

CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL

THE SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE SYNAGOGUE



BAR and BAT MITZVAH PLANNING GUIDE

Effective January 2026

A Letter from Our Executive Team

We are pleased that you are considering Shearith Israel - a uniquely beautiful and historic synagogue - for your child's upcoming Bar or Bat mitzvah. We created this event planning guide to introduce you to our event rooms, offerings, rate structure, and policies. We hope you will find it helpful.

Please take a moment to review this information, including our Room Rental Policies. Once you are ready to ask questions or schedule your event, please contact our Office Manager directly (contact information below) or use our [online room rental inquiry form](#).

We look forward to helping you make your event a success.

Best regards,



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Planning Your Bar or Bat Mitzvah at Shearith Israel

The Ceremony

Our stunning, historic synagogue is a special place to celebrate your child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Traditionally, a young man will read from the Torah on Shabbat morning, but can also read on Monday, Thursday, or *Rosh Hodesh*. Bat Mitzvah girls can mark this occasion in several ways, such as reading from the Torah in a special women's-only service or delivering a *Debar Torah* for the entire congregation following Shabbat morning services in the Main Sanctuary. Training in Torah chanting or preparation for the women's service can be arranged with our *hazzan*, Rabbi Ira Rohde (a flat fee of \$2,000 covers all lessons). As ample time for training and preparation is often necessary, and to fully familiarize yourself with our minimum training and Judaic education requirements, we recommend parents reach out to ritual director Rev. Zachary Edinger at least one year in advance. Please note that lifecycle events are only offered for members of our congregation.

If your child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah is held during one of our services, we will waive the ceremony rates. If your event falls in the summer months, our choir may be on break. You can arrange for them to perform during the service at a cost of \$4,000 for our standard choir, which consists of one choir leader and 7 choristers (and an organist, when applicable).

For privately-scheduled celebrations, please note the following ceremony rates (plus choir charges, when applicable):

Bar or Bat Mitzvah Ceremony Rates

Ceremony Space	Full Member	Associate Member
Main Sanctuary	\$2,200	\$3,300
Little Synagogue	\$650	\$900
Outdoor Pavilion	\$1,500	\$1,700

The Reception (Celebratory Meal)

Most families choose to hold their celebratory meal in the synagogue. Shearith Israel offers a variety of reception spaces perfect for celebrations large or small. Please see our Overview of Event Spaces (next page) for descriptions and seating capacity. All room rental rates include the cost of a **basic** room setup, one door attendant to greet and direct arriving guests, kashrut oversight (which does not replace a caterer's *mashgiah*), use of our standard chairs and tables, and the use of your chosen event space for a 4-hour event. If you will be holding a catered event with waitstaff (caterers' or CSI's), there is an additional charge for kitchen use (often used for storing catering supplies, food prep, heating [but NOT cooking], and staging). Furthermore, if your caterer/planner requires more than 2 hours in advance of the event for setup, additional fees may apply, subject to availability. Please note: if you or your caterer's waitstaff need substantial support from CSI staff before, during, or after your event due to your caterer's waitstaff arriving late or being understaffed, or if they do not adequately handle cleanup or equipment removal promptly and properly, additional fees will be charged. Additional hours beyond the 4 included hours are billed at 15% of the room rental rate/hour. Furthermore, a security fee will be charged for events with 100 or more guests (details to follow). See below for rental rates and space descriptions.

If you choose to hold your reception at an outside venue, we still require that you adhere to our kashrut standards. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to discuss with our Ritual Director, Rev. Zachary Edinger or Rabbi Meir Soloveichik.

Reception Rental Rates

Event Space	Full Member	Associate Member
Levy Auditorium*	\$1,500	\$1,700
Outdoor Pavilion	\$1,500	\$1,700
Elias Room	\$925	\$1,050
Portico	\$925	\$1,050
Portico Add-On**	\$350	\$375
Kitchen use	\$225	\$275

*A \$1,000 surcharge applies to rentals of the Levy Auditorium following morning services on Shabbat or holidays in order for us to provide a congregational kiddush in an alternate space. Alternatively, you may sponsor the congregational kiddush luncheon as a tax-deductible gift.

