

# *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Parent Handbook*



The Jewish Center  
PRINCETON • NEW JERSEY

## B'nai Mitzvah Handbook

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# B'nai Mitzvah Handbook

## 1. Mazal Tov! Now What?

Mazal Tov on the upcoming celebration of your child becoming a Bat/Bar Mitzvah. (plural: B'nai Mitzvah / B'not Mitzvah). Bar/Bat Mitzvah is the major rite of passage into emerging adulthood for Jewish teens and their families, marking a communal celebration of the moment a child becomes responsible for performing mitzvot (commandments). It also marks the culmination of life-long preparation at home and in religious school. TJC's goal is to partner with families to inspire a lifelong connection to Jewish practice and the Jewish People. This handbook provides parents with information about TJC's Bar/Bat Mitzvah program. Please consult the handbook on our website for updates. Our staff (clergy, Director of Congregational Learning, Executive Director and tutors) are also available to answer questions.

## 2. Who Can Become Bar/Bat Mitzvah at TJC?

- A child is required to be Jewish according to Conservative Jewish law: born of a Jewish mother or have undergone official conversion. Contact the rabbi if you have questions about conversion.
- A child must have had at least 3 years of supplemental Religious school or Hebrew day school, and must be currently enrolled in the TJC religious school. (Families joining TJC in the year before a child reaches B'nai Mitzvah age should contact the rabbi to discuss options.)
- Families must be members of TJC and in good financial standing.. Please contact our Executive Director one year prior to your date to confirm or arrange this.

## 3. Overview of Religious School Education at TJC

Your child's preparation begins (informally) through the religious education they receive at TJC in the years prior to their Bar/Bat Mitzvah:

- **Hebrew:** Students begin formal study of Hebrew decoding in 3rd grade, after being exposed to Hebrew language learning in earlier grades.
- **Judaica:** Children learn Hebrew reading, culture, prayer, ritual, history, and values.
- **Learning the Shabbat Service:** Students learn parts of the Friday night service in 4th grade, the Shabbat Morning Service in 5th grade, and the Torah Service in 6th grade.
- **Chanting Torah:** Sixth grade students attend trope (cantillation) classes on Sunday mornings to learn the methodology and melodies of chanting Torah.
- **Prayer Leading:** Seventh grade students attend a prayer class to master prayers and blessings. This class is from 11 am to 12 pm on Sundays during the school year until the B'nai Mitzvah day.

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- **Service Attendance:** Beginning in 3rd grade, students have Shabbat morning service attendance requirements. Attendance is taken.
  - Grade 5 = 7 services
  - Grade 6 = 10 services (Main Sanctuary service)
  - Grade 7 = 12 services (Main Sanctuary service)
- **Family Education Programs:** Families are given opportunities for grade level family learning. The goals of these programs are to create community and to learn as a family.
  - 5th grade: Families learn about sacred spaces in their homes and make mezuzot.
  - 6th grade: Families focus on community service (chesed) and make a yad (Torah pointer).
  - 7th grade: Families make a personalized tallit (prayer shawl)

***We cannot emphasize enough that one of the best ways to prepare for your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah is to attend Shabbat services from an early age, even for a short time each week.***

### 4. Chesed Project (Community Service)

In sixth grade, and at least one year prior (?) to their B'nai Mitzvah date, TJC will schedule a meeting with the Chesed Program Coordinator to plan a chesed project. Students work individually or in small groups to participate in community service. Students showcase their project through the Chesed Reporter and at their B'nai Mitzvah service. Examples of prior Chesed projects include: \_\_\_\_\_.

### 5. Tallit /Tefillin

- You and your child will make a tallit in religious school in 7th grade, and your child will learn how to put on tallit/tefillin in religious school
- If you wish to acquire an additional tallit, kippah and tefillin set, our clergy has suggestions for where to purchase these items.

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### 6. Individualized Instruction Begins One Year Prior to the B'nai Mitzvah

Approximately one year before your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the cantor/B'nai Mitzvah coordinator, the rabbi and The Director of Congregational Learning, will meet with you to discuss your family's goals for the day. The education team will then meet to develop an individualized plan for your child.

