

Letter from the Religious School Director

Welcome to Temple Isaiah Religious School. We hope that this handbook will be a valuable resource throughout the school year. This handbook describes the school's goals for religious and Hebrew education and provides some general information and guidelines. It also describes opportunities for both students and parents to be involved in school and Temple activities that help achieve the school's goal of providing each student with a well-rounded religious education.

We look forward to hearing your ideas and suggestions as we commence another successful year of religious education.

B'Shalom,
Rabbi Harvey Witman
Religious School Director

Mission Statement for Temple Isaiah Religious School

The Religious School provides a positive Reform setting that promotes, teaches, and instills a sense of Jewish values, knowledge, and identity among its students.

Goals

The Religious School will provide the following:

- A student-centered environment designed to develop Jewish identity, Jewish values, and kinship with other Jews.
- A knowledge base in Judaism and Jewish identity.
- Knowledge of Jewish traditions, rituals, and holidays.
- Knowledge and experience of *Tefillah* [prayer] as it relates to each individual.
- Knowledge and exposure to the Hebrew language, primarily as it is used in prayer and song.
- Exposure to Israel's history, customs, and current issues.
- Opportunities to pursue *mishpat* [justice], *tzedek* [righteousness], and *chesed* [loving deeds].
- Opportunities for all family members to study and play together.
- Opportunities to support and participate in the life of the Temple, including celebrating Shabbat, the festivals, and Jewish ceremonies that mark significant occasions in our lives.

Religious School Admission Policy

Any child of one or both Jewish parents who wants to receive a Reform Jewish education is welcome to seek admission to the Religious School.

Admission Guidelines

- A prospective student must reside with a member in good standing of Temple Isaiah at the time of registration and during his or her tenure in the Religious School.
- The Religious School Director determines a student's placement in the appropriate grade and class according to the student's educational background and needs.
- The Rabbi, Cantor, Religious School Director, and the Religious School staff determine a student's eligibility to become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah or to be Confirmed.
- We encourage parents of mixed faiths to have their children study only one religion.

Registration/Enrollment Procedures

Registration packages are emailed in early spring to enroll students for the school year commencing the following fall. This email will include a registration form and a tuition worksheet. Early registration helps the Religious School to anticipate class sizes so that we can plan for the number of classes and teachers needed for the coming year. We encourage parents to enroll their children by mid-July. Temple policy requires that all previous financial obligations be met before registration can be accepted.

General Information

Religious School Calendar

The Religious School Calendar is on our website at www.tisbny.org.

Achievement and Attendance Policies and Standards

Parents and Confirmation students must acknowledge the achievement and attendance policies and standards by signing and returning an acknowledgment form by the first day of classes. The form will be emailed to each enrolled student in August.

Policies & Standards for Kindergarten – 7th Grade Students

- Students must demonstrate knowledge of the term's work and have completed all assignments and projects in order to be promoted each year.
- Prompt and regular attendance is a necessary part of effective religious education. Only illness should keep a student home. When an absence occurs, it is the parent's or child's responsibility to obtain missed assignments from a classmate.
- 4th-7th grade students are allowed a *maximum* of 10 absences per class day per year (*e.g.*, students must attend 20 of 30 Monday sessions and 20 of 30 Tuesday sessions).
- Accurate records will be kept on all students in our Religious School to ensure that assignments are being met.

- Students who are unable to limit their absences to the allowed maximum will be given a curriculum assignment toward the end of the school year. Promotion to the next grade level will be provisional until the assignment has been completed.
- Absences beyond the maximum allowed might result in denial of promotion or postponement of promotion or Bar/Bat Mitzvah Service.
- In case of prolonged absence due to illness which compromises attendance and achievement standards, please notify the Religious School Director immediately. Each situation will be completely reviewed to determine the most acceptable solution for all parties involved.
- For both safety and insurance purposes, written consent from a parent must be given to the Religious School secretary if someone else is picking up your child prior to the regular dismissal.

Policies & Standards for 8th - 10th Grade Confirmation Students

The Religious School strongly encourages students to attend all 27 Confirmation classes each year. However, because it is recognized that absences are occasionally unavoidable, students are allowed up to six excused absences each year, which will not have to be made up.

