



**Temple Ner Tamid
Upper School**

***Parent Handbook
Grades 7-12***

**September 2018
5778/79**

**Iris Schwartz Ed.D.
Director of Education**

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Mission Statement 1

Program Values and Goals 2

Pre-Confirmation Program 3–4

Confirmation Core Curriculum 5

Limmud Program 6

Special Programs & Class Trips 7–13

Madrichim Program 14

Administrative Information 14–16

Carpool Procedures 17

Class Schedule 18

Closing Thoughts 19

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Temple Ner Tamid Religious School. We are delighted that your family has chosen to take part of its Jewish journey with us. Our program begins in kindergarten and continues on through the completion of high school. Along the way our students pass a variety of milestones that we celebrate together: Consecration, B'nai Mitzvah, Confirmation, and finally graduation from religious school in the 12th grade.

We are dedicated to creating a warm, caring Jewish community and instilling a love of Judaism in our students. We feel that the mark of a successful Jewish educational experience is not a score on a test but rather how it influences the way we choose to live our lives.

This handbook contains the answers to many of the questions you might have about our religious school. Since regular communication between parents and teachers provides the cornerstone for success we look forward to your on-going input during the year. Working together we can provide the best Jewish educational experience possible for your child. The doorway to Jewish education is always open. We are pleased that you have chosen to learn with us.

Iris Schwartz Ed.D.
Director of Education

MISSION STATEMENT

At Temple Ner Tamid, we strive to unite family, synagogue and school to develop in members of all ages an enduring Jewish Identity and a life-long love of Jewish learning.

By offering opportunities for group learning and innovative experiential education, the Temple seeks to impart the fundamental skills of Jewish living and ritual; an understanding of Jewish history and values; a love of Torah and Israel; a familiarity with the Hebrew language and our liturgy; and a passion for Jewish life that finds fulfillment in the spiritual and belonging to the community.

Our families have arrived from many different backgrounds. Together we strive to foster the development of individuals and families who identify with Israel and the Jewish people, and who pursue social justice and the improvement of our world as individuals and through community action. Our educational programs are designed to help congregants of all generations discover their own personally meaningful path through Jewish life; and find support, strength and identity not only in family, but in the larger communities of synagogue, Israel, and the Jewish people.

PROGRAM VALUES AND GOALS

Temple Ner Tamid's Religious School is designed to instill a love and understanding of Judaism in our students by providing a rich and varied Jewish learning experience. Our goal is to have Judaism be the lens through which our students come to see the world and walk in it. We aspire to meet the changing needs of the 21st century Jewish learner and to provide educational opportunities that address the needs of the whole person. We seek to connect students and parents with the on-going life of the Jewish people and to strengthen their attachment to Judaism intellectually, emotionally, physically and spiritually.

Our goals are to provide learners with an understanding of the Jewish past, the tools necessary to fully participate in the Jewish present, while being inspired and empowered to participate in the creation of a Jewish future including a life committed to tikkun olam, the repair of the world.

In support of the general educational goals designated by the Union for Reform Judaism we strive to provide the kinds of experiences that will enable the members of the Ner Tamid community to be:

- Jews who affirm their Jewish identity and bind themselves inseparably to their people by word and deed;
- Jews who bear witness to the BRIT (the covenant between God and the Jewish people) by embracing Torah through the study and observance of MITZVOT (commandments);
- Jews who affirm their historic bond to ERETZ YISRAEL (the land of Israel);
- Jews who cherish and study Hebrew, the language of the Jewish people;
- Jews who value and practice TEFILAH (prayer);
- Jews who further the cause of justice, freedom and peace by pursuing TZEDEK (righteousness), MISHPAT (justice), and CHESED (loving deeds);
- Jews who celebrate Shabbat, festivals and ceremonies marking significant occasions in our lives
- Jews who esteem their own person and the person of others; their own family and the family of others; their own community and the community of others;
- Jews who express their kinship with K'LAL YISRAEL by actively seeking the welfare of Jews throughout the world;
- Jews who support and participate in the life of the synagogue

Such Jews will strengthen the fabric of Jewish life and ensure the future of Judaism and the Jewish people

PRE-CONFIRMATION PROGRAM

SEVENTH GRADE

Seventh grade is a time of great change as students prepare for b'nai mitzvah and begin to take on more responsibility in the Jewish community. This is also the year when seventh graders begin to transition into our upper school program. They attend Wednesday evening classes in addition to preparing individually with Cantor Greenberg and Ronni Pressman for bar/bat mitzvah.

