to host a *Kiddush* following the Saturday service. This is a wonderful opportunity for our community to celebrate the *simchah* in your family's life. Since you are hosting, your presence is important for at least a 20-30 minutes. Therefore, if you are planning a celebration elsewhere, please take this into account. Please make sure to adhere to the temple's Kosher policies.
- **Arrange for a babysitter at Friday night/Saturday morning services, especially if young children will be present.**
- **Prepare Saturday Service Booklet**  
Some parents decide to prepare a special booklet with an explanation of the service, which is especially helpful for non-Jewish guests. The student's Torah portion may be briefly explained.

### **Two weeks prior to Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony**

- **Order flowers**  
Families of the *B'nei Mitzvah* typically provide a bouquet of flowers in front of the bima. The temple has a large silver vase that you may use. Please make sure to time the delivery for when the Office Administrator will be there to accept it.
- **Meet with the Rabbi** to determine honors for both the Friday night service and Saturday morning service and the procedures for these honors. The rabbi will schedule this meeting.
- **Meet** with the Rabbi for a "dress rehearsal" the following week at which the student will practice on the bima. CCI office will contact you to schedule this meeting.

### **One week prior to Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony**

- **Temple Key**  
Speak with the Office Administrator regarding your access into CCI if necessary.
- **Relax**

If your child is feeling overwhelmed or overly anxious because of getting up before a large crowd, remind him or her that everyone out there is there because they care and have a special connection to your family and to the Shabbat service. They are NOT there to judge a performance.

- **Parent Speeches**

Parents (and only parents) have the option of delivering a speech. It should be 3-5 minutes in length. This is a time to celebrate this moment in your child's life. Your words should be personal and from the heart, but also in context of this *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* and what it means to your family. Parents have the option to write individual remarks or speak together. Either way, please be aware of time, especially as your child will have been standing at the *bima* for quite some time. Multi-media presentations are not appropriate for the service.

- **Guest Gifts Bags**

Many families prepare a little welcome gift bag for out-of-town guests. Included in these bags are simple snacks, fruit, maps of Athens, water, soda - just a little something to say welcome. These are usually delivered to the hotel the day the guests will arrive. Include in the bag directions to the Temple and reception and a schedule of different events. This is a good time to ask Temple friends for help.

### **Friday of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony**

- **Afternoon:** be sure flowers have arrived and are on the bima
- **Before you leave your house, bring:**
  - ✓ kippot for attendees (place in a basket)
  - ✓ child's kippah, tallit and Kiddush cup (if you have a special one to use)
  - ✓ copy of child and parent speeches to leave at temple
  - ✓ copy of list of people with honors
  - ✓ program booklets if you are using them

### **Saturday Morning *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* Service**

- **Honors.** Make sure that people to whom you have assigned honors know what to do. Show them where they will walk, stand, and leave. The Rabbi and Board member on the Bima will help.
- **Tallit.** Keep your child's Tallit bag at your seat so there are not too many things for the student to keep up with. The rabbi will invite the parents to the bima at the beginning of the service on Saturday to present the Tallit.
- **Kippah.** If you have special kippot to distribute, have them in a basket at the entrance of the sanctuary.



## Private Reception Suggestions

- **Picture Board**

Some families create a picture board so that the *Bat/Bar Mitzvah* can have friends sign with a special note of congratulations. This is not required. The frame stores are used to this request. Enlarge a favorite photo, frame with a mat, put it in a frame without the glass (save for later), bring a special marker, and you are good to go.

- **Pictures of the Past**

Some families prepare special photo albums or videos showing the maturing *Bat/Bar Mitzvah* over the past 13 years. Some have a few pictures, some have a lot. This is not a requirement, just something that you may want.

- **Music**

Wide range here for sure. There are DJ's in town who have a *B'nei Mitzvah* plan in place. There are others who will create a plan with you. You may have a friend who spins music or a special band that will play for you. There is no magic formula here. Do what works for you and your family.

- **Candle Lighting**

This is where the *Bat/Bar Mitzvah* writes a series of poems about special guests in the audience. As each poem is read, the guest(s) come up and light a candle in their honor. This is totally optional.

### After the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* Weekend

- **Thank you notes**

Make sure your child sends thank you notes promptly for any gifts he or she may receive. Keep track. Make sure that all writing materials are handy (stationery, stamps, addresses). Some families extend thanks to the Rabbi with an honorarium or donation to the Temple. You may want to consider sending a donation to the Rabbi's discretionary fund as well as giving a gift to your child's teachers and/or tutors. Please send a note of thanks following the event to those who helped with *oneg* and other arrangements.

- **Tzedakah**

Whenever celebrating a joyous event, it is customary to donate to a charity. Many people choose Mazon, the Jewish Hunger Project. Of course, you are free to choose the charity of your choice. A list of Jewish related charities can be found in the Temple library, or a donation to one of the many funds at Congregation Children of Israel is always appreciated. This is not the same as the *Mitzvah Project* discussed above.

**The following books are available in the CCI Library**

*Mitzvah Chic: How to Host a Meaningful, Fun, Drop-Dead Gorgeous Bar or Bat Mitzvah.* 2003. Gail Anthony Greenberg. Fireside.

*Putting God on the Guest List, How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah.* 1996. Jeffery K. Salkin. Jewish Lights Publishing.

*The Complete Bar/Bat Mitzvah Planner.* 1993. Linda Seiter Gage. Danscott Publishing.

*Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics: A Practical Family Guide to Coming of Age Together.* 2007. Cantor Helen Leneman. Jewish Lights Publishing.