

Shalom!

We at Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas are delighted that you and your child will become a link in the chain of transmission of Torah that has taken place in this Congregation since 1796 and in our current building since 1833.

Expectations

Our Synagogue's approach to any B'nai Mitzvah is that visiting candidates should be prepared to do, at least, what is expected at their home congregations. We work closely with the Rabbis and tutors at Synagogues around the country to ensure that we respect the *minhag* (tradition) of everyone involved. When a family or group is less than 10 people total, the Rabbi will conduct a more intimate service that will provide a closer setting for your lifecycle event.

Hebrew Congregation uses *Mishkan T'filah*, our movement's most recent Siddur. In preparation for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, we encourage your child to master the common Hebrew prayers for a *shacharit* (Shabbat or weekday morning) or *mincha* (Shabbat afternoon) service. In order to fulfill the mitzvah of becoming B'nai Mitzvah, we at The Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas ask that the student recites (at the very least) the *Barchu*, *Sh'ma*, *V'ahavta*, *Avot V'imahot*, and *G'vurot*, in addition to the Torah service. That being said, it is the Rabbi/Cantor at your home synagogue who should decide which prayers your child should, or is able to, learn.

The Outline

Our office will provide the outline for you and your child. Please look at this outline closely with your tutor or home clergy. This outline will be the most important tool for the congregation's preparation for your special day. **It is the responsibility of the family or tutor to properly fill out the outline, and deliver it to the congregation via e-mail at least a week before your event.** For your convenience we have created an excel spreadsheet that you can edit as you prepare for the service; this includes choosing Rabbi OR B'nai for who will lead sections of the service, Hebrew OR English for prayers, and places to insert names of those you wish to honor (Ark openings, Aliyot, etc).

Service Types and Times

B'nai Mitzvot are available in our Synagogue for *shacharit* (morning services) Tuesday-Saturday. Morning services typically begin at 10:30am and last 90 minutes. . We offer the possibility for *mincha* (afternoon services) only on Shabbat. Afternoon services typically begin at 1:30pm and last 90 minutes, and our *Havdallah* services begin at 5pm and last one hour.

The Rehearsal

Because your child will be doing his or her training with an outside Rabbi/Cantor/Tutor, we do not require rehearsals with our Rabbi prior to your arrival at The Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas. However, we do require the following:

For those families that are flying into St. Thomas, we ask that 45 minutes be set aside the day before the event for a short rehearsal.

For those families arriving on a cruise boat the day of the event, we ask that 30 minutes be set aside that morning for a short rehearsal.

The rehearsal involves the following:

- 1) A meet & greet with the Rabbi
- 2) An opportunity to go through the outline and have questions answered
- 3) Last minute changes to be spoken about, and music decided
- 4) A chance for the B'nai Mitzvah to view the Torah and rehearse reading or chanting
- 5) An opportunity to get used to the space, see where the B'nai Mitzvah will lead, etc.

While we are open to a skype or phone call with the Rabbi beforehand, it is not necessary.

We are unable to take pictures of the B'nai Mitzvah Torah portion, so please plan on a few minutes for your child to read from our Torah that morning or at the rehearsal to become comfortable with the script of our Torah, which may differ from the *tikkun*.

Torah and Haftarah

Your Rabbi/Cantor/Tutor should also assign a passage from the *parsha* (Torah portion) of the week of your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah for your child to learn, using the standard *sedra* scheme of your temple (either Israeli or Diaspora *sedra*). Any part of the Torah portion can be read, but we do not require, nor encourage, that the entire portion be read. It is best that you and your child choose a section of the *parsha* that is meaningful or speaks to you in some way. The Torah reading must be contiguous. Each reading must be at least three verses long, and must be broken into *aliyot* that make sense according to the text and translation.

Please notify our Rabbi of the Torah and Haftarah passages your child will read, along with the prayers that your Rabbi/Cantor assigns your child by filling this information out on the outline attached. We, at The Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas, ask that B'nai Mitzvot know the blessings before and after the Torah and Haftarah Readings. Haftarah is only read on Shabbat or the first or last day of a holiday. Therefore, we do not require the Haftarah to be read if your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah is celebrated on a weekday.

On Shabbat and weekdays, we allow three *aliyot* for the Torah service. A standard *aliyah* is (minimum) 3-5 verses. The first *aliyah* is typically reserved for Grandparents; the second *aliyah* is typically reserved for Parents; the third *aliyah* is typically reserved for the child becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. However, these are only recommendations, so please choose whomever you would like for the *aliyah* and Torah blessings.

Our Synagogue includes a special part to any B'nai Mitzvah, wherein Grandparents and Parents, who are present, pass the Torah from down to your child, to symbolize the passing of Torah from generation to generation.

Honors

In addition to the *aliyot*, you are able to honor other friends or family members by assigning them to the following aspects of the service:

- 1) Opening and/or closing the Ark – The ark is opened three times, and an opener is needed for each of the two doors of the ark.
- 2) Serve as the *hagbah* to lift the Torah – We ask that this honor be given to a person who is strong enough to lift a Torah.
- 3) Serve as the *galilah* to roll, wrap and dress the Torah. Multiple people, including small children, can have this honor.
- 4) Prayers – Often there are family members or friends who wish to contribute by sharing in the reading of a prayer, or reading of a prayer in Hebrew or English in place of the B'nai Mitzvah. We ask only that this does not substitute the basic requirements of B'nai Mitzvah.

Music and Melody

We at Hebrew Congregation wish to honor the musical *minhag* of your home synagogue. Therefore, please let the Rabbi know what melodies for prayers and blessings your child wishes to use. We will do our best to accommodate.

As a Reform Congregation, we sing the common melodies of the Reform Movement, i.e. those sung at most Reform synagogues. These can include the works of Debbie Friedman, Craig Taubman, Dan Nichols, etc. Additionally, the Rabbi is able to accompany melodies with guitar, as an option.

Special Needs

We at The Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas are sensitive to the needs of our students. Please let us know if your child has special needs that we should be aware of, so that we can adapt the service requirements. Our goal is to make this a meaningful day for everyone, and we are always willing to make changes to fit the needs of your child.

Other Additions

While we do not require it, we encourage families to print programs for the day of your child's *simcha*. This program can include the Torah portion, the Haftarah, or any other personally significant readings or prayers. It can also provide translations, and names of honorees.

We provide plenty of *kippot* and tallit for guests, but we welcome personalized *kippot* for your event as well!

We have a wonderful list of photographers and videographers who can add to your service. Please let us know if you would like help in selecting one. All have worked with us before, and are trained in how to capture your child's special day while still respecting the sanctity of our sacred space.

Contact and Questions

Please contact us if you have any questions leading up to your child's special day! Communication is the best way that we can ensure a successful and meaningful event for you and your child!

For logistical and general questions, please contact Stella Minion at Stella@synagogue.vi

For questions about the service, please contact Rabbi Harvey at RabbiMike@syangogue.vi

We look forward to celebrating this wonderful *simcha* with you!

Rabbi Michael E. Harvey & The Staff of the Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas