

Frequently Asked Questions concerning Bar/Bat Mitzvah services at B'nai Zion Congregation

What is a Bar/Bat Mitzvah: What does it mean to be a Jewish adult? What is the best way to celebrate the new responsibilities of becoming a Jewish adult? Preparation for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a commitment made by the student, and also the family. It is not a “show” and it is not a “party.”

Commitment: No student is required to lead a service or read Torah or bless the Torah to be a Jewish adult. Jewish children become Jewish adults at the age of thirteen. If your family chooses to have the child lead a worship service, then the child needs to know enough Hebrew, and be able to lead the congregation in worship. This involves a commitment by the family and child in order to achieve these goals.

Set a Date: Set a date for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service with the Rabbi. Some of the things to consider when choosing a date. Find a date that is: ideally after the 13th secular and/or or Jewish birthday. Convenient time for family to attend. Be aware of holidays and vacations, in order to let the student be able to find sufficient time to work with the Rabbi. For example, not immediately after school breaks, if the family is away for the break; not immediately after major Jewish holy days. Please be considerate of the Rabbi's schedule as well.

Mitzvah project? The student should find a Mitzvah project that they want to work on for six months to a year before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. The project should be in addition to any donations or requests for donations. Selection of the project should be discussed with the Rabbi.

Invitations/save the date: Please have “Save the Date” and Invitations proofed by the Rabbi. Some of the wording to avoid: A child does not “have” a Bar/Bat Mitzvah – they “become” one. The name of the congregation is “B'nai Zion Congregation” (note: no capital “N” in the middle of “B'nai” and not “Temple.”) Typically Friday night service is at 6:00 PM. Saturday morning service begins at 10:30 or sometimes 10:00 when there is a Bar/Bat Mitzvah leading the service, as opposed to the usual 11 AM. Some of the recent invitations were ordered online at zazzle.com, or basicinvite.com. Locally people have used Boyett Printing or Styrons.

Number of people in the synagogue: The sanctuary has seating for between 176-190 seats. Remember that keeping the attendance to under 200 is safer and more comfortable for the Lefkowitz Hall as well.

Do you expect a larger than normal group for Friday night? We need to have an idea of a number of extra people from your group to be able to make sure that there are enough seats in the sanctuary and an appropriate location and amount of food for the Oneg Shabbat.

Please consider these numbers before creating an invitation list.

Familiarity with the Service: In addition to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah becoming comfortable with the Friday night and Saturday morning services, the immediate family should also be familiar with the services. The family should know when to stand/sit, be familiar with the prayers/blessings, know all of the rituals for the Torah service, candle blessings/Kiddush, etc. There is a requirement that the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and the family attend services every week during the six months before the date of the event, and at least twice a month while the student is in the Bet Hebrew class (5th-7th grade), and once a month when the child is in the Aleph Hebrew class (3rd and 4th grade).

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Torah portion: The Torah portion will be determined by the date that is selected for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service. However, the selection that the child will read in Hebrew from the Torah scroll and teach about in the D'var Torah (sermon) will be determined when the student and Rabbi meet to talk about the Torah portion. This should occur no longer than 6 months before the date of the ceremony. By this point the student needs to have already learned all of the prayers and blessings needed to lead the service. The student will begin individualized weekly lessons with the Rabbi. The tradition at B'nai Zion has been to read the Torah selection in Hebrew (and not chant the selection).

Haftarah Portion: The Haftarah selection is based on the weekly Torah portion. The tradition at B'nai Zion is to read the portion in English. The selection may be edited for size or eliminated at the Rabbi's discretion.

Flowers: Every Shabbat service has flowers that help beautify the worship space. Some Bar/Bat Mitzvah families would like to request certain flowers, or color schemes. Often the flowers are also used to decorate during the Oneg Shabbat &/or Kiddush Luncheon, so the flowers may be made in a way to be put on a circular table, or larger table. The Sisterhood provides flowers every week, but any additional charges for specific requests are usually paid by the family.

Food: Discussions about serving food need to be made with our Special Events Coordinator and should begin at least 3-6 months before the date. Food can be catered (the Events Coordinator can make recommendations of caterers who have experience at B'nai Zion). B'nai Zion does not have a Kosher Kitchen, but does not serve pork or shellfish. We also have some restrictions about serving dairy and meat at the same meal. Food choices should be discussed with the Special Events Coordinator.

Typically the family of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah helps host the Oneg Shabbat on Friday evening (even if the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service is Saturday morning). Oneg Shabbat is usually "finger foods" such as pastries, cheese, crackers. If the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service is Friday evening the family will often have more "substantial" food, which can take the place of or actually be dinner.

When the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service is on Saturday, the family usually helps host a Kiddush Luncheon. Discuss with the Events coordinator efficient ways to set up the Lefkowitz Hall for seating and food/drink service.

Please consider the size limitations at B'nai Zion before deciding how many people to invite.

Please consider what will happen with any leftover food.

Who is hosting Oneg Shabbat Friday night: how should the names be included in announcements or bulletin messages. For example, if grandparents are hosting an Oneg Shabbat, can it say: Hosted by the grandparents of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, or should it include all of the names? Even when the Bar/Bat Mitzvah is Saturday morning, the tradition is that the family hosts the Oneg Shabbat on Friday evening, and the family attends the Friday Shabbat service.

