

INCLUSION AT CONGREGATION BETH SHALOM

Congregation Beth Shalom is a community, not just a building. We make every feasible attempt to make our spiritual environment as welcoming as possible. Not only do we have greeters and ambassadors in our foyer to welcome people every Shabbat morning, but we pride ourselves on our professional and administrative staff who we deem the “directors of first impressions” to each and every guest who enters through our doors. We are confident in our ability to make you feel at home.

When it comes to ensuring that our facility is equally as welcoming, we have taken significant and thoughtful steps to being sure that our entire facility is accessible. Congregation Beth Shalom maintains handicap washrooms, parking spaces, electronic entry doors, aisle seating in our sanctuary and classrooms to name a few things. Additionally, we have sound amplification headsets as well as loop options for those with hearing aid devices. We offer large print books for all services as well as magnifying lenses which are helpful for small print. Our lower level, where our expansive and modern Youth Lounge is located, is accessible via an elevator. We are also proud that our bimah is equipped with a state of the art mechanical lift so that anyone can easily ascend to the bimah for an honor without compromising his or her dignity while doing so. It can be operated by our staff or by the user.

Diversity at Beth Shalom is also part of our inclusivity. We have been an egalitarian, interfaith family (Keruv) – welcoming congregation for many years. In more recent years, we have opened our arms to work with the LGBTQ+ community via our CBS Pride program which includes both inreach and outreach programs – to ensure that ALL of our members feel welcomed and represented within the Beth Shalom community.

Our overarching goal is to create a space where all feel welcomed within Conservative Judaism, and all families are able to participate in meaningful ways at family simchas, religious services and programs.

Our senior members are a vibrant and a vital part of our activities and ritual life. A myriad of adult education classes are a mainstay to our synagogue calendar, as are the activities of our HAZAK group, for those 55 and over. From morning minyan to staffing our gift shop, from reading Torah to board and committee membership, CBS’ senior community is at the helm of our efforts.

Beth Shalom pioneered the HUGS (Healthy, Understanding, and Growing Spaces) program which now includes other synagogues from the North Shore of Chicago. This program is a series of ritual-based holiday programs and religious services for the special needs community. While we offer these personalized programs, we also strongly work to make all our religious, educational and social programming accessible and inclusive for everyone.

Our Hebrew School is sensitive to the educational journey of our youth and knows that each child is unique. We are guided by the Jewish principle of “Chanoch Ha-Na’ar al Pi Darko”, “Educate each child according to his or her own abilities”. We work hard to help all the children to realize their fullest comprehension and skill levels and have celebrated numerous Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies for all of our students following a personally guided year of study.

In addition, our Youth group community is welcoming and inclusive to any child, no matter his or her special needs. We find great joy in watching all of CBS youth partake in the fullness of what Judaism has to offer within our building and in the greater Jewish youth community.

Our goal is to create a normative culture in which our CBS community cherishes and celebrates the uniqueness of each person as we do with the youngest infant to the eldest of our elders; those who struggle with mobility or emotional challenges; those who may have come to Judaism through conversion or families with multi-faith partnerships. We strive to make our building a joyful and safe

place for all to be themselves and through interaction with our leadership and membership come to know the fullness of true equality.