Hebrew

Seventh graders can choose a Hebrew elective course during the fall semester to polish their Hebrew skills.

EIGHTH AND NINTH GRADES

Our Pre-Confirmation program addresses the needs of our oldest students. How does Judaism fit into my life? How do I fit my life into Judaism? In addition to rooting our students in the primary source materials, the cornerstones of our tradition, our high school program encourages lots of questions. Students find that Jewish guidelines are available for the moral and ethical dilemmas facing them today. As well, students find that Judaism is a way of life, not something to just learn about in school.

All 7th, 8th, and 9th grade students take a required core class the first hour and choose one elective for the second hour. 8th and 9th graders choose two electives for the spring semester.

Grades 7 through 9 meet on Wednesdays from 6:45 p.m. to 8:45 p.m.

COURSE OFFERINGS

Required Core Courses

1st Period:

Why Be Jewish?

During the fall semester seventh graders explore the many varied components of Jewish identity and wrestle with how they personally define who they are as a Jew. This experientially-based class challenges students to examine what they believe, how they behave, and what kind of relationships they have with our heritage, God, others, and the world in which we live, triggering critical thinking on an individual basis about how to answer the question "Why be Jewish?"

Mandatory for 7th graders Fall Semester

Coming of Age During the Holocaust, Coming of Age Now

All seventh graders will take a spring semester core class devoted to the study of the Holocaust. Students will use their analytical skills to learn about the Holocaust using primary source materials. Critical facts and thoughtful questions will be used to frame class discussions. Videos, guest speakers and a parent/student trip to the Museum of Jewish Heritage will enhance the learning experience.

Mandatory for 7th graders Spring Semester

Required Core Courses (cont.)

1st Period:

The Prism Project

The Prism Project shifts the learning model! Ownership for the learning exploration is placed squarely in the hands of the students with teachers acting as facilitators and mentors, helping students make sense of what they discover. Students engage with themes from a variety of angles, or prisms, through which they come to new insight on the fundamental question, “*How does Judaism contribute to our understanding of the world around us?*” An invited guest from the congregation or community shares a conundrum for students to resolve, offering a prism through which to explore the issue in Jewish values, belief, and action. This Challenge Question isn’t easily solved but rather compels learners to dig in and consider multiple answers and perspectives. At the end of each Prism, students present their findings to the guest, who can then put their ideas into action. Each Prism is anchored in an Enduring Understanding (often a Jewish text) and a Challenge Question that students explore throughout the learning block. Examples of Enduring Understandings include: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Leviticus 19:18, “All Jews are responsible for one another.” Talmud *Sh’vuot* 39a, and “Personal and collective memory shapes Jewish identity, impacts behavior and influences our relationship to the community.”

Mandatory for 8th graders Fall Semester

Social Action/Social Justice: Who’s Responsible?

Social action/social justice and the Jewish responses to those in need will be the focus of this course. We will investigate the roots of social action in the Jewish community and then focus on issues with current pending national legislation. Topics may include civil liberties, economic justice, education, environment, hate crimes, Israel and others.

Mandatory for 9th graders*

Hineni

This project-based class is for 9th graders who want to devote an entire year to being a Social Justice change-maker. In addition to covering the themes in the regular 9th grade core class students will create their own social action organization. The class will decide, by consensus, on an area of focus for their organization. Students will learn how to create a mission statement, do community outreach, plan programs, prepare a budget, design publicity, fundraise, and do program evaluation. The long-term goal will be to plan and implement social justice programs that benefit the community staffed by other teens from Temple Ner Tamid.

Optional for 9th graders*

***Students can choose the *Social Action/Social Justice: Who’s Responsible?* course for the Fall semester OR the *Hineni* course for the entire year.**

Elective Classes

Detailed elective class descriptions will be available to students at the beginning of each semester.

CONFIRMATION CORE CURRICULUM

What Does It Mean To Be A Jew?

Rabbi Marc Katz

What does it mean to be a Jew? Even more, *why* are we Jews? Must we believe in God? Do we have choices? How do we decide?

Confirmation is a year-long exercise of asking the big questions and putting together the pieces that make for Jewish identity. Culminating in a powerful ceremony of *affirmation* at the festival of Shavuot and highlighted by an extraordinary mid-winter trip to Amsterdam (including the Anne Frank Huis and museum), the Confirmation class is a unique opportunity to study with Rabbi Marc Katz.

