



**GISHREI SHALOM JEWISH  
CONGREGATION**

**RELIGIOUS SCHOOL HANDBOOK  
2024-2025**



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## **PROGRAM GOALS**

Our synagogue has three roles:

- o a house of prayer... *Bet Tefilah*
- o a house of gathering ... *Bet Keneset*
- o a house of study ... *Bet Midrash*

Education represents one of the major functions of the synagogue. As a *Bet Midrash*, the role of Jewish education is to provide learners with the fundamental skills, information and values of our tradition that will enable them to lead a more fulfilling life, as well as carve out a meaningful place for themselves in the Jewish world. Included in these goals are learners who:

- o study Hebrew
- o value and practice *tefilah* (prayer)
- o further the cause of justice, freedom and peace by pursuing *tzedek* (righteousness), *mishpat* (justice), and *chesed* (loving deeds)
- o observe Sabbath, festivals and life cycle events
- o actively seek to improve the welfare of Jews in Israel and the rest of the world

## **PROGRAM MISSION**

Our mission is to enable learners who complete the program:

- o to transfer what they learn at school to their homes and lives
- o to possess a strong, positive Jewish identity
- o to know their heritage and history
- o to understand the concepts behind and the celebrations of the Jewish holidays
- o to have a basic understanding of Torah and Bible
- o to understand and feel a commitment to Jewish ethics
- o to be able to fully participate in a reformed Jewish service

## **SCHOOL SCHEDULE**

Our classes are designed to meet our program goals in a very limited amount of time. It is essential that students arrive on time for class and stay for the entire program. Parents are encouraged to attend group activities with students.

Hebrew instruction is provided 1:1 or in small sibling groups based on teacher and family availability. The Rabbi visits the religious school and leads instruction one Saturday every month. Hebrew and religious instruction are provided in person and via virtual learning platforms such as Face-Time and Zoom.

## **TUITION AND FEES**

Education program tuition is payable two weeks prior to the beginning of the school year. Tuition payment is to be mailed to the synagogue P.O. Box or remitted through PayPal. If tuition is a financial hardship or if you have any questions about payments, please contact Barbara Kilburn, GSJC treasurer at 860-919-2915.

Tuition for the 2024-2025 school year is:

GSJC member students \$500.00

GSJC non-member students \$700.00

## **ATTENDANCE**

Please be sure students are in class and ready on time. For safety reasons, parents must accompany their children to the classroom. Children are to be picked up at the conclusion of the class or service and a parent must touch base with the teacher or Rabbi at this time. The students will not be allowed to leave without a parent or guardian.

From third grade on, if a student fails to attend more than half of the scheduled classes an assessment may be made to ensure that adequate knowledge has been acquired. A student may be required to receive additional tutoring or repeat the grade.

Absences should be called in as soon as possible to Helene or the Rabbi (if it is a Rabbi-day). We understand that life is unpredictable and things happen, and we ask for as much notice as possible.

## **EMERGENCY CLOSING**

In the event that school has to be canceled due to weather or some unforeseen circumstance, you will be contacted at least one hour prior to the scheduled class time. Careful consideration will be given to school cancellations including travel distance of the students and teachers. If you are unsure if school is in session, call Helene or the Rabbi.

## **MATERIALS**

Students will receive books as part of the yearly tuition. Please check to be sure your student brings all books and materials required for each session. Lost or damaged books and materials will be replaced at the student's family's expense. Crayons, pencils, pens, scissors and glue will be supplied.

## **PARENTS AS PARTNERS**

Parents (and GSJC members) are strongly encouraged to participate in the education program. Examples of participation include teaching a section, subject, song or dance, helping prepare materials for classes, purchasing supplies or photocopying worksheets. By observing their parents and other members engaged in activities, students witness the highest level of commitment to lifelong learning.

Parents are welcome to attend any class at any time without notice. Any comments, compliments, or concerns can be directed to the program facilitators.

## **RELIGIOUS SERVICE ATTENDANCE**

Students in Grades 3-6 must attend 6 Rabbi led services over the course of the calendar year. Students preparing for B'nai Mitzvah will follow the Bar and Bat Mitzvah Guidelines as they appear below.

# Gishrei Shalom Jewish Congregation

## Bar/Bat Mitzvah Guidelines

*Approved March 9, 2000*

*Revised December 2022, July 18, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2014, 2016, 2022*

A Bar or Bat Mitzvah is an important event in the life of a young man or woman. It is a public affirmation of loyalty to Judaism and to the Jewish People. Accordingly, becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is both a joyous and serious event in the life of an adolescent and his/her family and is, therefore, subject to well-defined religious and educational standards.

### A. Who May Be Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

Any child born of a Jewish parent or being able to show proof of conversion to the Jewish faith in accordance with the standards of Reform Judaism, will be eligible to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah upon meeting the following requirements and upon performing mitzvot that show a commitment to a positive exclusive Jewish identity.