- Students learn the service structure and become comfortable leading tefillah by fulfilling their service requirements in the years leading up to their Bat/Bar Mitzvah and attending the Shabbat services.
- Students also practice service leading during religious school services on Sunday mornings and Wednesday afternoons. In the months leading up to the B'nai Mitzvah date, students practice with the Cantor on the bimah.

#### Individual Tutoring: Learning Torah & Haftarah Chanting

- Your child will be assigned a bar/bat tutor about 12 months before their simcha after your meeting and he/she will contact you to arrange an individual tutoring schedule. Ideally, students meet their tutors at the same time each week. (Tutors are NOT available during your child's own religious school or #Sulam (Hebrew High School) time.)
- At the start of tutoring, each student will receive a link to an online Dropbox file containing all relevant materials as well as a booklet containing relevant texts.
- Tutors will work with students first on their maftir Torah portion, followed by their Haftarah and then as many additional Torah readings as possible.

#### Writing a D'var Torah

- **Sixth Grade:** Children begin to learn the content of their Torah portion (parsha) in religious school during a family learning workshop facilitated by the rabbi and educator.
- **Seventh Grade: Children** will have several meetings with the rabbi and/or educator to review their parsha and begin writing the d'var Torah they will teach at their Bat/Bar Mitzvah service.

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### **7. How Parents Can Help and Participate**

- Parents are asked to attend the first tutoring session and first d'var Torah writing session. Parents are encouraged to attend any additional sessions.
- Your child must practice in between tutoring sessions in order to learn the material. We recommend practicing a short amount of time each day instead of a long time once a week. Parents are the primary partners in supporting their child in learning their material. This can mean reminding them to practice, sitting with them to review the material, etc. Materials are available online and on recordings, in Hebrew and in transliteration, so knowledge of Hebrew is not required on the parents' part.
- If you see that your child is not studying outside of tutoring, please contact the tutor. You will be contacted if your child needs more instruction.
- Consider learning a Torah reading for your child's Bar/Bat mitzvah. The Cantor can help you to learn a part.
- Please bring your child to Saturday morning services with you as often as possible in the year(s) leading up to their Bar/Bat Mitzvah. This will help you and your child feel comfortable with our services. They will learn our melodies and the flow of the service, and will become familiar with our Shabbat community. If your child has sports before or after services we are happy for them to even attend part of the service each week.
- Parents are encouraged to write a one paragraph blessing for their child for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service.

### **8. B'nai Mitzvah Rehearsal with the Cantor**

Final tutoring sessions will take place with the Cantor in the Sanctuary during the few weeks before the celebration. A final rehearsal will occur the week prior to your child's B'nai Mitzvah date in order to review everything, in order, in the Sanctuary. Times for these sessions will be arranged with the Cantor.

### **9. Final Meeting with Rabbi and Family**

Cynthia Richman will contact you to schedule a final meeting for you, your child and the Rabbi. Siblings are welcome.. If your child has a tallit or tefillin, please bring it to this meeting.

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### 10. Photos

Photography is not allowed in our Sanctuary during Shabbat. Many families choose to have a professional photographer take pictures of the family in the Sanctuary and on our grounds the week before their child's Shabbat. Please contact Cynthia Richman to arrange for the Sanctuary to be open and available, and to coordinate with clergy. Please let her know if you would like the clergy to be in your photos.

### 11. TJC Bulletin Article

Please send a photo and a one paragraph bio of your child by the fifth of the month prior to your child's date.

### 12. Participation in the Service by Family and Friends - Honors Sheet

- All parents, grandparents and family are an important part of your child's special day. We honor parents and relatives of all faiths. Please speak with the Rabbi about opportunities to honor Jewish and non-Jewish relatives.
- As listed below, many options are available to honor family and friends during the service. Please complete the honors sheet (Appendix E) and return to TJC's Ritual Assistant at least two weeks prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
- Most honors need to be given to people over 13 who are Jewish; the Prayer for Peace can be led by non-Jewish honorees.