Option 1: Sponsored Congregational Kiddush

If your celebration falls on Shabbat or a holiday, you may wish to sponsor a kiddush luncheon for our congregation, either in lieu of, or in addition to, a private reception. These sponsored meals are fully tax-deductible as allowed by law, so long as you provide the same menu and setting to the Congregants and your private guests. If so: **1) we will waive the room rental fee, 2) all charges from your caterer and possibly additional vendors will be exempt from sales tax, and 3) your payment toward the catering will be treated as a donation to the Synagogue.** In order to enjoy the sales tax exemption and the charitable deduction, your vendors will need to supply us with the detailed menu, and make out the invoice to “Congregation Shearith Israel”. After we have received your contribution to CSI in the same amount, we will pay them in full.

The goal of this option is to be gracious and inclusive to every Congregant who attends services that day. If you need more than one space to accommodate the larger crowd, that is fine, however, all participants- your invited guests and Congregants- must be permitted to choose which space to attend and may not be separated or restricted to one or another room. Furthermore, no assigned seating will be permitted (although you may request one or two reserved tables for your immediate family and infirm guests). Many (but not all) families have a brief program with speeches after Services before the reception. If you opt to include everyone in the sponsored kiddush, be aware that all Congregants will be invited to attend the program first (and try to be mindful of time for the sake of those Congregants).

Option 2: Private Kiddush or Reception (with or without a sponsored congregational kiddush): Alternatively, you may opt to hold a private reception for your family and invited guests. In this case, you will need to rent the space(s) and arrange for catering (subject to our kashrut policies) that suits you (these costs are not tax deductible). As a courtesy to the Congregation, you may separately sponsor a congregational kiddush (which would be tax deductible). In this case, you may invite your invited guests to hear speeches in the Main Sanctuary while the other Congregants enjoy Kiddush. Kiddush sponsorship options can be found at <https://www.shearthisrael.org/giving/sponsor-a-kiddush/>.

It is important that you discuss all arrangements with our Office Manager before proceeding.

Our Event Spaces

Levy Auditorium

Our largest and most popular function room, Levy Auditorium is a carpeted, comfortable room that lends itself well to most types of events. An adjacent kitchen provides the perfect catering staging area, and a bar or buffet can be set up in the adjoining foyer to accommodate larger parties. **Given its location beneath the Sanctuary, dancing of any kind is not permitted in this room.**

Outdoor Pavilion

Created in late 2020 in response to the need for outdoor gathering space, this beautiful spacious lawn includes a large and attractive tent top (excluding the Winter months), lighting, an open stage (can be used for a bar, dessert buffet, presentations, etc.), and access to electrical outlets. This space, best suited for the milder times of year, is conducive to either an elegant affair or a more relaxed vibe.

The availability of an outdoor space in the heart of the city and next door—but not inside—our Synagogue building presents unique opportunities and responsibilities. We are committed to being respectful neighbors and, as such, we need to be mindful of noise. **Please note that when amplification is permitted (not on Shabbat or Jewish holidays), amplification must cease by 10 PM and should never approach or exceed permitted decibel levels.** Please advise your event/party planner, musicians, DJs, etc. to maintain moderate sound levels, and that if you exceed the acceptable levels, you will be asked to turn it down. **Non-compliance may result in fines.**

Elias Room

Our elegant wood-paneled library, distinguished by its portraits, antique wall sconces, chandeliers, and cozy fireplace, is a great space for more intimate gatherings. Located next to our Little Synagogue, the Elias Room is a natural reception area for smaller ritual events. It can also be used in combination with the Portico and/or Levy Auditorium when more space is needed.

