

## Youth and Family Learning Annual Report

2022-23

Submitted by: Barbara Fink, Director of Youth and Family Learning  
Deborah Zuckerman & Hannah Zwiebel, Co-Chairs, Board of Education

### Summer:

We spent the summer preparing our space to be shared with The Children's Museum. This was a tremendous undertaking to clear out the classrooms, closets, Early Childhood Center and the library. With the help of Jennifer Molinari, we created a beautiful Jewish children's library in the Religious School wing. The Religious School curriculum was revamped and updated and teachers were hired to replace those who retired.

### School Year:

This year our school community grew by six new families (1 was already a member) with 10 kids; plus younger siblings who did not enroll in Religious School. This was mostly due to our new member incentive program. We welcomed back a family who was not comfortable being here in-person since the pandemic began and one of our Religious School families moved their children to SSDS!

We kicked off our Religious School year with a breakfast prepared and sponsored by our Brotherhood' the first one since 2019! Families were so appreciative to be back together and the food was delicious!

Our Religious School classes worked hard learning about holidays, prayers, Torah and Hebrew reading. They all eagerly volunteered to lead parts of *t'filah* each week.

Our 3<sup>rd</sup> graders led parts of the service on a Shabbat morning in March as they were given their first siddur. What a delight it was to see them dressed in their best and showing off their Hebrew reading skills.

Both our Day School and Religious School 6<sup>th</sup> graders each read Torah twice in our family services. And the 5<sup>th</sup> graders read Torah for the first time in April and May!

Rabbi Small, Cantor Risman and I facilitated seminars for our **b'nai mitzvah classes**. 7<sup>th</sup> graders and their families learned about Coming of Age, Healthy Communication and Our Relationship with G-d. Our 6<sup>th</sup> graders and their families learned about the importance of *Putting the Mitzvah Back in Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, and what it means to take hold of the Torah. The 6<sup>th</sup> graders were given their *Tanachim* as they began to learn about how to write and deliver a *D'var Torah*.

Barbara worked with Jewish Federation, CBI, Beth El, Sinai, and Beth Hillel to create a **Mitzvah Project Fair** for 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> graders and their families. The Emanuel hosted over 200 people on a Sunday morning in February. The goal of the program was to teach our kids that a mitzvah project is more than "I volunteered 2 times playing piano at the Hebrew home or collecting money to send to an organization," but that it is a lifetime opportunity to advocate, educate and donate. Families learned about different opportunities in our community and beyond that they can use to jump start their lives of *mitzvot*.

In the fall we brought back the **Haunted Shul!** With the help of parents, we decorated Koret to be spooky and creepy. We started the program in the lobby with The Witch from Endor who conjured up the spirits of the Israelites' enemies. The kids used Hero Cards to fight nine different biblical enemies. At each station, a teacher played the enemy. They told the story, but left out how the enemy was defeated for the children to solve through the station's activity. Some stations had an activity that helped the kids to figure out who the hero was, while others they just had to use the clues in the story. We ended the program with the story of the Rabbi and the 29 witches. Day School students and younger siblings joined in the Haunted Shul program during the Religious School's scheduled time. This program continues to be a student favorite and an educational way to engage students during this very distracting season.

Our 3<sup>rd</sup> graders and their parents decorated siddur covers for their new siddurim. Our 4<sup>th</sup> graders and their parents learned about the importance of *I'dor vador* by sharing artifacts that have been passed down from one generation to the next in their family and created time capsules of different things that are important to them Jewishly for to be opened at a later date.

On Superbowl Sunday we celebrated the **World Wide Wrap** with our 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade families. Rabbi Small taught them about the history of *tefillin*, and why we wear them. Together, with the help of volunteers from the Brotherhood we taught each kid (and some adults) how to put them on. Brotherhood once again sponsored and prepared a delicious breakfast for us.

Our 6<sup>th</sup> graders planned a pretend **trip to Israel** for our 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class. They were the flight attendants on El Al and when they landed they "took" them to the Dead Sea, the *Kotel*, *Eilat*, to the *shuk* and more. Our 5<sup>th</sup> graders learned 3 Israeli dances to show off at the **Israel 75 party** in April.

Along with CBI, Sinai, and Beth El we held our 2<sup>nd</sup> annual **Community Wide Lag B'omer Field Day** at SSDS. Every child was given a Lag B'omer field day t-shirt designed by our office aide, Barak Goldberg. Cantors and music teachers from each synagogue began the day with some songs. Kids were then separated by grades to play gaga, capture the flag, kickball and relay races. We shared ice cream before heading home.

### **Shabbat Programming:**

**Tot Shabbat** and a family service are each once a month. We inaugurated **Shabbat Jams** for our early childhood families. This has brought our early childhood Shabbat programming to twice a month.

**Shabbat Babayit** was held each week on Zoom, led by Sass Brown, Rabbi Small and Barbara. Sass sang Shabbat songs and *t'filot*, while Rabbi Small told a Shabbat story. Each week different families were asked to lead candle lighting, *kiddish*, handwashing and *motzi*. Barbara leads them in blessing their children. While this was a program originally intended for preschool families during the pandemic, it became a staple in some of our grade school families' homes. We saw kids who barely knew the *brachot* learn to lead them. As the pandemic waned, so did our Shabbat Babayit attendance. It became harder to get families to log on each week. And because of that, we held our last Shabbat Babayit on May 19<sup>th</sup>.

