



Frequently Asked Questions about B'nei Mitzvah at Temple Sinai

Updated June 2024, this document is subject to change from time to time.

Q: Can you offer me some definitions of the Hebrew words used around B'nei Mitzvah at Temple Sinai?

A: Sure thing! We'd love to.

- **Simcha** The Hebrew word for happiness, it also is the noun meaning "happy occasion."
- **Bar Mitzvah** Literally, "Son of the Commandments," this is the typical term for both the service and the male-identifying child celebrating the ceremony.
- **Bat Mitzvah** Literally, "Daughter of the Commandments," this is the typical term for both the service and the female-identifying child celebrating the ceremony.
- **B'nei Mitzvah** Literally, "Children (or Sons) of the Commandments," this is the typical term used for multiple children's ceremonies. (My brother and I celebrated our *b'nei mitzvah* last weekend.) B'nei mitzvah is also increasingly used where 'he/she' gender identifying pronouns are not chosen, and another gender identifying pronoun is.
- **B'not Mitzvah** Literally "Daughters of the Commandments," this is the typical term used when two girls or women share the bimah. (I had a moving experience at Hannah and Sarah's *b'not mitzvah* last weekend.)
- **Bet Mitzvah** Temple Sinai has adopted this adaptation to the traditional text for non-binary students. It means "child of the commandments."
- **Shabbat** The day of rest, beginning at sundown Friday evening and extending one hour after sunset on Saturday evening.
- **Shacharit** The morning prayer service
- **Mincha** The afternoon prayer service, sometimes including havdalah in winter, the ritual separating Shabbat and the week.

Q: How are dates determined?

A: We try to schedule the date within a two-month period (before or after) the child's 13th birthday. This may be extended to a three-month period (especially surrounding July and August). The Temple calendar is reviewed to avoid conflicts with holidays, school breaks and challenging times of year.

Q: Will all B'nei Mitzvah students share a service?

A: With few exceptions, b'nei mitzvah students will share the ceremony. To avoid creating conflicts for your family, we attempt not to pair children who are personal friends, children who are in the same secular school or children who are not well suited to share the bimah together. Because of the number of children and the limits on available service times, virtually all children will share their service.

Q: Do we have a choice between the Sanctuary and the Beit Am?

A: B'nei mitzvah services are celebrated in our Sanctuary.

Q: Do we have a choice between a morning (Shacharit) service and an afternoon (Mincha) service?

A: We schedule Shacharit services for most families. Because we are blessed with such a large b'nei mitzvah class, we schedule Mincha services to accommodate all our students celebrating close to their 13th birthday. Mincha services are assigned as needed.

Q: What are the differences between the Shacharit and Mincha services?

A: The Bar/Bat/Bet Mitzvah student's participation within the Shacharit and Mincha services is essentially the same. There are some differences in the morning and afternoon liturgy, but the experience is quite similar.

Q: How long do the services last?

A: Shacharit services usually last about one hour and forty-five minutes. It begins at 10:30am and usually concludes at about 12:15pm. The Mincha service begins at 5:30pm and lasts about 80 minutes, until about 6:45pm.

Q: What is a “Havdalah” ceremony?

A: Havdalah is a brief ceremony that takes place at home or in the synagogue at the conclusion of Shabbat. If your child is assigned a Mincha service, Havdalah may be included at the end of your service, depending on the time of year.

Q: When does my child begin to prepare for the ceremony?

A: One year before your ceremony, you will meet with a 6-month cohort to learn about the process of becoming B’nei mitzvah. You will receive all of your learning materials and your tutor options at that meeting. You will meet with clergy approximately 6 months prior, 12-weeks prior, 8-weeks prior, 4-weeks prior, and then will have a final rehearsal with clergy the week before your service.

Q: When is the officiating rabbi assigned?

A: The officiating rabbi is assigned about 2 months before the ceremony.

Q: How do I arrange for a tutor?

A: During the cohort meeting, the cantor will offer tutor recommendations. It will be your responsibility to contact the recommended tutor and arrange a study schedule.

Q: Do the parents come with the child to every Bar/Bat/Bet Mitzvah appointment?

A: Yes, parents attend each meeting with their child, if possible.

Q: How can we reserve the sanctuary for a photography session for our family?

A: The Clergy Assistants will schedule your photo session, please contact them directly. [Please see the photography guidelines here for detailed information.](#)

Q: How can we reserve the Social Hall or other temple facilities for a Kiddush luncheon or celebration?

A: Contact [Helena Peter](#) for more information on facility rental.

Q: Are we required to attend services on the Friday night before our Bar/Bat/Bet Mitzvah ceremony?

A: All families are encouraged to attend services on Friday evening and will be offered the opportunity to participate in the service by lighting Shabbat candles. This allows the entire congregation to share in your simcha.

Q: Are there charges for the officiants who perform our Bar/Bat/Bet Mitzvah ceremony?

A: There is no charge for the services of our cantors or the officiating rabbi, although some families make donations to the discretionary funds of the officiants, the Religious School Fund or another fund of their choosing in appreciation of their efforts.

Q: What fees and costs are associated with the Bar/Bat/Bet Mitzvah?

1. **Bar/Bat/Bet Mitzvah Fee:** A charge will be included on your temple statement for these fees associated with your child becoming bar/bat/bet mitzvah.
2. **Social Hall Rental:** If you choose to rent the temple facilities for a luncheon or celebration following the ceremony, you will be charged at the special member rates for usage of the social hall, kitchen or other spaces for catered receptions. These optional charges will be billed separately.
3. **Tutoring:** The tutors that we recommend charge for their services at an hourly rate. Fees for tutoring are paid directly to the tutors.
4. **Please note:** Families who are not current in their financial obligations to the temple will not be assigned a date. Contact our Executive Director if you have a question about your financial obligations or need to make individual arrangements.

Q: Along the way, who do I contact for help or support?

A: If you’re not sure who to contact, it’s best to start with the senior clergy assistant, [Gail Sell](#).

- For date scheduling questions, please contact [Cantor Rachel Rhodes](#).
- To change or adjust your already assigned date, please contact [Gail Sell](#).
- Questions about financial obligations or payments, please contact our Executive Director, [Ellen Agler](#).
- Questions about event venue rental, please contact [Helena Peter](#).