#### Explanation of Honors:

- **Aliyot:** Five of the eight aliyot, including the Maftir (#8), are reserved for the B'nai Mitzvah family. The aliyah honor involves going up to the bimah and chanting the blessings, in Hebrew, before and after the Torah is read. Each aliyah may be assigned to one or two people. Please leave any three aliyot blank (typically the first three); these will be assigned to congregants.
- **Torah Reading:** You, your family and friends, are welcome to chant any Torah readings that will not be chanted by your child. Please consult the Cantor to learn which readings are available and let the cantor know a month in advance which aliyot your family/friends will do. In order to ensure the quality of Torah reading at TJC, all Torah readers need to practice with our Cantor two weeks before the weekend of the simcha. This includes any out-of-town guests, for whom a read through can be done virtually.
- **Two Ark Openings (p'tcha):** One or two people may be assigned for each ark openings.

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- **Glilah:** One person may dress the Torah with its cover and ornaments, as directed by the gabbai on the bimah. Please note that Hagbahah, the honor of lifting the Torah, is reserved for a trained member of the congregation.

### **13. Tzedakah**

We encourage students to donate some of their Bat/Bar Mitzvah gifts to those in need. Some children designate a favorite Jewish and secular organization for donations. The Rabbi is happy to discuss options with your child.

In addition, consider having Centerpieces on the tables at your simcha that represent Jewish values: donation cards to Jewish causes, books or food to donate, or Jewish themed decorations.

### **14. Invitations**

- Please invite your guests for 9:30 am on Saturday morning; 6:30 pm Friday night.
- All services are available on our Livestream at <https://thejewishcenter.org/livestream/in/> on Facebook Live and Zoom.

### **15. Decorations at TJC: Flowers and Tzedakah Baskets**

B'nai Mitzvah families may provide fresh or dried flowers or plants for the bimah, as well as a centerpiece for the table in the entrance lobby. As a courtesy to congregants with allergies, we require that you avoid intensely fragrant flowers, such as lilies.

Families may order symbolic food baskets to be placed on the bimah or in the lobby, representing a donation to the Kosher Food Pantry at Jewish Family and Children's Service of Mercer County. For more information, call JFCS at 609 987-8100.

If there is another occasion on the Shabbat of your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the cost of these items may be shared.

### **16. Financial Responsibilities**

The current B'nai Mitzvah fee is \$1,200. This may change in the future. This fee is due in full at the time you start tutoring and includes individual tutoring, family programming, materials, room reservations, and security. In addition, all membership dues and religious school fees shall be paid no later than six months prior to the date, unless prior financial arrangements have been made with the Executive Director.



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Finally, families are currently required to provide a Shabbat Kiddush luncheon for 40-50 congregants after services. Catering fees should be paid directly to your choice of caterer. Please speak with our Executive Director if you have questions.

Inquiries regarding fee adjustments should be directed to our Executive Director, and will be handled with full confidentiality.

### **17. Planning a Celebration at TJC - Due to Covid-19 Restrictions we invite you to speak with our Executive Director about current policies.**

We hope that you will choose to celebrate your simcha at the Jewish Center with a Friday night dinner, Shabbat Lunch or party on Saturday night or Sunday.

Please speak with our Executive Director for a list of kosher caterers.

A band or DJ may begin playing music one hour after services are over, 1 pm.

### **Tree of Life Recognition**

To recognize this special time for your family and our congregation, families are encouraged to dedicate a leaf on our Tree of Life outside the sanctuary (in the parking lot lobby). For more information contact the Synagogue office.

### **Personalized Kippot, Birkat Ha-Mazon Booklets & Masks**

While not required, some families wish to provide personalized kippot printed with your child's name and celebration date and Birkat Ha-Mazon booklets that include the blessing after the meal. During the pandemic, some families may also choose to do personalized masks.

### **Deliveries**

Please arrange all your deliveries (flowers, kippot, food, decorations, party favors, etc.) for no later than 3:00 p.m. on Friday, well in advance of sunset and the onset of *Shabbat*, and should be picked up after Shabbat ends Saturday evening. Please make sure that all involved (family, guests, caterer, florist and others) are aware of this policy. If you have any questions, please discuss in advance with the Executive Director.

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### **Checklist Timeline for the B'nai Mitzvah Process at The Jewish Center**

**Fourth Grade** – Date is assigned by the TJC staff

**Fifth Grade** – Heh Parents B'nai Mitzvah Meeting with staff to review the B'nai Mitzvah process with parents.

Second half of fifth grade-year, students begin trope study (effective 2022-23 school year)

**Sixth Grade** - Students meet with Chesed Coordinator to choose their project, make contact with the agency and begin their volunteer hours

Students continue trope study.

