

Ushering Instructions for Congregation B'nai Israel

Last updated January 1, 2011

When to arrive, how long you need to stay:

If your ushering assignment is on a Friday night, you will need to arrive by 8:00 and remain until services conclude, usually by 9:15. Attendance is often light, but may be heavy on those evenings when the Bar or Bat-Mitzvah family is sponsoring an Oneg. Generally, most attendees arrive by 8:30 for the Friday night service.

If your ushering assignment is on Saturday morning, you should arrive *no later than 9:00*. While most congregants arrive between 9:45 and 10:30, many Bar and Bat-Mitzvah guests show up very early, and need to be greeted and handed siddurim. You should insert the weekly announcements and other paper handouts into a siddur, and make sure every guest has a siddur and chumash. The peak time for people to arrive is between 10 and 10:30. It is a good idea to use the quieter period between 9 and 10 to prepare the table by the entrance with books, lining up siddurim with paper inserts in one section and chumashim in another. When it gets busy, you will not have enough time to arrange all the books. If possible, one usher should be stationed by the door to the sanctuary (either inside or outside) to help keep the door closed when appropriate (see below) and to help make sure that people leave the sanctuary in an orderly way. By 11:00, one of the ushers may sit down if traffic has slowed, but one usher should remain in the foyer until the end of services, usually just about 12:00.

If your ushering assignment is for Mincha on Saturday evening, it means that there is a Bar or Bat-Mitzvah that evening. Mincha begins at a different time each week, depending on when Shabbat ends. You should call the office that week to find out when Mincha begins (the start time is also printed in the weekly announcements), and plan on arriving 10 minutes before Mincha. Mincha and Maariv together take just about one hour.

Ushering Duties

Generally, your job is to stand in the foyer, greet people as they enter with a "shabbat shalom," and hand them a siddur (or on Saturday morning a siddur and chumash together). Hand people the blue Sim Shalom siddur and the red Etz Hayim chumash. A few people prefer the older black Silverman siddur, or the older blue Hertz chumash; these people will help themselves. If you run out of the Sim Shalom and the Etz Hayim, hand out the Silverman and Hertz. While most prayer books are kept in the bookcase in the main foyer, there may be books kept elsewhere and you may need to find our custodian, Joe, to help fetch them if you run out of books.

All men and boys must have a head covering (even non-Jews). If you see someone who does not have a kippa, please offer them one. Jewish males that are of the age of bar mitzvah should wear a tallit, and you can point to the rack where they are kept if you see someone that might need one. There is also a basket with head coverings and tallitot for women that should be by the books.

Part of your job is maintaining decorum in the public areas of the synagogue. Warn people in the foyer to lower their voices, as they can be heard in the sanctuary. If you see infractions, remind people that there is no smoking or cell phone use in the shul on shabbat, and that men and boys must cover their heads.

On Saturday morning, people may not enter the sanctuary during the Kedushah portion of the Amidah (after the congregation stands and recites the Amidah silently, the cantor will repeat the Amidah – the Kedushah is the second page of this repetition and is read responsively between the cantor and congregation, with the congregation standing), while the Torah is being read (although people may enter and exit during the aliyoth between readings) and during recitation of the Mourner's Kaddish.

Here are some approximate times when you should mind the door:

- 9:45 – Kedushah for the Shacharit Amidah
- 10:00-10:30 – torah reading
- 11:30 - Kedushah for the Musaf Amidah

We try not to prohibit people from leaving the sanctuary at any time (you may assume that nature is calling) but this should be done in an orderly fashion. If you are unsure as to when people may or may not enter, ask the rabbi or cantor, or anybody who looks knowledgeable and familiar with the service.

Ushering Tips for those with Special Needs

Please be aware of any congregants walking in who might need assistance with the door. In our desire to be helpful and welcoming to a person with a disability, we make assumptions about what they need. Please ask the person with a disability what they might need help with.

Please be sure that large print sidurrim (and soon hearing assisted devices) are easily accessible and available for use. It lets people know that we are sensitive to these needs and ready to accommodate them.

There is a wheelchair available in the coat closet if needed. If a person requires seating with a wheelchair, please accompany/assist them into the Sanctuary and be sure they are seated comfortably with their family members and/or companions. If necessary, please ask people to move over.

If someone appears to be having some difficulty remaining in the service and needs to walk out, please be attentive and sensitive to that. Please provide a kind and encouraging word that it can be difficult to sit through a long service and they can rejoin at any time.

Thank You for Your Service!

Ushering is a crucial part of not only maintaining decorum, but of welcoming people into our community. Many people feel intimidated when they walk into a strange synagogue (or any synagogue!) and the presence of a friendly greeter is critical in their being able to enjoy their experience at B'nai Israel. Thank you for your service to B'nai Israel, helping our community thrive and adding to our sense of kavanah and spirituality.