

# Congregation Shir Shalom Religious School

Adapted from curriculum development guide by Leslie Gottlieb, Director Emeritus

*“Educate children in the way they should go;  
when they are old they will not depart from it.”*

*(based on Proverbs 22:6)*

## **Our Mission:**

Help students develop feelings of love, pride and respect for their heritage as they create individual Jewish identities.

## **Our Vision:**

An engaging education for all learners based on Jewish traditions that honor Torah, ritual, worship, acts of loving kindness and repair of the world. We provide a nurturing, supportive and inclusive environment to inspire a sense of connection, pride and community.

## **Our Program:**

### ***Kindergarten-Grade 7***

Age-appropriate weekly instruction in prayer-based Hebrew and Jewish history and culture is offered in grades K-7. We strive to teach through creative programming and engagement for all learners. Traditional classroom learning is supplemented with music, cooking, project-based learning, community outreach, visiting speakers, and social opportunities. Sunday morning student worship services led by our Rabbi and enhanced with music with our Cantor round out the experience. Our program includes special family education opportunities for all grade groups. With a commitment to flexibility and consideration for all families and their needs, our school aims to practice a culture of kindness and understanding.

In all areas of study, students are encouraged to think critically, express themselves--and ask questions. Students are encouraged to appreciate lifelong Jewish learning, embracing the values shared by our synagogue and the global Jewish community.

## ***B-Mitzvah***

Our B-Mitzvah program is a highly personalized approach to preparing students to make a lifelong commitment to Jewish life. Culminating with a special worship service that students help plan and lead, students study and complete meaningful tasks along the way, with many opportunities for learning about our traditions and making a difference in our world. To celebrate their achievements and lifelong commitment to Judaism, our students are called to read/chant from the Torah and receive a special blessing. Preparation begins in grade 5 with family education programs. Yearly orientation meetings help families stay engaged with our highly individualized process.

## ***Post B-Mitzvah Programs***

We strongly encourage all students to remain active members in our teen programs after becoming B-Mitzvah. Further opportunities are in development.

## ***Social Action as Jewish Education (SAJE)***

Students examine social justice themes in Judaism to prepare for navigating the world as Jewish adults while participating in opportunities for community service. Students in grades 9 and up are encouraged to participate in our annual visit to the **Religious Action Center's L'Taken** program in Washington, D.C.

## ***Student Mentor Intern Program (SMP):***

B'nai mitzvah graduates in grades 10-12 are invited to return to Shir Shalom in a new role: as mentors in our religious school classes. The school director teaches a weekly thirty-minute pedagogy class for first year mentors, who are assigned to work with supervising teachers. Mentors are transitioned to become co-teachers in their senior year of high school—creating a new generation of instructors of Jewish education. Students receive a stipend for their work.

## **Our Curriculum:**

Four essential concepts help guide lessons in Judaic culture and Hebrew classes: ***Olam*** (the World); ***Torah***; ***Avodah*** (Ritual & Worship); and ***G'milut Chasidim*** (Acts of Loving Kindness).

### ***Olam, the World:***

Students learn about Jewish history and communities from Biblical days to the present. Israel education is highlighted in all grades, with Israel's places, people, culture and geography presented in an engaging and age-appropriate way. Project-based learning, such as the Israel tourism project, is used frequently. Older students will learn about the

Holocaust, the creation of the State of Israel, Jewish values related to living as global citizens, and our role in applying Jewish principles to our own lives. Discussions about our relationship to the State of Israel are aided by our relationship with the Israeli Emissary project, through which Israeli teen emissaries living here for a year visit our classes several times a month.

### ***Torah:***

Students will study Torah and its central importance that guides our faith. Younger students will read Bible stories to learn about central figures and important moments in Jewish life. Older learners will use critical thinking skills to interpret the major themes and lessons of Torah in class discussions. All of these skills culminate as B Mitzvah students examine their assigned *parashah*, or Torah passage.

### ***Avodah, Ritual and Worship:***

Students will gain insight and knowledge about Judaic culture and learn Hebrew through prayer and sound.

Starting in kindergarten, students are introduced to the Hebrew aleph bet through games, stories, and art projects. Gradually, familiarity with Hebrew letters and root letter system grows until, in older grades, students are able to read/decode Hebrew from sections of Torah with accuracy and fluency. Students will study and practice blessings and prayers at all grade levels, learning both the text of the prayers (*keva*) and the deeper meaning/intentionality associated with each prayer (*kavannah*).

Students will learn about past and present communities of Jews, the synagogue, traditions for the home, *mitzvot* and lifecycle events. Creative programming includes a model wedding, a study of famous Jews throughout history, and many others in order to develop a close understanding of our traditions through a project-based lens.

Holidays are explored through educational programs that provide meaningful connections for students through cooking, art, drama and more.

Students will learn about Reform Judaism and what makes it unique.

### ***G'milut Chasidim, Acts of Loving Kindness:***

Students will learn to value ideas of justice, inclusivity, diversity and kindness. The meaning of *tzedakah* is explored through projects such as food drives or sandwich-making for local food pantries. Discussions about social responsibility teach students the concept of *Tikkun Olam*, repairing the world, which is an overarching theme at all levels.

We are proud to host a guest speaker each year from the **Holocaust and Human Rights Education Center's Speakers Bureau** and/or **Holocaust Child Survivors of Connecticut** for our older students and families. **Anti-Defamation League** programming for schools is another feature we utilize.

### **Program Schedule:**

This fall, our program will utilize both in-person and small, remote tutorial sessions to gain the benefits of different modes of instruction. **We look forward to a return to in-person learning for grades K-7 on Sunday mornings! For grades 2-7, thirty-minute small-group Hebrew tutorials will be delivered remotely on Wednesday afternoons.** These focused learning groups will allow our students to make rapid progress in learning the Hebrew aleph-bet, prayers and blessings. Small learning groups offer our teachers the ability to support students in all stages of learning with individualized attention. Some flexibility in scheduling may be possible because of the small group nature of this program.