Students are also allowed up to six unexcused absences each year. Unexcused absences must be made up in one or more of the following ways with the pre-approval of the student's instructor:

- Participation in a Social Action program – each program equals one class with an annual limit of three programs.
- A major research paper – equals three classes.
- An independent project – the instructor will determine the number of classes eligible for the project, which shall not exceed three classes.
- NFTY Fall or Spring Weekend – equals three classes.
- NFTY Five-Day Program – equals five classes.

To be Confirmed, a student must be in attendance for at least 15 classes and must have completed the equivalent of an additional six classes (through actual attendance or one or more of the above listed methods) for a total of 21 classes each year. In addition, a student must attend at least two Religious School-sponsored field trips during the three years of the Confirmation program. The Religious School emphasizes that actual class attendance is the best preparation for Confirmation.

Punctuality

To make the most of your child's time in school, we encourage students to be in class on time. We urge you not to let your children lose valuable moments of their education or disrupt the education of others by late entrances.

Drop-off & Pick-up Procedures

Please do not drop off your children more than 15 minutes prior to the school starting time, regardless of the students' ages, as there is no supervision for the children at that time.

Drop-off and Pick-up for Kindergarten – 2nd Grade:

Children should be walked to their classroom and picked up from their classroom by a designated adult. Teachers will wait until all students are picked up.

Drop-off and Pick-up for Grades 3 and Up:

Children may be walked to their classroom or dropped off at the Temple's main entrance. Please pick up your child at the classroom or arrange a pick-up spot with your child either in the Temple lobby or at the car line. To avoid disruption to classes, please do not enter the school wing or youth building more than five minutes before the end of class.

Early Dismissal

For our students' safety and to help us keep track of the whereabouts of the children entrusted to us, we ask that parents either send a signed, written request or make a request in person at the Religious School office if a student must leave (for any reason) while school is in session. Parents must obtain a pass from the Religious School office before picking up a student from the classroom.

Updated Emergency Contact Information

Prior to the start of the school year, parents are asked to supply emergency contact and medical information. Please ensure that the Religious School office has up-to-date information on emergency phone numbers in the event we need to reach you during school hours. Parents must keep the Religious School informed of any medical conditions, such as asthma or allergies, that may require medical assistance. Parents are responsible for keeping emergency contact and medical information current throughout the year. Please make sure to notify the Religious School office of any changes.

Illness

Please do not send your child to school if he or she is ill, especially if he or she is contagious. We will notify you if your child becomes ill while at school. A sick child is brought to the office to wait for his or her parent's arrival.

Nut-Free Environment

As there are students enrolled in the Religious School who are severely allergic to all tree nuts (walnuts, almonds, pecans, cashews, pistachios, etc.), or peanut butter/peanut products, please do not send in food containing any tree nuts or peanut products for snacks, classroom celebrations, or craft projects.

Brit Kavod [Honor Covenant]

Introduction

Creating the next generation of Jewish adults is a team effort. Parents and teachers must work together to pass on Jewish values and Jewish knowledge to our children. Our goal is to help today's children develop into responsible adults. One way to meet this goal is to hold them accountable for their actions. To do this, we must state our expectations and the consequences of not meeting them. Thus, we have developed this *Brit Kavod* [Honor Covenant]. Please download this form which is attached. Students and parents must sign the *Brit Kavod* return it to the Religious School on the first day of classes.

Brit Kavod

I, the student, know that the Temple is a place of worship and that the Temple and the Religious School are places of learning and friendship. I agree to the following:

- I will treat others with *kavod* [respect].
- I will make sure that my words are never harmful.
- I will never hit, kick, or use violence.
- I will act appropriately in the sanctuary at all times.
- I will observe the mitzvah of *Ba'al Taschit* [not destroying property or littering].
- I will complete my school assignments and homework.
- I will strive to be a *mensch* [a good person].

I, the parent, will reinforce the subjects taught in Religious School. I agree to the following:

- I will reinforce the subjects taught in Religious School.
- I will set aside time for Religious School homework.
- I will attend worship services with my children.
- I will share my suggestions, concerns, and praise with the teachers or the Religious School Director.
- I will endeavor to perform mitzvot [good deeds].
- I will be safety-conscious, especially in the parking lot.
- I will support the school if any disciplinary action is necessary.