#### **One year in Advance** -

- Clergy/Education Director to have first discussion with family
- Meet individually with Executive Director to discuss:
  - Catering and Kiddush options. Review facility rental options/costs
  - Confirm your family is in good financial standing before tutoring begins
- Student begins tutoring

#### **Second Half of Sixth grade**

- Families meet with staff to begin d'var Torah preparation

#### **Four months in Advance**

- Parents and student meet with Rabbi Merow and/or Sharon to study the Torah portion and work on D'var Torah
- Discuss what parents do at the service as well as other family honors

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### **Two months in Advance**

- Students work with cantor to finalize parts of the service
- Family should start to think about other family members who might want to read Torah
- Schedule the rehearsal with the cantor
- Arrange time with the cantor, rabbi and Cynthia for family photos
- Send in bio and picture

### **One Month in Advance**

- Finalize Chesed Reporter

### **One to two weeks in Advance**

- Parents and student meet again with Rabbi Merow for a pre-Bat/Bar Mitzvah meeting
- Parents should meet again with the executive director to review all non-service details
- Come to services week before
- Parents send personalized blessing to rabbi

### **Week of the Celebration**

- Bring in all supplies to TJC (i.e. kippot, centerpieces, etc.)
- Dress rehearsal with cantor
- Photos
- Enjoy feeling the love and support of your community

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### Contact info & who to ask at TJC- 609-921-0100

<p><b>Rabbi Andrea Merow</b></p> <p>(Pastoral issues, dvar Torah, discussion of family involvement)</p>	ext. 203	ram@thejewishcenter.org
<p><b>Cantor Jeff Warschauer</b></p> <p>(B'nai Mitzvah dates, questions about tutoring, family Torah reading)</p>	ext. 213	cantorjeff@thejewishcenter.org
<p><b>Joel Berger, Executive Director</b></p> <p>(Catering options, financial arrangements, logistics before the simcha)</p>	ext. 205	jberger@thejewishcenter.org
<p><b>Sharon Diamondstein, Director of Congregational Learning</b></p> <p>(Chesed projects, educational support)</p>	ext. 220	sdiamondstein@thejewishcenter.org
<p><b>Mindy Langer, Ritual Assistant</b></p> <p>(Honors sheets / family Torah reading)</p>	ext. 208	mlanger@thejewishcenter.org
<p><b>Cynthia Richman, Executive Assistant</b></p> <p>(Appointments with clergy, scheduling photographer, other questions)</p>	ext. 218	crichman@thejewishcenter.org
<p><b>Roni Garrison, Executive Assistant</b></p> <p>(Commererating your day-Tree of Life)</p>	ext. 200	vgarrison@thejewishcenter.org
<p><b>Emily Kafas, Communication and Social Media Manager</b></p> <p>(TJC Bulletin, Bar/Bat Mitzvah program)</p>	ext. 201	ekafas@thejewishcenter.org

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## Appendix:

### Hints and Tips for Party Planning

- The TJC sanctuary provides comfortable seating for approximately 350 guests. We have reduced capacity during the pandemic. Please clarify with our Executive Director closer to your date. Guests should remain at all times in the area of the Social Hall, Main Lobby, Parking Lot Lobby, and restrooms. (The Youth Lounge, Library, Beit Midrash, and the Yad-B'Yad Room are off limits during the B'nai Mitzvah party unless prior arrangements have been made with the Executive Director. These arrangements must be made well in advance of the date of the party.)
- Do not leave gifts unattended! Ask a friend/family member to keep gifts in a safe location.
- Arrangements for coat room attendants and other “party helpers” can be made independently. We do not have a working coat room.

### Glossary of Hebrew Terms

**Aliyah** (pl. **Aliyot**) Lit. going–up. The honor of reciting the blessings before and after reading *Torah*. On *Shabbat* morning there are seven *aliyot*, and in the afternoon service there are three.