Who is hosting Kiddush Luncheon Saturday morning? Do you have an idea of numbers of extra people who will be attending services? We need to have an idea of a number of extra people from your group to be able to make sure that there are enough seats in the sanctuary and an appropriate set up of tables and amount of food for the Kiddush luncheon.

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Theme: The theme for the event is the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. It is important to clear choices about decorations, etc. with the Events Coordinator. Setting up the building needs to be scheduled with the Events Coordinator. Usually the family arranges for friends/family to help set up tables and decorate.

Setup/Cleanup: Any setup or cleanup of any of the areas at B'nai Zion that is above and beyond normal weekly chores will incur extra expenses that the family is expected to pay.

Videos / Pictures: B'nai Zion now typically has a Livestream of the service (on the B'nai Zion YouTube site) which is then kept on YouTube to be watched at any time. You may also request copies of the service on DVD. (When we Livestream we need to use microphones for anyone who should be heard.)

Families often want pictures of the event. If family pictures are requested, we suggest that they occur either during the week before the ceremony, or an hour before the service (so that all portrait photography equipment is put away at least half an hour before the service begins). If a family wants to request that a photographer take pictures during the ceremony, it is important that no photography distracts the worshippers, therefore: no flash is allowed during the service, no photographer (including family/friends – even with phones) should stand in front of others. Please discuss the details with the Rabbi.

People Participating in the Service:

Honors: Two weeks before the date of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah the Rabbi should meet with the parents and Bar/Bat Mitzvah to discuss ways that they can honor family/friends during the service. The Rabbi will need to know names, relation to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, if they are Jewish, how familiar they are with the service, how mobile they are (to get on the bimah), etc.

Friday Evening Blessers: Who will lead the Congregation in the blessings for the Candles and Kiddush Friday night? Traditionally the family (parents, sometimes grandparents, and sometimes siblings and Bar/Bat Mitzvah as well) are called up to lead the Candle and Kiddush blessings at the beginning of the Shabbat Evening service. The family traditionally does this even if the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service is Shabbat morning.

Presentations:

The Brotherhood gives the Bar/Bat Mitzvah a Prayerbook. How would you like your child's name to be embossed on the Prayerbook cover?

How would you like your child's name be shown on the Bar/Bat Mitzvah certificate?

There will be a gift from the Brotherhood (an embossed prayerbook) and the Sisterhood (typically candle set for girls and Kiddush cup for guys). If you have a suggestion or request of a member from each group who might know your child and be a good person to make the presentation, please speak with the president of the organization, who will clear the choice with the Rabbi

Ushers/Greeters: It is helpful to have Ushers/greeters: Do you have requests or suggestions of congregants who you would like to have greet your guests?

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Handout / Program: It is not necessary to have a handout for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony. If the family is considering having a handout, the Rabbi has samples, and needs to work with you to create the handouts. Usually B'nai Zion prints the handouts.

Candy: There is a tradition that some people choose to follow of tossing candy at the Bar/Bat Mitzvah during the service after the Bar/Bat Mitzvah has completed their part in leading the service and giving the D'var Torah. If your family chooses to have candy tossed at the Bar/Bat Mitzvah it is important that the candy be soft, and wrapped in such a way as not to mess up or damage the sanctuary. The Rabbi will work with the family about the most appropriate way to have the candy distributed.

Clothing: While we do not usually prohibit worshippers from attending a worship service because of what they wear, Shabbat is a holy day, and there are customary ways to dress. Men usually wear jackets and often ties. Women usually wear skirts/dresses or nice pant suits.

The Bat Mitzvah should be aware of skirt length, since she will be sitting on the bimah. If possible, the skirt should cover below the knees when she is sitting. Women on the bimah should consider skirt length and should cover their shoulders. Usually the Bar/Bat Mitzvah needs to wear a headgear microphone (be aware for hair styles) which includes a wireless transmitter box (which should attach to their clothes).

Kippot and Tallitot: B'nai Zion does not require that anyone wear Kippot (Yarmulkes) or Tallitot (prayer shawls), nor does the congregation prohibit wearing them.

Traditionally a tallit is only worn during a daytime service (not an evening service) unless the person wearing it is leading or helping to lead the service. A Bar/Bat Mitzvah is not required to wear a Tallit. It is important to understand that if a Bar/Bat Mitzvah chooses to wear one it is not a "costume" or "uniform" for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah service, but rather a choice to wear a Tallit as an adult Jew. The Rabbi can help choose an appropriate Tallit (helping to find the correct size and style). They can be ordered online, purchased at the Gift Shop, handed down from a family member, or speak to the Rabbi about making one. Often when a new Tallit is purchased, it comes with a matching bag and Kippah. B'nai Zion has Tallitot that guests are welcome to use during services.

Some families choose to purchase a number of kippot for guests/family/congregants to wear for the service. These can have the Bar/Bat Mitzvah's name and date printed inside and saved as a memento. The Rabbi can help find Kippot that the family can purchase online. Kippot can also be handmade (for example, crocheted). B'nai Zion has many kippot in a variety of colors and designs that the family is welcome to use for the service(s).

Security/Safety: The current B'nai Zion policy is to have a police officer at every service. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah family is welcome to make a donation to help defray the cost of the security for their service. If the family chooses to request additional security, it must be arranged through the B'nai Zion office and the family will be requested to help defray the costs.

Experience Helps: We would like to encourage that your family meet with families who have already experienced having their child lead a service for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, and meet with families who are preparing for a service this year. The Rabbi and the Educator hope to help arrange these meetings and facilitate these meetings.