## Early Childhood Programing

With the help of Cantor Risman and Josh Cohen we continue hosting **Kibbitz and Nosh** every Thursday in the lobby. It has become a highlight of many families. Each week about 5 moms and their kids ages 0-4 come to eat lunch and play. The kids who come each week have made a special connection with both Barbara Fink and Cantor Risman. In fact, when Cantor Risman was on vacation, one of the boys curled up in Barbara's lap and asked, "Where's Cantor Daniella?" Another mom told Barbara that every time they pass the Emanuel her 18 month old says, "See Barbara, See Daniella." While they may not have become formal members, these families are building a community and making a home at The Emanuel.

In January we went to **Build a Bear** Workshop in Westfarms mall. There we made 15 bears that sing the *shema*. This was a very successful outreach event. Most of the families that attended were prospective members and it was a great way to have The Emanuel name out there. At the program Barbara read a book about the *shema*, taught the kids how to sing it and then they (or their parents) sang the *shema* into a voice recorder that was placed into a bear that they stuffed, dressed and named. Kids also decorated pillowcases with the *shema* and The Emanuel logo on it. They took their bears home to cherish. Several of the parents noted that they had to remove the bear from their child's bed, because when they rolled over at 2 in the morning the *shema* was very loud. Many of these families subsequently came to our Chanukah, Purim and Israel community celebrations.

For Pesach we hosted a **Matzah Factory** for nursery school aged kids. Families learned about the difference between *chametz* (bread) and *matzah*. They made their own matzah covers, taste tested different types of matzah (chocolate covered was the favorite) spelled matzah in Hebrew with playdough and pattern blocks and made *afikoman* bags.

## Holiday Observance and Celebrations

On the **High Holy Days** we offered an early childhood service, a family service for families with children in K-7 and a teen service. All of them went really well. We made use of our outdoor spaces on Rosh Hashanah and needed to be inside for Yom Kippur due to weather. When one of our leaders had a family emergency after services on the first day of Rosh Hashanah Barbara Fink stepped in to lead one of the services for the remainder of the High Holy Days.

We continued our pandemic tradition of doing **Tashlich** on the Sunday between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This year we were at SSDS, where families participated in five self-guided activities. Then we gathered by the water to perform *Tashlich*. Rabbi Small spoke and explained the ritual while Cantor Risman sang a few songs. Josh Cohen secured the Kona ice truck to be there for a treat at the end.

We enjoyed *Pizza in the Hut* during **Sukkot** and we danced with Torahs on **Simchat Torah!** The highlight was seeing so many adults with flags while the kids danced with stuffed Torahs.

We celebrated **Chanukah** together with The Emanuel community on Wednesday. With the help of Josh Cohen, the clergy and the arms we put on a wonderful party. The kids were able to create their own Chanukah art and decorate cookies while they were

there. JTConnect sponsored a Chanukah Olympics of sorts for our Religious School students on Sunday. They created stations of fun games all related to the Chanukah story and miracle for our kids to participate in. I led Bagels, Blocks and Beyond for our preschool families to learn about Chanukah.

**Purim** was another spectacular and fun night. With the help of Cantor Risman, Rabbi Small and Josh Cohen we had a special family megillah reading and party on Monday night with over 300 people in attendance. A costume parade with giant puppets started the evening, and a juggler interrupted the megillah reading with his antics. Silverman Auditorium was filled with smiling and laughing kids, parents and grandparents.

We held for our annual **Mishloach Manot fundraiser**. The theme was "Seas the Day" and all the items were beach themed!

For **Pesach**, the Religious School kids learned different parts of the Seder and were able to show off at their own Seders!

### **USY:**

During the fall, our **USY** advisor, Cara Levine, moved back to NY. We hired Max and Merissa Beade to become the next advisors. They have been actively reaching out to our teens to encourage them to join more regional programs and we had a nice number attend the regional convention at Camp Ramah and other regional events. They continue to do the monthly Shabbat Dinners alternating between The Emanuel and Beth El. They were a co-sponsor of JTConnect's Shavuot Night Live Tikkun as well.

**Finally, we thank all of our Religious School staff for the hard work and dedication that makes our school as wonderful as it is:**

Sarah Baden  
Janice Barshay  
Fern Cohen  
Doron Feller  
Nancy Fichman  
Lance Goldberg  
Lev Kropsky  
Gilana Levavi  
Gail Mackey  
Jennifer Molinari  
Cantor Daniella Risman  
Stephanie Rosenthal  
Beckie Sahl  
Karen Schlossberg  
Philip Schlossberg  
Mark Simon  
Rabbi David Small  
Joseph Ward

Allie Weiner

**And our Teacher Aides:**

Adam Diaz-Matos  
Rebecca Diaz-Matos  
Hannah Fink  
Barak Goldberg  
Ryan Leef  
Lake Piekarsky  
Jonah Rosenberg  
Jonah Schulman  
Ethan Shtern  
Hannah Shtern

**And our Board of Education:**

Heather Jacobson  
Sarah Laskowski  
Jeni Maghaleas  
Angela Stein