**Ark**, or **Aron Hakodesh** (The Holy Ark) The repository of the *Torah* scrolls.

**Bima** (Pulpit) Lit. high place. The *bima* (*stage*).

**Chumash** (pl. **Chumashim**) A Hebrew name given to the Pentateuch in Judaism. The word comes from *chamesh*, the Hebrew word for five, because of the Five Books of Moses that make up the *Torah*.

**D'var Torah** The preparation and delivery of a talk on the *Torah* portion prepared by the child with our staff and parents.

**Gabbai** (pl. **Gabbaim**) A person who assists the *Torah* reader and makes sure that the *Torah* service runs smoothly. There are two *Gabbaim* on the bima during the *Torah* service, who are active members of the congregation.

**Gelilah** The honor of rolling and dressing the *Torah* scroll. After the congregation has had an opportunity to see the scroll, the *Magbihah* (*Torah* lifter) sits in a chair on the bima while the person honored with *G'lilah* rolls, ties and dresses the scroll.

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**Haftarah** A text selected from the books of *Nevi'im* (The Prophets) that is read by the Bar or Bat mitzvah in the synagogue after the reading of the *Torah* each *Shabbat* and holiday morning.

**Hagbah** The honor of lifting the *Torah*. After the *Torah* has been read, the congregation is asked to stand, and someone lifts the scroll above his/her head. This person then turns around to make the writing visible to everyone assembled. This honor is given to a trained congregant.

**Halakha** Jewish law.

**Chesed** The Hebrew word for acts of loving--kindness.

**Kaddish** ("Sanctification") refers to a central blessing in the Jewish prayer service. The central theme of the *Kaddish* is the sanctification of God's name. Several variations of the *Kaddish* are used as separators between various sections of the service.

**Kiddush** A prayer used in the home and in the synagogue to sanctify *Shabbat* and holidays through blessings over wine or grape juice.

**Kippah** (pl. **Kippot**) Head covering worn out of respect for God and as a sign of recognition that there is something greater and above us. The Yiddish word is *yarmulke*. The kippah also serves as a symbol of Jewish identity. A kippah may be worn by men and women.

**Maftir**, informally, refers to the final section of the weekly parsha read on *Shabbat* and holiday mornings in synagogue from a *Torah*.

**Mitzvah** (pl. **Mitzvot**) A commandment or Jewish actions.

**Mourner's Kaddish** A prayer that expresses God's majesty of needing to continue to live in when we experience sadness as a mourner.

**Musaf** Additional service after The Torah Service on *Shabbat* and holidays.

**Oneg** or **Oneg Shabbat** Lit. joy of *Shabbat*. Informal Sabbath (or Friday evening) gathering of Jews with food in a synagogue or private home to express the happiness inherent in the Sabbath holiday.

**Parsha** (pl. **Parshiot**) Lit. portion. The weekly *Torah* portion read in Hebrew. It is also known as the *Parashat HaShavuah* ("Weekly Portion") or the *Sidra*.

**Parve** Food or food product that does not contain either meat or dairy products, and that has not come in contact with either.

**Shehecheyanu** ("Who has sustained us") The blessing said by parents for special times, usually a first or recurring event that has not happened for a while.

**Simcha** A happy occasion such as when a child becomes a *B'nai mitzvah*.

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**Tallit** (pl. **Tallit**) The *tallit* is a prayer shawl, the most authentic Jewish garment. It is a rectangular piece of linen or silk with special fringes called *tzitzit* on each of the four corners. The purpose of the garment is to hold the *tzitzit*, which is a reminder of the 613 *mitzvot*.

**T'filah** (pl. **t'fillot**) Prayer.

**Trope** The system of cantillation marks and their music, used to chant sacred books. There are tropes systems for Torah and Haftarah that differ musically from each other.

### Guidance for Guests who will receive an *Aliyah*

Reciting a blessing both before and after we read from the Torah is one of the ways we show our honor for and devotion to it. The act of coming to the Torah and reciting the blessings is called *aliyah*, which means “going up,” for we go up to the *bimah* (platform) to do so. To be called for an *aliyah* is considered a great honor.

