

# America's oldest Jewish congregation launches a kosher food pantry on the Upper West Side

**JTA** [www.jta.org/2025/11/28/united-states/americas-oldest-jewish-congregation-launches-a-kosher-food-pantry-on-the-upper-west-side](https://www.jta.org/2025/11/28/united-states/americas-oldest-jewish-congregation-launches-a-kosher-food-pantry-on-the-upper-west-side)

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November 28, 2025

Congregation Shearith Israel announced a partnership with the kosher food insecurity nonprofit Masbia on Thanksgiving.



Volunteers working at the new Masbia Relief Annex at Congregation Shearith Israel on Nov. 27, 2025. (Stefano Giovannini)

On Thanksgiving morning, as volunteers gathered at Congregation Shearith Israel for the synagogue's 11th annual "packathon," they also marked a new milestone: Their synagogue was opening a kosher food pantry on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

Shearith Israel, an Orthodox congregation that is also known as The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, was established in 1654, making it the oldest congregation in the United States.

The synagogue's Thanksgiving-morning volunteer event draws a large crowd each year in part because of its location along the Macy's parade route. But its Thanksgiving tradition stretches back centuries: In 1789, when George Washington announced the first national

Thanksgiving, Shearith Israel's leader at the time, Gershom Mendes Seixas, held the country's [first Jewish Thanksgiving service](#).

With a history older than the founding of the United States, Louis Solomon, the president, or parnas, of Shearith Israel, said the congregation was looking for a way to celebrate the country's upcoming 250th birthday.

"It's been a part of our culture for 3,000 years, but certainly a part of our culture in America for 372 years, to give back, to try to do what we can," said Solomon. "So the congregation has gotten itself together and thought about, what is it that we could actually do?"

Over the summer, Shearith Israel reached out to Alexander Rapaport, the executive director of Masbia, a kosher soup kitchen and food pantry, to propose an idea: Masbia could open a location in their synagogue.

"They're celebrating America turning 250 years, and they're thinking of what they can do, something special," said Rapaport. "And one of the things they think that could be is opening up a food pantry in their place."



Alexander Rapaport, the executive director of Masbia, and Louis Solomon, the president of Congregation Shearith Israel, on Nov. 27, 2025. (Stefano Giovannini)

At the event on Thursday morning where the new [Masbia Relief Annex](#) was announced, volunteers from local faith groups, including the Jewish Center, the Latter-Day Saints and the West End Church, watched the parade and assembled 2,000 packages of food.

Solomon said Shearith Israel had pledged to contribute \$50,000 to the new Masbia annex, and was asking local faith groups to collectively match their donation.

The new food distribution center is scheduled to open sometime before Hanukkah, and will allow Masbia to serve Manhattan through the use of Doordash, which [provides the nonprofit with free delivery services.](#)

Rapaport said that this month, due to the tightened federal rules around the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Doordash had provided Masbia with 11,000 free deliveries. So far, Rapaport said they were on track to hit that number.

“We’re hoping that DoorDash is our go-to thing, because that eliminates the breadline stigma, and it just brings people food. It also gives us flexibility,” said Rapaport.

Masbia currently has three locations, two in Brooklyn and one in Queens. Now, Rapaport said the new space will allow the food nonprofit to provide delivery service in Manhattan as well.

“We’re here to help people. It’s a new borough, it’s not a borough that we were in. We’re going to reach out to the community and see where the need is, and slowly take on hopefully,” said Rapaport. “The first week we’ll only serve a few dozen people, but then if it grows to hundreds, we’ll be very happy.”