Although Rabbi Katz modifies the course content to each Confirmation class, the primary framework revolves around Jewish theology - God, Torah and Jews. Among the many discussions flowing from this curriculum are: Reconciling God and the Holocaust, Establishing an Authentic Jewish Life, and Interfaith Relations. At the same time, much of the class time is devoted to applying Jewish tradition to our everyday experiences, especially those of the high school student.

Confirmation is a solidifying experience in the religious education program at Temple Ner Tamid.

Grade 10 meets on Wednesdays from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

LIMMUD - A Program for Eleventh and Twelfth Grades

This program offers all 11th and 12th graders in our congregation a unique adult learning program in a supportive environment and the opportunity to remain connected to their peer community at Ner Tamid. Limmud provides a transition for teens to adult learning and life.

Each semester includes thematically based class discussions, guest speakers, films and trips.

Do I Fit Judaism Into My Life or My Life Into Judaism?

Rabbi Ari Perten, Avi Slivko Ed.D.

What does it mean to be a Jewish teenager in a progressively-evolving Jewish world? Am I an American Jew or a Jewish American? In this year-long course, we will explore the uniqueness, challenges, and excitement of growing up as a Jew in America. What role does my religion play in high school? What role will my religion play in college? And, perhaps most importantly, what role will Judaism play in my life as an adult? Using a wide-array of sources, articles, philosophers and current events, we will tackle these difficult questions. Many of the topics for discussions are those raised by class members.

Graduation Trip

A 8-day trip to New Orleans is planned in June as the culminating activity for graduating seniors.

Grades 11 and 12 meet on Wednesdays from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS & CLASS TRIPS

Special programs and class trips are integral parts of our curriculum and are intended to be learning and community building experiences for the students. Please note that these programs' dates might change during the year to accommodate modifications in the Temple calendar.

Parent Orientation Session
Wednesday September 26, 2018

CLASS TRIPS

Grade 7

Sunday, December 9	Community Foodbank of NJ
Sunday, January 13	Museum of Jewish Heritage

Grades 8

TBA	TBA
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Grade 9

Friday, March 1 through Monday, March 4	L'Taken Seminar, Religious Action Center Washington, DC
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Grade 10

Wednesday, February 13 through Monday, February 18	Confirmation Class Trip Amsterdam with Rabbi Katz
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Grade 11

TBA	TBA
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Grade 12

Spring 2019 - Dates TBA	8-day trip to New Orleans
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Museum of Jewish Heritage Exhibit Tour

“Coming of Age during the Holocaust, Coming of Age Now”

Date: January 13, 2019



During the spring semester 7th graders are involved in learning about the Holocaust. In conjunction with this core class, students and their parents are invited to participate in this special program at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City.

In preparing for a bar or bat mitzvah, a young person is preparing to become a fully recognized member of the Jewish community. What does it mean to be a part of the Jewish community? What responsibilities are involved? The Museum is pleased to present a special tour and curriculum for bar and bat mitzvah students to discuss these questions. This Museum tour presents artifacts that focus on the stories of young people who lived during the Holocaust, and begins a dialogue in the Museum galleries on the themes of Jewish identity, community, and responsibility.

*A Jewish Values and Social Justice Experience
for 9th Grade Students*



L'Taken Seminar
Friday, March 1 through Monday March, 4, 2019

The Religious Action Center (RAC), the social action arm of the Reform movement, located in Washington, DC holds four-day L'Taken seminar focused on Jewish values and social justice. Students from across the country participate in:

- ◆ **Prayer** – Connecting holiness and justice through creative worship services including Havdalah on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.
- ◆ **Education** – Learning Jewish social justice values, the legislative process, and the political and social reality we need to transform.
- ◆ **Action** – Going to Capitol Hill and lobbying their Representatives' and Senators' offices on the issues they have just studied.

COST: The trip fee is approximately **\$600**. This includes the conference, hotel, transportation and some meals. Students should bring an extra **\$50** to cover the cost of additional meals.

*****FRANK DENNY L'TAKEN SCHOLARSHIP: a grant covering 1/3 – 1/2 the cost of the trip fee is available to students who submit an application.** Requests for the Denny Scholarship as well as any additional assistance should be made to Iris Schwartz, Director of Education.

We strive to make it possible for every student to attend the L'Taken Seminar. All information will be kept confidential.