If a behavioral problem emerges, the teacher will remind the student of the terms of this *Brit Kavod*, will suggest appropriate ways of acting, and will explain the consequences if the student does not behave responsibly. If the student continues to behave inappropriately, the student will meet with the Religious School Director to try to resolve the problem. In extreme circumstances, a student may be suspended or expelled from the Religious School. Parents will be involved to help resolve all serious or repetitive behavioral problems.

In sum, this *Brit Kavod* is intended to enhance the learning environment of the Religious School. Students will have the best success in an educational setting that is supported by parents, teachers, and the Religious School Director.

Judaic & Hebrew Programs

Jewish Studies

The Jewish Studies program is offered from Kindergarten through 7th grade. There are several components to the Jewish Studies program. Some subjects are studied every year with increasing depth based on the student's grade level of understanding. Jewish Studies includes the following:

- Holidays
- Jewish History
- Jewish Values
- Torah/*Mitzvot*/Ritual
- *Tzedakah*
- Israel

In addition to general Jewish Studies, each grade generally focuses on a specific subject as appropriate to the grade level.

Hebrew Studies

Our *Sam the Detective's Reading Readiness* book and our *Sam the Detective Alef Bet Mystery* book will enable our 2nd and 3rd grade students to learn the Hebrew alphabet. They will recognize letters and vowels in simple syllables and words.

Formal Hebrew studies begin in 4th grade. By the end of the 4th grade, *Derech Binah: The Hebrew Primer* will enable the students to decode as well as practice the blessings and Hebrew songs. In 5th through 7th grades, the Hineni Program presents the Shabbat Morning Service, prayers, blessings, and songs for home observance of Shabbat and holidays, as well as selections from the Friday Evening Service. Students will learn to read fluently from the *siddur* [prayer book]. They will be able to understand the meaning of the prayers, translate key words, and participate in the prayer service.

Some of our 7th grade students will study mini-*ulpan* services (Aleph), giving them a taste of Modern Hebrew. These students will learn to appreciate Hebrew as a living language. This fun approach to learning Modern Hebrew covers units of food, clothing, school, and family.

Sanctuary Skills

4th Grade:

Students will study the Friday Evening Service with a major emphasis on the Family Shabbat Service. Students will be presented with an orientation of the service. The major prayers will be recited and sung. The *parasha* of the week will be studied through various activities, including *Torah Toons I*.

5th & 6th Grades:

Students will study the Saturday Morning Service and the major festival services. These are rotated every other year to prevent repetition of the curriculum, but will be discussed here as Year 1 and Year 2.

Year 1—The Festival Services

Students will be encouraged to more-greatly appreciate and celebrate the festivals. The prayers emphasized on the holidays, such as *Hallel* [praise], are studied. Special videos about the holidays are shown to the students and a video series of *Torah Toons* on Chanukah, Purim, and *Tzedakah* is used.

Year 2—The Saturday Morning Service

Students will study the *Shacharit* [morning] Service that corresponds with the *Mishkan T'filah* prayer book. Students will become comfortable with this important service in preparation for the service at which they become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

B'nai Mitzvah Program

To become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah at Temple Isaiah, a student must be enrolled in our Religious School during the year that he/she becomes a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, and the student must have successfully completed four years of Hebrew and Judaic study or its equivalent, as determined by the Rabbi and the Religious School Director.

Attendance at Tutoring Sessions with the Cantor

A student may not have more than six unauthorized absences (not including rescheduled appointments) from tutoring sessions with the Cantor.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Fee & Membership Dues Obligations

A Bar/Bat Mitzvah fee is due 30 days prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Service. You can call the Temple office to learn the current fee. For your convenience, the Temple can set up a payment schedule to help ease the financial obligation. If interested, please contact the Temple's financial secretary through the Temple office to discuss such an arrangement.

For a Bar/Bat Mitzvah Service taking place between January 1st and May 31st, 50% of all dues and assessments for the fiscal year beginning the first of January must be paid at least 30 days prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. The balance must be paid in the normal monthly installments, as billed.

For a Bar/Bat Mitzvah Service taking place between June 1st and August 31st, 80% of all dues and assessments for the fiscal year beginning the first of January must be paid at least 30 days prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. The balance must be paid in the normal monthly installments, as billed.

For a Bar/Bat Mitzvah Service taking place after September 1st, all dues and assessments for the fiscal year beginning the first of January must be paid at least 30 days prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date.

The building fund pledge must be completed before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date.