1. The child's family must be a member in good standing of Gishrei Shalom Jewish Congregation (GSJC) who has paid the current year's membership and religious school dues, subject to the usual considerations of financial need. GSJC's membership year takes place between May 1-April 30 of the following year.
2. The minimum age of the student will be 13 and the education requirement will be the satisfactory completion of the 7th grade level at the GSJC Religious School. Students whose Bar/Bat Mitzvah occur during the 7<sup>th</sup> grade are expected to complete the religious school year. Children who will become Bar/Bat Mitzvah at GSJC are required to begin religious school by the third grade. Families of children who, for one reason or another, do not meet the educational requirements by the time of Bar/Bat Mitzvah age must meet with the Chairs of the Ritual, the Religious Education Committees, and the Rabbi to discuss ways in which the deficiency can be rectified. All of these factors will be considered in scheduling the ceremony. Progress will be monitored by the Hebrew school teacher together with the Rabbi. If it is determined that the student will not be ready by the designated date the Rabbi, President, and Ritual Chair will consult with the family to reschedule the Bar/Bat mitzvah service in order to allow for more preparation.
3. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah child **accompanied by an adult** must have attended a minimum of 12 Friday night or holiday services at the Congregation during the

twelve-month period prior to the ceremony. It is the responsibility of the family to make sure that such attendance is recorded and verified by a designee using the tracking sheet provided by the education and/or ritual committee. There will be no reconstructing of attendance after the fact.

4. The student shall complete a community mitzvah project within GSJC or the community at large that has been previously discussed and approved by the Rabbi. This project will be completed over a period of 9 – 12 months leading up to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony and discussed in the students Bar/Bat Mitzvah speech. At least 8 hours will be devoted to such a project.

5. Special arrangements will be made by the Religious Education Committee in conjunction with parents, for any child who may require any modification or accommodation to their learning due to an intellectual or learning disability.

6. Any other requirements as indicated by future amendments.

## B. Instruction

Parents are responsible for providing any additional instructional preparation deemed necessary for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah at their own expense. Regular attendance at Religious School (two days weekly) and services should more than prepare students for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah eliminating the need for any additional private instruction. Students will also be provided with individual instruction by the rabbi at no cost to the family.

## C. The Service

The first step is for the family to meet with the Rabbi 15 to 18 months in advance to discuss all aspects of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah including choosing the date, the Torah portion and beginning preparation.

Because the service is a public celebration, not a private one, a Bar/Bat mitzvah will be scheduled to take place at the Congregation's regular Shabbat morning service and the service will be open to all members of the Congregation. The service may take place in the Chapel or the Main Sanctuary, thus the date will be coordinated with the calendar of the First Congregational Church.

The family must also coordinate the date with the Chair of the Ritual Committee and review the setup procedures if the ceremony is to take place in the Main Sanctuary rather than the Chapel. In consultation with the family, the president of the congregation or ritual chair will contact the Church office regarding availability of the sanctuary.

Family members and friends are welcome to participate in the service. Please see the Ritual guidelines attached for participation by non-Jews and discuss with the Rabbi.

In keeping with the Shabbat observance, no flash photography is permitted during the service.

D. Oneg Shabbat, Kiddush and Other Customs

It is customary for the family of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah to sponsor the Friday night Oneg Shabbat and the Saturday morning Kiddush. The Saturday morning Kiddush consists of wine/grape juice and challah for the entire congregation. A donation to the congregation is also appropriate.

It is also customary for the family to provide flowers/plants for the Bimah at the Friday night and Saturday morning services. Arrangements may be made with a florist of your choice.

It is also customary for the Rabbi to receive an honorarium from the family of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah child.

E. Financial Obligations

The Congregation requires that all financial obligations of the family to the Congregation be met three months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony. However, if the ceremony takes place in May or June, dues for the May 1-April 30 membership year may be paid during the month of May. Questions on this matter should be directed to the Congregation's Treasurer.

F. Acknowledgement

The child's parent(s) hereby acknowledge and accept these guidelines.

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Signature of Parent(s) or Guardian and date

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Signature of Rabbi and date

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Signature of Education Liaison and date



## **MEET THE INSTRUCTORS**

### Rabbi

Rabbi Alana Wasserman has been GSJC's spiritual leader since 2018. Rabbi Wasserman received her ordination in 2004 from Hebrew Union College; worked as Campus Rabbi at Furman University in South Carolina, and served several congregations in New Jersey and Florida. Rabbi Wasserman and her husband are the proud parents of two daughters. At each service she leads, Rabbi Wasserman engages students with Jewish history, traditions and instills a sense a Jewish community. She can be reached by phone at 864-567-2413 or email at [AlanaMWass@yahoo.com](mailto:AlanaMWass@yahoo.com).

### Religious School Teacher

Helene Shapiro

We are proud to have Helene Shapiro as the GSJC Hebrew School teacher since 2019. Helene has had a long career which started with creating and implementing a Pre K/ Kindergarten program at Temple Beth Tefilah in East Hartford, CT. She has taught at several temples which include Achvas Achim in Westfield MA and B'nai Jacob in Springfield. Helene does a wonderful job of teaching the holidays, Jewish culture and social action while integrating Hebrew into the lessons. Helene can be reached by phone at 860-490-1820 or email at [Heleneaslove@comcast.net](mailto:Heleneaslove@comcast.net)

### Education Liaison

Debbie Lieberman

Debbie has been an invaluable member of GSJC since 2011. She has been intimately involved with the religious school for many years. Her daughter is a graduate of the GSJC religious school program and was a B'nai Mitzvah under Rabbi Wasserman's tutelage.