On Shabbat the reading of the Torah is divided into seven portions, each including at least three verses. The person who receives the *aliyah* may also read the text of that portion from the Torah scroll, or there may be a designated reader. If two or three people are called to the Torah to share one *aliyah*, they may recite the blessings together or may divide them -- before and after. There can be no more than three people called to the Torah at one time. Those honored with an *aliyah* will be called both by their Hebrew and English names. They come onto the *bimah* by way of the set of side stairs closest to them and stand on the reader's right. There will be an assistant on the *bimah* to guide you, but please familiarize yourself with the following procedure for recitation.

1. Touch a fringe of the tallit (one of the long *tzitzit*) to the place indicated in the Torah scroll where the reading is to begin, then kiss the fringe. (This indicates respect for the words.) If you do not wear a tallit, use the prayer book or Torah belt for this act.
2. Grasp both handles of the scroll and hold them while you recite the blessing before the reading, found below. After the portion is read, grasp the handles again and recite the blessing after the reading. If two or three people are called, they should share this task of grasping the handles. The act of holding the handles while saying the blessings is derived from Proverbs 3:18: “It is a tree of life to those who hold fast to it.”

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3. When you have completed the second blessing, move to stand on the reader's left. Remain on the bimah through the next Torah portion and blessing after the reading. Then return to your seat. It is customary to leave the bimah by the steps opposite the ones where you came up.
- Men are required to wear a kippah (head covering) and tallit (prayer shawl). If you do not have your own, you may pick them up in The Jewish Center lobby.
  - The wearing of a head covering and tallit is recommended for but not required of women.



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### **Information for Guests**

Shabbat is a day of rest and celebration. Our congregation has established standards, inline with Jewish tradition to help us create an atmosphere of prayerful respect at The Jewish Center on Shabbat. We welcome the many friends of our B'nai Mitzvah. Please advise your guests in advance about observing these norms while at The Jewish Center.

### **Here are some tips:**

- Dress in the Sanctuary should be appropriate for worship. Boys and men should cover their head with a kippah. Girls and women are encouraged to cover their heads in the sanctuary. Men and women, over B'nai Mitzvah age, are encouraged to wear tallit (prayer shawl).
- The Jewish Center is a non-smoking facility in the building and on the grounds at all times.
- The use of cell phones, cameras, electronic games, and other electronic equipment is not permitted anywhere at The Jewish Center on Shabbat.
- There are a few times where the congregation is encouraged not to enter or leave the sanctuary - during the Torah processions, anytime the congregation is standing in prayer, when the student is speaking, or during the rabbi's sermon.
- Many families opt to provide personalized kippot for their celebration.
- During the service, we ask that all attendees please exercise discretion and respect for the prayer service and for Shabbat by holding extended conversations in the hallway and silencing all cell phones.

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## Shabbat Morning Service

Honors and Torah Aliyot

Bar Mitzvah of  
Hebrew Name:  
Parents:

Date:  
Parasha:  
Haftarah:

#	Aliyah	English Name/Hebrew Name	Verses	Reader
1	Rishon			
2	Sheini			
3	Sh'lishi			
4	R'vi'i Parents			
5	Chamishi			
6	Shishi			
7	Sh'vi'i			
M	Mafir Bat Mitzvah			
<b>Haftarah:</b>				

Gabbai Rishon:  
Gabbai Sheni:  
Shamash:  
Board member:  
Living Grandparents:  
Siblings and Ages:

Reading begins  
Torah Service:  
Musaf:  
D'var Torah:

Ashrei:  
Ein Keloheinu:  
Adon Olam:

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## Additional Service Honors for Shabbat Morning B'nei Mitzvah

Please make sure all ark door/curtain honorees come to the Bima carrying an OPEN SIDDUR so they can continue to participate in the service.

Honor	English Name	Hebrew Name
<b>English Reading (B/M Shabbatot)</b>		
<b>Open Ark doors: Baruch She'amar</b> <i>Page 122</i>		
<b>Open Ark curtain: Torah Service</b> <i>Page 168</i>		
<b>Hagbahah: Sefer Torah Rishon</b> <i>Lifting 1st Torah scroll</i>		
<b>G'ililah: Sefer Torah Rishon</b> <i>Tying 1st Torah scroll</i>		
<b>Close Ark curtain</b> <i>Page 184</i>		
<b>Close Ark doors: Aleynu</b> <i>Page 206</i>		