

The B'nei Mitzvah Program

Dear friend,

Mazel tov and welcome to the B'nei Mitzvah journey at Central Synagogue. When a child is called to Torah for the first time, it is a *simcha*, a joy, for the entire community. In that spirit, we thank you for sharing your joy with our Central family. This brochure contains information which will guide you through our meaningful process of becoming Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah.

Many cultures have found a way to acknowledge the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual changes in the lives of teens. Some communities celebrate this moment by having their children demonstrate physical prowess, while others challenge their teens to wildlife survival. The Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah calls upon our young adults to read and teach from the Torah. This taps into your physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual self in the most meaningful of ways as we recognize your entrance into adulthood.

Becoming Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah is a bold step in joining the 3,000 year conversation about living Jewishly. As you embrace the Torah on the day of your Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah service, you will be our scholar and teacher. The cantors, rabbis, tutors, and lay leaders are *with* you in your learning and preparation, and we look forward to learning *from* you as well. We will work closely with you to support you in this process, and we look forward to sharing the journey with you.

Warmly,

Central Synagogue Clergy and B'nei Mitzvah Team

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ABOUT THE B'NEI MITZVAH PROGRAM

■ What is a Bar or Bat Mitzvah?

Bar or Bat Mitzvah means son or daughter of the commandment. For our children who identify as gender non-conforming or gender non-binary, we are happy to discuss language that honors their experience. In the past, we've used the term B'nei Mitzvah, meaning child of the commandment. Children reach this milestone at 13 years old. The Talmud, the major compilation of Jewish law, describes this rite of passage as the age at which children become personally responsible for their observance. At Central, we mark this special moment with a Bar, Bat, or B'nei Mitzvah service. At this service, your child will be called to read from the Torah for the first time. Typically, they will also chant *Haftarah* (a reading from the Prophets), and give a *d'var Torah* (a teaching from their Torah portion).

■ How will my child's Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah date be assigned?

We make every attempt to assign a date close to your child's birthday. As we don't have B'nei Mitzvah services at Central in July or August, children with summer birthdays will be assigned a date in the Spring or Fall, as close to their birthday as possible.

■ What if we are assigned a date that does not work for our family?

After all dates are assigned at the Derech Mitzvah program, you will be notified of the process for requesting a date change. Although we cannot guarantee a specific date will be available, we will do our best to find a date that works for your family. We ask that you do not request a specific date for your child's Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah. However, if there are certain dates that you know will not work for your family, please let us know via the Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah Date Form, which you can request, and we will do our best to accommodate.

■ Who will be officiating my child's Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah service? Can I request a Rabbi or Cantor?

Clergy assignments are completed in the Spring preceding the academic year. We know that you may have special relationships with specific clergy, and in assigning dates, we will take those relationships into account. Regardless of who officiates, it will be a meaningful day for your family.

■ What is the difference between the 9:30 AM and the 11:30 AM service?

Children celebrate becoming Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah at our Shabbat morning services at 9:30 AM. If we have more than two children becoming Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah on a Shabbat morning, we will hold an 11:30 AM morning service as well. The liturgy and role of the B'nei Mitzvah will be the same at both services.

■ What if my child has special learning needs?

We have special education support in place at Central and will be happy to discuss with you how we meet the needs of all our B'nei Mitzvah students. If you would like to speak with a clergy member about your child's needs, please contact our B'nei Mitzvah Program Manager, Keren Eckstein, at ecksteink@censyn.org

■ When will my child start preparing?

Tutoring begins 6 months prior to the B'nei Mitzvah date. The B'nei Mitzvah Program Manager will be in touch to schedule a tutoring time slot and confirm all appointments and rehearsals.

■ I don't know Hebrew. How can I help my child prepare?

You do not need to know Hebrew. The best way to help your child prepare is to show them the importance of this lifecycle event, and to hold them accountable to regular at-home practice sessions. We have found that when you show your child you care about the service, your child will care too.

■ What are some other ways my child can prepare for his/her/their B'nei Mitzvah service?

It is Central Synagogue's tradition that families help each other by ushering at a Shabbat service before their own. By doing so, we share the delight in the Sabbath and help one another celebrate the occasion. The B'nei Program Manager will send a sign up form prior to your child's bar/bat/b'nei mitzvah. The Shamashim are Central Synagogue's group of congregants trained in welcoming guests. Please note that ushering begins one-half hour before services, and lasts through the conclusion of the service.

■ Will my child's Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah service be recorded? How can I obtain a copy of the video?

As a special service to our congregants, we offer a professional quality video-recording of the service via a private YouTube link. The AV Manager will send the link via email 3-4 weeks after the Bar/Bat / B'nei Mitzvah has occurred. The link will be hosted by Central Synagogue in perpetuity. Central Synagogue live streams most of its services on our website, including its Friday night, Saturday 9:30 am and holiday services on the Jewish Broadcasting Service (JBS). Any person present at Central Synagogue during these times gives consent to being filmed.