Portico

Our lovely outdoor portico runs along the magnificent front of our historic synagogue and is distinguished by its Greek-Revival architectural style. Offering broad views of Central Park from between its soaring Corinthian columns and arched doorways, this is the perfect spot for cocktail parties or events in the warmer months. **You may add the Portico to any other room rental for the add-on rate.

Main Sanctuary

Our stunning 125+ year-old sanctuary, which features soaring stained-glass windows designed by Louis Comfort Tiffany, provides a grand setting for important lifecycle events and dignified, large-scale public gatherings.

Little Synagogue

Our serene colonial chapel is a replica of the congregation's original Mill Street synagogue, which was erected in 1730. Ritual objects used by our forebears over the past three centuries are on display and in use. The Little Synagogue is the perfect space for weddings, baby namings, or other ritual celebrations with a smaller, more intimate crowd. The space can be reconfigured to accommodate more women (see seating capacity chart below).

Kitchen Use

Our kitchen is not a “cooking kitchen”, i.e., no actual oven or stovetop cooking is available or permitted. We do allow caterers to bring in hot boxes/warmers to keep pre-cooked food warm over Shabbat or for a non-Shabbat event. Your caterer must have their equipment approved by us for electric load and other potential constraints. They should not assume that CSI’s warming ovens will be available or sufficient for your needs.

Seating Capacity at a Glance

Event Space	Lecture or Cocktail Party	Seated with Tables	Seated with Tables and Buffet Stations
Levy Auditorium	250	190-210	160-180
Outdoor Pavilion	250	190-210	180-200
Elias Room	60	60-70	50-60
Portico	60	40	30
Main Sanctuary	380 men; 320 women	N/A	N/A
Little Synagogue	60 men; 12 women	N/A	N/A

Options and Extras

We can provide the following extras and options, subject to availability, color choices, and quantity limits. All selections must be discussed with our staff before your event:

- Standard tables and chairs—available at no additional charge. Chair covers available at \$1.50 each. As is; subject to availability.
- Washing station—available at no additional charge (subject to linen charge, when applicable).
- Audio/visual equipment (basic)—available at no additional charge.
- Place Settings (meat only)—dishes, flatware and glasses may be rented at \$2 per place setting.
- Linens—tablecloths may be rented at \$10 each and napkins at .50¢ each. Several colors available, please inquire. As is; subject to availability.
- Choir (in Main Sanctuary)—choirmaster and 7 singers (and organist, when applicable), \$4,000.
- Waitstaff (subject to availability)*— provided at \$185 per person for up to 4 hours; additional hours at \$50 per hour per person.
- Attended Coat Check (subject to availability)*— provided at \$40/hour per attendant (4-hour minimum).

- Bathroom Attendant (subject to availability)*— provided at \$40/hour per attendant (4-hour minimum).
- Additional Security Personnel—provided at \$70/hour per professional security guard (4-hour minimum). Events with 100 or more guests will be required to cover the cost of security for the duration of the event, with a 4-hour minimum. The minimum charge of \$280 will be added to your invoice in advance of the event.

* We cannot guarantee the availability of our waitstaff or attendants. If we are unable to accommodate your staffing requests you will need to procure staffing from your caterer or a staffing company. Staffing is subject to insurance requirements (e.g., workers' compensation, liability, liquor liability, etc.).

Our Room Rental Policies

Congregation Shearith Israel offers room rentals for everything from ritual and lifecycle events to private meetings and parties. We look forward to helping you make your event a success, and ask that you take a moment to read and understand our room rental policies:

- To schedule your event, you must discuss your plans with our Office Manager, submit our Room Rental Reservation Form, and pay a down payment of 25% of your room rental rate. A security deposit of 10% will also be collected at that time, refundable after the event, provided no damage or loss and all charges for incidentals (if applicable) have been deducted.
- The remaining balance will be due 30 days prior to your event.
- We are a traditional Jewish institution and expect that all events held here will be conducted in a dignified manner and in accordance with our traditions and customs. While we invite organizations, non-profits, and individuals to rent our event spaces, only members of our congregation are permitted to host lifecycle events such as weddings, *beritot*, and Bnei Mitzvah at Shearith Israel. (If you are not already a member but would like to be, we welcome you to apply for membership.)
- Our room rental rates include the cost of setup, a door attendant, catering supervision by our *Mashgiyah*, use of our standard chairs and tables, and use of your chosen room(s) for a 4-hour event (setup and teardown can occur outside of the 4-hour window). Additional event hours are billed at 15% of the room rental rate/hour.
- Catered events (i.e., events that involve onsite food prep and/or waitstaff) will incur a kitchen use fee as stated above. This fee does not apply to basic events involving food platters which are dropped off and do not have catering staff.
- If your caterer's waitstaff isn't sufficient, you are responsible for any additional staffing costs if CSI's staff provide substantial support.
- We do not rent our sanctuary spaces for private events on Shabbat or holidays.
- Members who wish to schedule an event must ensure that their accounts are in good standing. All arrears, such as membership dues, offerings, sponsorships, or other past due items, must be settled before event requests can be confirmed.
- Your caterer must be pre-approved by our *Mashgiyah* in advance of your event and wine must be kosher AND *mevushal*.
- You are responsible to ensure that we receive a certificate of insurance (COI) from each caterer and vendor you use (florist, musicians, etc.) at least 7 days prior to your event.
- **Open flames, such as candles, are not permitted, and we cannot accommodate ritual Sabbath or holiday candle lighting at this time. Use of sterno for catering must be discussed and approved in advance.**
- You must discuss your floor plan and room setup plan with our Office Manager.
- If you need to cancel your event, please note our cancellation policies within the following time frames:
 - More than 30 days ahead: Your deposit will be returned in full.
 - Between 30-7 days ahead: Your payments will be returned less \$100.
 - Less than 7 days ahead: Your payments will be returned less your deposit.

To discuss your plans and schedule your event, contact our Office Manager at 212-873-0300 x230. You can also inquire immediately about available dates using our [online room rental inquiry form](#).

Etiquette for Services at Congregation Shearith Israel

Dear Friend,

We hope you find these guidelines to etiquette at Shearith Israel helpful, especially on those occasions when you invite guests, including, and perhaps especially, youngsters to join our distinctive services. Some of these guidelines are typical at most synagogues while others are standard at orthodox synagogues. Shearith Israel is a traditional congregation, which takes pride in its dignified service.

If you are inviting guests to our services – and we very much encourage you to do so – especially when inviting groups of youngsters to a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, we suggest you share these guidelines with them or their parents in advance. Some people send a personalized version by email shortly before their event.

Dos:

- Head covering: *kippah* for men and boys (some of our men enjoy wearing a dapper hat), a head covering for married women (*kippot* and doilies are available at our front door);
- Modest attire: suits/business attire for men (hats optional), appropriate length dresses or skirts with sleeved tops for women;
- *Tallitot* are available for men at the entrance to the sanctuary. Feel free to quietly ask our helpful *shamash* for assistance;
- Take notice when the congregation stands or sits during service.

Don'ts:

- Large bags: avoid bringing large bags or backpacks with you. Our security personnel will inspect them and as they may not be brought into the sanctuary, you will need to leave them in our unattended coatroom;
- Men's section: do not walk in the open center area of the sanctuary. If you need to step out during services, please walk around the back of the pews and not in front of them;
- Cell phones: we ask that you leave cell phones and all electronic devices at home. But if you do have one with you, please be discreet. Make sure to have it turned off (or at least on silent) and leave it in your purse or pocket for the duration of services;
- Absolutely no checking of emails or any other smartphone programs in the sanctuary or elsewhere in the building on Sabbath or holidays;
- Absolutely no photographs/selfies may be taken any time in any location in the sanctuary or elsewhere in the building on Sabbath or holidays;
- Talking: please keep any talking to a minimum or step outside the sanctuary;
- No chewing gum, smoking, eating, or drinking during services.

We look forward to welcoming you to Shearith Israel and hope you enjoy the experience and come often.