Confirmation

8th Grade Program:

The 8th grade program introduces students to their responsibilities as adult Jews by engaging them in discussions and seminars in the following areas:

- Ethical dilemmas
- Jewish identity
- Avoiding cult traps

The program, *You Be the Judge*, in which teens debate ethical issues, encourages discussions about “the right thing to do.”

The 8th grade program includes field trips, breakfasts, guest speakers, and the opportunity to connect with other Jewish youth.

9th Grade Program:

The 9th grade program affords the teacher the opportunity to deal with subjects not ordinarily covered, while giving students a chance to delve into many interesting areas. The following topics will be explored from the Jewish perspective:

- Bio-Medical Ethics—including transplants, euthanasia, abortion, surrogate parenting, and Jewish genetic diseases
- Peer Pressure/Teenage Problems—including values clarification and human sexuality (the Jewish view of premarital sex, abortion, homosexuality, and birth control)
- Responsibility to the Aged
- *Ba'al Taschit* [Concern for the Environment]
- Comparative Religion—including other major religions and Jews-by-Choice (conversion)

The 9th grade experience is enhanced by specific exercises including the preparation of living wills, a mock euthanasia trial (with all sides represented), a visit from a Planned Parenthood representative, an AIDS workshop run by the Jewish Community Service of Long Island, field trips, and opportunities to connect with other Jewish youth.

10th Grade Program:

Rabbi Karol's class focuses on students learning beliefs and practices of Judaism through the eyes of a Rabbi and on connecting with the Jewish community through a yearlong individual mitzvah project and a weekend trip as a class.

Students will discuss the following topics with the Rabbi:

- Jewish identity according to Jewish tradition and the Reform movement
- "Jewish time" and how we celebrate it
- The advantages and disadvantages of being different
- God in our lives and in our prayers
- Why weddings are so important
- Inter-marriage and the Jewish people
- *Mitzvot*, *Tzedakah*, and *kashrut* for Reform Jews
- What the Rabbi can tell you about death and life after death
- Your life after Confirmation

Students will participate in activities outside of class, including two Sunday field trips with 8th and 9th grade Confirmation students, Mitzvah Day, and the Purim Carnival. Students are required to do a ten-hour mitzvah project approved by the Rabbi and have the option of going on a class trip (which rotates among Boston, Philadelphia, or Washington D.C.).

All students will lead the Confirmation Service on or near the holiday of Shavuot.

Atid (Post Confirmation)

Post-Confirmation class for 11th and 12th grade students meets once a month on Sunday mornings from 9 to 11. Rabbi Karol teaches during the first hour and Rabbi Witman teaches for the second hour. The Rabbi's two-year course is "Jewish Values and How You Live Your Life," based on a book by Rabbi Ronald Isaacs. Topics include taking care of your health, business ethics, practicing *tzedakah*, what it takes to be a leader, trust, humility, and much more. The Rabbi also invites college students from Temple Isaiah to share their experiences with the Post-Confirmation students each year. Rabbi Witman teaches about contemporary issues and how they affect Jewish high school students now and as they look forward to entering college.

In addition, students are invited to participate in the Walk for Beauty in the fall, a trip with the Confirmation students in October, Mitzvah Day, and a trip to Boston, Washington, or Philadelphia with the Rabbi and the 10th grade Confirmation students in the spring.

Tzedakah

Integrated throughout Jewish life is the concept of *righteousness*, giving of oneself to help others. The Hebrew word for this charitable behavior is *tzedakah*. In the Religious School, students are asked to practice *tzedakah* by participating in an in-class project. Additionally, students are encouraged to do *tzedakah* projects with their families, friends, and classmates, and these projects are an important part of the B'nai Mitzvah and Confirmation programs. Also, each year, Temple members join together to help a variety of worthy causes during Mitzvah Day.

Student Evaluations

To keep you apprised of your child's progress, report cards are sent home twice a year.

Faculty

We have a talented group of teachers, many of whom are members of our own congregation. Our staff is selected for their ability to be strong Jewish role models and solid Jewish educators. Teachers have opportunities to attend Jewish education conferences to develop new teaching techniques. They are informed of the latest teaching materials as they become available. Most importantly, our teachers are committed to providing each student with the best possible Jewish education.

Religious School Board

The Religious School Board is an advisory committee that reviews and develops policies on the school's operations. The Board meets once a month during the school year to discuss current issues. School Board members also help with the school social and educational activities.