REQUIREMENTS

■ What are the requirements for becoming Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah at Central Synagogue?

- Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah is only open to members of Central Synagogue.
- Students are required to have at least four years of participation in our religious school (the LCLJ), beginning by the third grade, and continuing through the school year of their Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah. Students must fulfill all religious school requirements, including regular attendance, participation, and completion of work. Students who join the LCLJ later than the third grade may require additional tutoring in Hebrew beyond that offered by our B'nei Mitzvah program.
- Students are expected to attend services regularly – at least five times per year during 4th, 5th and 6th grade, and at least seven times per year during the 7th grade year. Worship is part of Jewish life and it is especially important that students and their families become accustomed to the flow of Shabbat service so they are comfortable when they help lead it.
- All B'nei Mitzvah students are expected to complete the social justice unit in their 6th grade year at the LCLJ.

■ My child's Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah is in the Fall. Do they need to be enrolled in LCLJ?

Enrollment in the LCLJ is an important piece of instilling a sense of community in your child; therefore, enrollment and attendance are both mandatory for the full year of your child's Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah service.

RITUAL INFORMATION

■ What role will my child have in the Shabbat service?

At the service when a child becomes Bar, Bat, or B'nei Mitzvah, he, she, or they will typically do the following:

- Chant from the Torah and the corresponding *Haftarah* in Hebrew
- Chant the associated blessings for the Torah and *Haftarah* in Hebrew
- Deliver a brief *d'var Torah* (teaching) about the Torah portion

■ What honors can I give my family?

Every child comes to Torah through the support and love of family and community, and we want to honor those who have been part of the journey. There are many ways to honor loved ones for your child's Bar, Bat, or B'nei Mitzvah:

- Two loved ones may kindle the Shabbat lights on Friday evening. This is a low-pressure honor that does not require speaking or chanting so it works well for younger siblings but can be for anyone you choose.
- When the Torah Scroll is removed from the Ark, the Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah and his/her/their immediate family – parents and siblings – will join the Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah and the clergy in the procession around the Sanctuary.
- There are three Torah honors called *Aliyot*. Family and loved ones participate in the first two *Aliyot*, and the Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah receives the third. Each *Aliyah* involves honorees chanting the blessings before and after the Torah reading. *Aliyot* may go to anyone over the age of thirteen who the Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah family seeks to honor. Honorees often include, but are not limited to: grandparents, parents, older siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins.
- Prior to your child's first rehearsal, we ask that you fill out the honors form. To do so, please visit: www.centralsynagogue.org/BneiMitzvahHonors
- Your child's name will be listed in our Order of Service and on our LCD Board on 55th Street and Lexington.

■ What is the Torah Passing Ceremony?

Great grandparents, grandparents, and parents, are invited to participate in the "chain of tradition," where the Rabbi symbolically passes the Torah down from one generation to the next by holding the *Sefer Torah* (Torah Scroll) in front of each member of the family. If you have not witnessed a Torah pass, please join us for any B'nei Mitzvah service and experience the emotional charge that this moment brings.

■ What honors can I give to non-Jewish family and friends?

We seek to include non-Jewish parents and relatives in the celebration in equally meaningful ways, and we will be guided by each family's sense of what is authentic and appropriate. The only honor we reserve specifically for Jewish family members is the ritual Hebrew recitation of the blessings over the Torah reading. The translation of these blessings may be offered by non-Jewish family members.

LOGISTICS

■ When can I take photos with my family?

Families often choose to take photos before or after the final rehearsal. Some families even choose to take photos on a date after the actual Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah service, as it can be less hectic. This component is completely optional. You may reserve a photoshoot after confirming all other meeting times with the B'nei Mitzvah Program Manager. If you have any questions about taking photos in the Sanctuary, please contact Chelsey Linkens, our Events Manager, at linkensc@censyn.org.

■ **Is there a kiddush following the B'nei Mitzvah service?** Central Synagogue provides a congregational kiddush following each service on Saturday morning. You and your guests are welcome to attend. The Saturday congregational kiddush consists of wine and *challah*.

■ **What is the B'nei Mitzvah Shared Kiddush Program?** Central Synagogue now offers all families the opportunity to hold a one-hour kiddush in the Lindenbaum Pavilion, immediately following your child's Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah service. In order to accommodate up to four families on Saturday, we are offering an all-inclusive shared kiddush program which will allow both families in the first service to share the kiddush with each other, and the families in the second service to do the same. It is a meaningful way to provide a celebration for your family's milestone event and acknowledge that your family is part of the larger Central Synagogue community. To participate in the shared kiddush program, please visit:

www.centralsynagogue.org/SharedKiddush.

For more specific information, including pricing, please contact Events Manager, Steve Weingord, at weingords@censyn.org.

CELEBRATE THROUGH TZEDAKAH

■ How can we demonstrate support of our synagogue community through Tzedakah and share our gratitude for our family's joy?