PLEASE NOTE: A limited number of spaces are available. **A non-refundable deposit of \$50 is due by Wednesday, October 10, 2018** to guarantee your participation. The remaining balance is to be paid no later than **Wednesday, January 9, 2019.**

10th Grade Confirmation Class Amsterdam Trip

Each year we like to offer our Confirmands a unique trip of Jewish interest; an opportunity that cannot be replicated. To be sure, much of the value is just in being together. The sense of shared experience is priceless. But we also want to give them an insight into the life and history of our people that will forever shape their Jewish lives. The trip to Amsterdam is, needless to say, a remarkable opportunity.

The itinerary is an exercise in memory making. Of course, we will visit the Anne Frank House. Without a doubt, the tragic and inspiring story of Anne Frank is reason enough to visit this sacred site. But there is more. We will have the opportunity to stand inside the historic Portuguese synagogue (built in 1675, it was the world's largest synagogue at the time), the *Joods Historisch Museum*, and the *Hollandsche Schouwburg Theatre*, the site from where most of Amsterdam's Jews were gathered prior to deportation. Additionally, we will be treated to Shabbat dinner in the homes of members of Amsterdam's Liberal congregation, *Liberaal Joodse Gemeente* as well as join them for Shabbat services. The trip will also include sites such as the *Rembrandt House*, the *Rijks*, *Van Gogh* and *Stedelijk* Museums, and a canal boat ride. And yes, we will walk through Amsterdam's notorious *Red Light District*.

Specific information as to the cost of the trip will be sent to all students after the beginning of classes.

***Amsterdam Trip dates:
Wednesday, February 13 through Monday, February 18, 2019***

This is a wonderful opportunity and we hope you will be able to arrange to have your child join us. If you have any questions about the trip please call me at your convenience.

Rabbi Marc Katz



Graduation Trip to New Orleans For 12th graders

Specific dates/costs to be announced
This 9-day trip will take place at the end of
May/beginning of June
(Can be used for Senior Option
at Montclair High School)



12th Grade New Orleans 2018

New Orleans Senior Class Sample Trip Itinerary



12th Grade New Orleans 2017

Day 1

- Meet at Ner Tamid
- Depart Newark Airport
- Dinner – Pizza Delicious
- Snack at Café Du Monde, French Quarter

Day 2

- Habitat for Humanity volunteer assignment
- Urban Adventure Quest NOLA Scavenger hunt
- Dinner
- Preservation Hall
- Snack



12th Grade New Orleans 2016

Day 3



12th Grade New Orleans 2015

- Habitat for Humanity volunteer assignment
- Dinner
- Tour of Hurricane Katrina Area
- Dinner – Juan’s Flying Burrito

Day 4

- Habitat for Humanity volunteer assignment
- Dinner
- Mid-City Rock & Bowl - Cajun music & bowling
- Snack

Day 5

- Habitat for Humanity volunteer assignment
- Shabbat services and dinner Temple Sinai
- Meeting with Cantor Joel Colman
- Snack – Creole Creamery



12th Grade New Orleans 2014



12th Grade New Orleans 2013

Day 6

- Shabbat services at Temple Gates of Prayer
- Lunch – Dat Dog
- D-Day Museum visit
- Dinner – Pho Cam Ly
- Movie or Roller Skating
- Snack

Day 6

- 10 a.m. Mass at St. David's
 - Meet Father Oswald Pierre-Jules and parishioners
- Dr. Wagner's Honey Island Swamp tour
- Dinner – Joey K's
- Snack – Brocato's

Day 7

- Volunteer at ARNO (Animal Rescue of New Orleans)
- Lunch – Koz's
- Snack – Ro-Bears sno-balls
- Garden District Walking Tour
- Dinner – Mona's – last night celebration
- Snug Harbor Jazz Club show
 - Meet with Charmaine Neville



12th Grade New Orleans 2012



12th Grade New Orleans 2010

Day 8

- Breakfast – Mother's
- Holocaust Memorial
- Trip evaluation
- Old French Market/French Quarter
- Depart New Orleans Louis Armstrong Airport
- Arrival at Newark Airport

MADRICHIM PROGRAM

All 8th through 10th grade students enrolled in the Confirmation program, as well as 11th and 12th graders who have already been Confirmed have the opportunity to volunteer in our religious school. Years of Jewish study culminate with the chance to learn about the administrative and programmatic ends of the religious school, volunteering as teacher aides, Hebrew tutors and office assistants.



Madrichim Program participants are assigned to specific classes and become an integral part of the daily classroom routine. Each teaching assistant will move toward the goal of actually teaching part of a class. In addition, participants meet as a group with the Madrichim Program Coordinator to help develop special skills and to discuss their experiences as religious school assistants.