Guidelines for Supportive Parents

- Show your support and enthusiasm for your child's Jewish education. Exhibit a positive attitude and prepare your child at the beginning of the Religious School year by purchasing a new notebook, pencils, special Religious School bag, etc.
- Convey to your child that you have confidence in, and respect for, the teaching staff, school director, and religious leaders at the Religious School and the Temple. Young children, especially, must know that you trust their teacher and that they are entering a safe environment.
- Visit your child's class and attend Religious School and Temple activities, such as Family Education Programs, Family Services, the Purim Carnival, and the Chanukah Zimriah [song festival] and Latke Bash.
- Discuss Jewish issues and celebrate all Jewish holidays at home.
- Involve yourself in the school as a volunteer or room parent. Join the Parents' Association; offer to visit the class to share a special talent or to help out at a holiday celebration.
- Go together to the Adam D. Fisher Library at Temple Isaiah and check out Jewish books of interest. Use a Jewish-themed book from time to time as a bedtime story, or ask an older child to review a Jewish book during dinner one evening with the family.
- Understand the *Brit Kavod* [honor covenant], attendance and achievement policies, and drop-off and pick-up procedures (especially parking lot pick-up) of the Religious School.
- If there is a problem in school, take it immediately to the proper person. If there is a classroom concern, always go to the classroom teacher first. If it cannot be resolved with the teacher, speak with the Religious School Director.
- Listen to the evaluations and recommendations of your child's teacher. More often than not, a child acts differently at home than at school.

Co-Curricular Activities

Family Education

Throughout the year, the Religious School hosts a number of educational programs for students and their families. These programs give you the opportunity to meet your child's teacher(s) and his or her classmates, as well as to socialize with the parents of the children in class. We hope you can join us to help make the learning of Jewish tradition a real and vital part of your child's education.

Family Services

Family Services take place once a month during the school year. The services are geared for family and children, with singing and a story. Family Services begin at 7:30 PM.

Parents' Association (PA)

The PA's many activities enhance your child's Religious School experience and bring families and friends together. The Parents' Association helps at Family Education Programs, Shabbat Dinners, Passover Seders, and other educational programs. The PA joins with the Social Action Committee on Mitzvah Day, with Sisterhood for its annual functions, and with Brotherhood for a fun-filled end-of-year party.

The PA also hosts an annual Family Fun Night, Family Bingo Night, and Book Fair. The Parents' Association is always ready to welcome new members. Membership information will be sent to all enrolled students and families in August.

Youth Group

Temple Isaiah has three very active Youth Group levels. We invite all of you to participate in the very best of informal Jewish education in our Youth Group programs.

Juniors (5th & 6th Grades):

This group encourages members to mix and mingle with each other through a variety of Jewish programs.

Inters (7th & 8th Grades):

This group provides additional opportunities for members to get to know each other through Shul-ins (overnights) and thematic Jewish programming.

Seniors (9th – 12th Grades):

As part of our Senior Youth Group, students are also members of the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY), which has approximately 10,000 high school student members. Our students join at Temple Isaiah (a local chapter), but interact with other temples from our region. The NFTY experience enables our young people to make friends and work together on social action programs, attend retreats (conclaves) at Kutz Camp or Eisner Camp, and attend the NFTY National Convention. This is a rewarding experience.

Jewish Summer Camps

The Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) camps are Jewish camping at its best. At Eisner Camp and Crane Lake Camp, campers are instilled with Jewish identity and pride while participating in athletics and other social activities. At Kutz Camp, campers develop leadership skills in the NFTY youth movement.

All three camps are wonderful places for our young people to spend their summers. Over the years, Temple Isaiah has sent a significant number of Religious School students to these great camps. Scholarship funds are available. For more information, please contact the Rabbi or the Religious School Director.

Israel

Traveling to and living in Israel is a wonderful opportunity for all Jews, especially our young people. Many organizations offer youth summer trips to Israel, Confirmation class trips, gifts of Israel programs, and even longer work-study programs. Students who are entering 11th grade can spend the summer in Israel with NFTY. This experience fosters a very positive Jewish identity and an opportunity to meet other teens who are part of the Reform Movement. Scholarships are available. Also, Birthright now offers a free ten-day trip for Jewish college students (18-26) who have never been to Israel. Information on these opportunities can be obtained from the Religious School office.