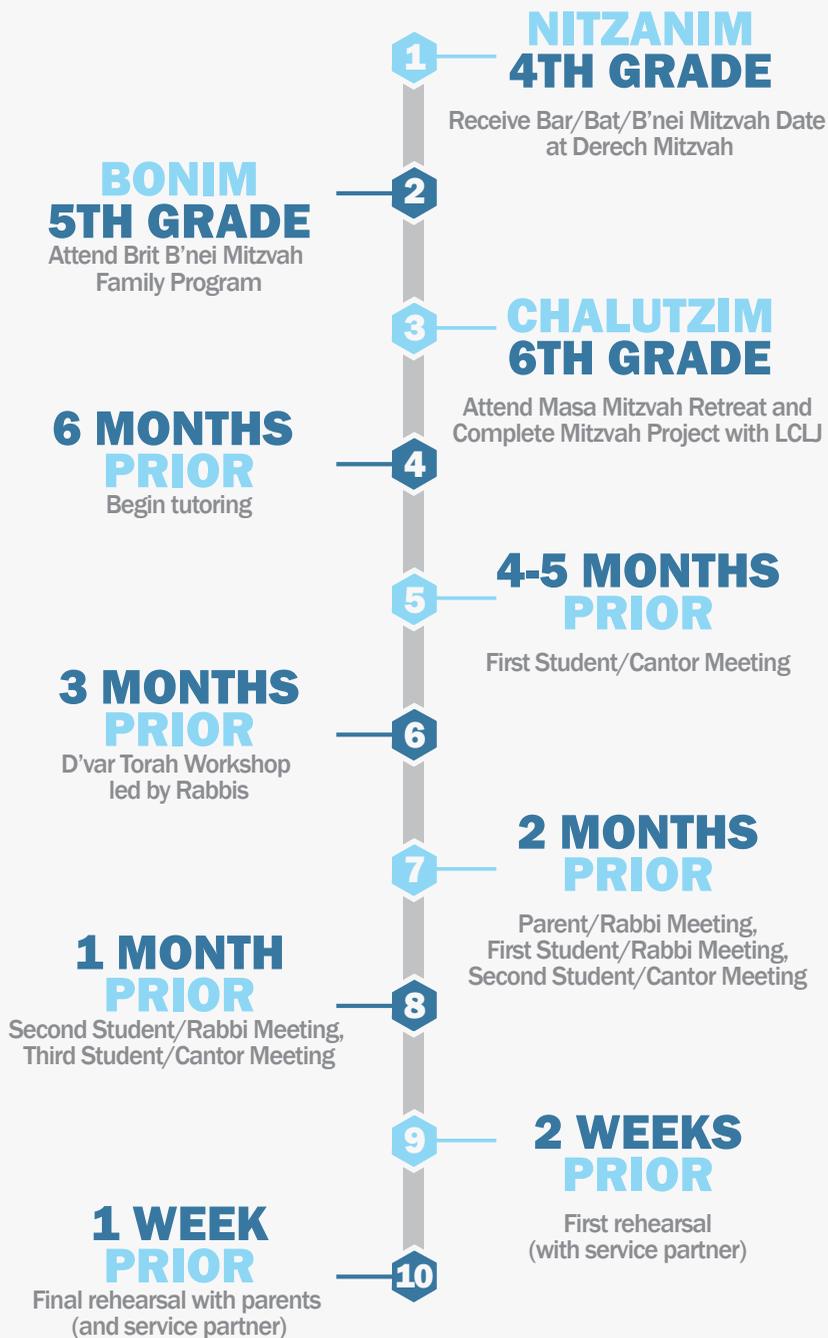
It is very meaningful to honor your child becoming a Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah by supporting Central Synagogue with a gift of Tzedakah. You may want to consider a contribution to the General Fund in honor of one or more members of our clergy who played a significant role in this important lifecycle event for your family. We also ask you to consider giving a new or increased gift to the Yom Kippur Appeal. The Appeal is a critical financial resource as it funds nearly one-third of our operating budget and makes possible so much, including our magnificent worship services led by our exceptional clergy team and beloved musicians; our amazing array of Adult Education classes and events; and our LCLJ religious school where no child is turned away because of their family's ability to pay, and our students study and learn with full-time educators.

We also ask you to consider giving a new or increased gift to the Yom Kippur Appeal. If you have any questions about donating to Central Synagogue in honor of your child's Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah, please contact Director of Development Pamela Goldstein at (212) 508-3026 or goldsteinp@censyn.org.

For more detailed information about Central Synagogue's B'nei Mitzvah program, please visit www.centralsynagogue.org.

B'nei Mitzvah Timeline

Below is a list of key events in the B'nei Mitzvah process for you to look forward to. Keep in mind that these are in addition to the expectations/requirements listed in this brochure and in our B'nei Mitzvah Handout on our website.



...The child stands
between generations,
inheriting from the one and
transmitting
to the other..

- Harry M. Epstein, The Eternal Light



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Meet the Team



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LCLJ Related Questions



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Planning the Kiddush on Saturday



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Booking the Photoshoot



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Celebrating Through Tzedakah