

Guidelines for B'nei Mitzvah

Preparation & Services

Congregation Etz Chaim
on Bacon Street in Biddeford, ME

P.O. Box 905 Kennebunk, ME 04043

So, you are planning a B-Mitzvah!
Mazal tov! Congratulations!

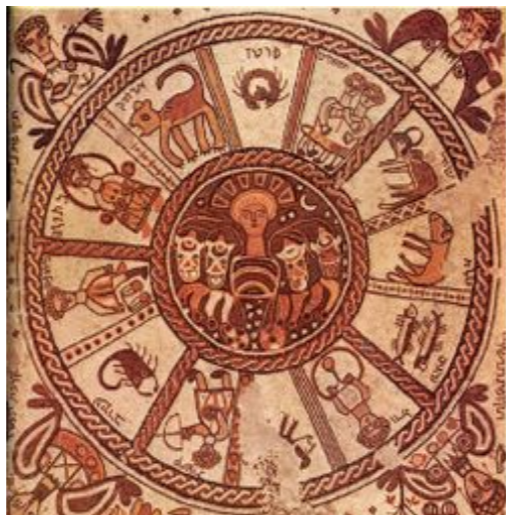
Congregation Etz Chaim would be happy to host this event. We specialize in customizing each B-Mitzvah to fit each family.

Chances are you have a lot of questions. This is not a definite “rule book”, but an outline of the basics of having this family celebration. We hope these pages will give you a general idea of what needs to be done, what you can expect of us and what we expect of you.

Our goal is to help you plan ahead to create a service that best reflects your student and family, so you may sit back and enjoy your “Big Day”.

How and When Do We Set the Date?

There are several factors that families may consider when setting the date for a B-Mitzvah.



- Traditionally, the event takes place after a girl turns twelve and a half, or a boy turns thirteen. Birthdays are calculated according to the Hebrew calendar, which differs slightly from the daily American calendar. Cantor Strassler will assist you in calculating the date.
- Some students choose a date that corresponds to a specific weekly Torah portion or haftarah reading that is especially meaningful to them. Cantor Strassler will assist you in identifying the dates for specific readings.
- Some families choose a date which will be convenient for those who will be traveling to attend. Holiday weekends may be preferred if people need extra travel days OR not preferred if traffic may be heavy or hotels in the seacoast communities are crowded.
- You may set the date as soon as you wish, but we recommend that you set it no later than 9 months ahead of time.

When you are ready to set the date, please call Cantor Strassler at 207-967-5833 to reserve it on the synagogue calendar. This phone call is important to insure that your date does not conflict with any other synagogue activities.

Who will Lead the Service?

Congregation Etz Chaim's Spiritual Leader will officiate at the service. Cantor Beth Strassler received her cantorial ordination and masters' degree in Jewish Studies from Hebrew College in 2017. She has served the Biddeford shul since 1987 in volunteer positions before becoming ordained.

Cantor Strassler is flexible, accommodating to work with and makes the service interesting and memorable for everyone in attendance. She is sensitive to the mixture of people that will attend and is adept at putting everyone at ease.

There is a private fee for Cantor Strassler to lead the service and a synagogue fee for building use.



Do We Need a Tutor?

Yes. B-Mitzvah candidates work with Cantor Strassler weekly for a minimum of nine months before the event. How much time is needed depends on your student's Hebrew proficiency, and how much they want to learn and lead on the day of the service.

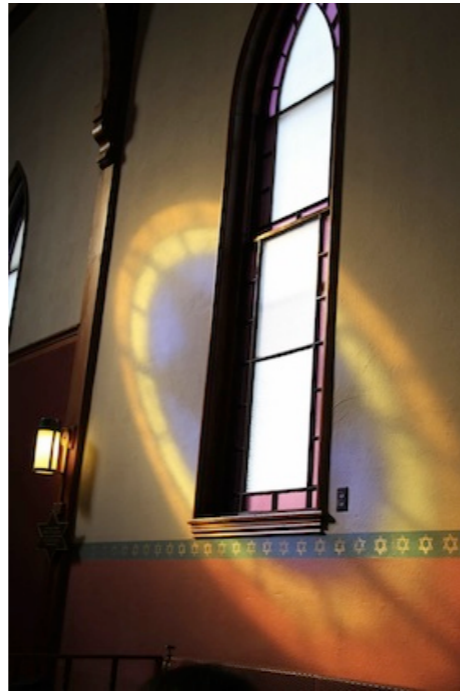
Cantor Strassler provides tutoring for a private fee. Please discuss the fee with her. If there is a financial concern, there are synagogue resources to support families.

How long will the service last?

The service will last about two hours. It will depend on how many extra prayer and honors your family decides to include.

When will the service begin?

Depending on what time you want to end and how long you estimate the service will take, you may determine your starting time. Families have previously used 9, 9:30 or 10 o'clock.



Whom Should We Invite from our Synagogue Community?

Your student's B-Mitzvah is a very special occasion, commemorating their acceptance into the larger Jewish family. In keeping with the significance of the event, the service is open to the entire synagogue community. It will be listed on the synagogue calendar and we will announce it to the community through email.

We ask that you formally invite your student's Hebrew School peers and families and the Board of Directors of the synagogue to the service. Cantor Strassler will assist you in securing names and addresses.

Whether or not you invite Hebrew School peers to an after party or reception is your personal choice.

What Happens After the Service?

Usually a kiddish is offered immediately after the Shabbat morning service in the downstairs social hall. However, the type and size is entirely up to each family. The basic foods of the kiddish are wine and challah. Some families opt to offer a brunch of bagels and cream cheese or a luncheon which includes blintzes, fish, and/or kugel.

What will your student do during the service?

When becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah, a student leads different parts of the weekly Shabbat morning service. They will work with Cantor Strassler to decide which parts to lead from a combination of the following:

- **Prayers:** There are several prayers that your child is familiar with from Hebrew School, and may decide which ones to lead. These include the Shema, the V'ahavta, Ein Keiloheinu, and Adon Olam. You may also ask younger siblings to lead one or more of these.
- **Blessings before and after the Torah reading:** The same prayers are read at each service before and after the Torah reading. These are important because they are the prayers that your child may be called upon to read when attending future Shabbat or High Holiday services.
- **Blessings before and after the Haftarah portion:** The same prayers are read at each service before and after the Haftarah reading.
- **Torah Reading:** The Torah reading is divided into several sections and most of it will be chanted by the leader of the service. Often, a B-Mitzvah student decides to learn the last portion (the Maftir) to chant from the Torah scroll.
- **D'var Torah:** This is a discussion of the meaning of the Haftarah and/or Torah readings for that day. It is an opportunity for your child to demonstrate an understanding of the lessons to be learned in modern Jewish life from the ancient readings.
- **Haftarah Reading:** There is a scheduled reading from the Prophets that is unique for each Shabbat service. If your child chooses to do a reading in Hebrew, then this is what s/he will practice.

How May We Personalize the Service?

There are a broad range of possibilities of how to personalize the service for your student and your family. There are usually a few “extras” in the Shabbat service on the day of a B-Mitzvah. It is important that you, your student and Cantor Strassler plan these ahead of time.

The “extras” are opportunities for your student, family members and special friends to receive honors and attention. None of these are required and families choose whichever ones fit their style.

- **Presentation of the Tallit:** In the beginning of the service, a family member may be chosen to come forward to present the B-Mitzvah student with their own tallit. There is a special blessing and the presenter may say a few words about the occasion.
- **Aliyahs or honors:** This is an opportunity for special guests to be called up to join the cantor in leading the service. Honors include Hebrew speaking parts, (blessings before and after the Torah readings), English speaking parts, (leading a prayer in English) and parts that do not involve speaking, such as opening and closing the doors of the Ark at certain times during the service.
- **Speeches and Presentations:** After the Haftarah reading, there is an opportunity for family members or special friends to say a few words about the student. In addition, representatives from the synagogue and Hebrew School will present special gifts. The B-Mitzvah student gets the last word in a traditional Thank You speech.
- **Programs for the Service:** You may choose to print programs for the service. These may be used to welcome the participants, outline the service, list the names of those receiving honors, and/or explain the meanings of parts of the service.
- **Personalized Yarmulkes:** Yarmulkes printed with the student’s name and date of B-Mitzvah may be ordered ahead of time to be used by participants on this day.

What Synagogue Policies Do We Need to Know About?

Photography during the service is discouraged, but not prohibited. If used, it must be discreet and without flash. Sometimes families choose to go to the synagogue on one of the days preceding the event to take photos in the sanctuary.

Kosher Food Policy: This is a **Dairy Kosher** Kitchen.

Foods which may be brought into the kitchen/ put in the refrigerator:

- Fresh fruits, fresh vegetables/herbs , fresh fish or eggs.
- Foods labeled with a Kosher Dairy or Pareve symbol .
- Drinks, such as soda, or kosher grape juice/wine.
- **No meat of any kind**—unless pre-approved by Cantor Strassler.

This means:

- Only synagogue kitchen utensils, pots and pans stored in this kitchen may be used in the kitchen.
- All cleaning supplies are marked with a Kosher food symbol—dishwashing liquid, scouring powders, sprays and polishing pastes.
- All cooking utensils, pots and pans which are added to the kitchen must be new or must not have been used for one year.

Social Get Togethers: Because we wholeheartedly support community gatherings here in the synagogue, we ask that food be prepared in the synagogue kitchen using the kitchen utensils, pots & pans and all Kosher ingredients.

When this is considered impossible and a social event includes non-Kosher food (such as a potluck supper), then non-Kosher food may be brought into the social hall, IF the following rules are observed:

- Non kosher food, utensils or containers may not go in the kitchen.
- No dishes or utensils from the synagogue kitchen are used.
- No containers or utensils brought into the synagogue may be washed in the synagogue kitchen.
- No meat of any kind is included.
- The food plan is approved by Cantor Strassler.