By participating in this program students will develop valuable teaching skills, enhance their commitment to Jewish life, and build self-esteem. Equally as important, these students serve as role models for the rest of our religious school community. Madrichim are invaluable to the smooth working of our religious school. We are proud of their commitment to Judaism and to our school.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

TUITION POLICY

Students are officially enrolled in religious school by submitting the online registration. Once this is received families are billed for the annual religious school tuition. Please note that we are unable to offer any tuition rebates or refunds after registration is submitted even if students withdraw from school at a later date, as programming and staffing decisions are made prior to the start of school based on registration.

For any questions on this policy please contact: Iris Schwartz or Maribel Leon in the Religious School office or Brian O'Reilly, VP of Religious Education.

ATTENDANCE

Regular and consistent attendance is vital to your child's growth and the progress of his/her class. Encouraging regular attendance at religious school makes a positive statement to your child about the importance of Jewish education.

All class sessions begin punctually. **Students are expected to be at the Temple at least five (5) minutes before class sessions.**

Students must be enrolled and regularly attend religious school classes in grades 7, 8 and 9 in order to participate in the 10th grade Confirmation year.

DISCIPLINE POLICY

1. The teacher will establish classroom guidelines with the students at the start of the school year. If a child does not follow these guidelines or the *Code of Conduct*, the teacher will discuss consequences with the student.
2. If a problem persists or cannot be immediately resolved in the classroom, the student will be sent to the Education Director's office where the problem will be discussed and the *Code of Conduct* reviewed.
3. If the student is sent to the Education Director's office, the parent(s) of the student may be notified of the problem. They may be asked to meet with the teacher and/or the Director.
4. If a problem continues with a student one or more of the following actions may be taken:
 - a. A meeting will be held with the parent(s).
 - b. A parent will be requested to accompany the student to class for a period of time.
 - c. Suspension from religious school for a set period of time (make-up work required).
 - d. Dismissal. An Education Committee representative, the Education Director and the president of the congregation will make a decision for dismissal.

CODE OF CONDUCT

We believe that religious school is an integral part of our children's education and should be treated as a serious commitment by the entire family. **Therefore, we require all registered students and their parents to read, sign and return the *Code of Conduct* document that is included in the registration packet.**

“Where there is no Torah, there is no proper conduct; where there is no proper conduct, there is no Torah.” (Ethics of the Fathers 3:21)

- I will not disrupt the class with extra talking or joking and will behave properly so that we can all learn as much as possible from the teachers and from each other.
- I will behave in a respectful manner during services in the sanctuary and outside of the sanctuary.
- I will respect Temple property.

“Who is wise? One who learns from all people.” (Ethics of the Fathers 4:1)

- I will participate fully in all class activities to the best of my ability.
- I will be seated and ready to work when class starts.
- I will give religious school my full attention.
- I will act as a positive role model for others.

“Learning begins with listening.” (Noah Ben Shea, The Word)

- I will show respect for others by listening in class to the teachers and fellow students as well as to others at Temple Ner Tamid.
- I will speak to others with respect at all times.

“Say not, ‘When I have leisure I will study.’ Perhaps you will have no leisure.”
(Ethics of the Fathers 2:3)

- I will take religious school seriously and complete all assigned homework in a timely manner.

EARLY PICK-UP

Students will not be released early from school unless accompanied by a parent or other adult previously designated by their parents. **Parents must report to the Temple office and sign the Early Dismissal Log.** Religious school personnel will then go to the classroom and bring the student back to the office for early dismissal.

SCHOOL CLOSINGS

In the event of inclement weather or other emergencies, the following procedures will be in effect:

- ✦ If the Montclair public school district has closed due to inclement weather, the Temple Ner Tamid Religious School will be closed.
- ✦ The Religious School will close during a mid-week session when the Montclair public schools cancel their after school activities due to inclement weather.
- ✦ If the Religious School will be closed on a Sunday, a message will be placed on the temple's voicemail message by 7:30 a.m. that morning.
- ✦ Religious School closing information will also be posted on the temple website at www.nertamid.org.

CELL PHONES

Students **must** keep cell phones and other electronic devices **OFF and Out of Sight** during Religious School hours. Should you and your child need to make contact you can reach each other through the Religious School Office at (973) 338-1500 ext. 6.

CONFIRMATION AND UPPER SCHOOL PROGRAM FACULTY

The following experienced Jewish educators teach in our Confirmation program. We are committed to providing our students with the most interesting and challenging Jewish learning experiences possible:

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| ✦ Rabbi Marc Katz | ✦ Michele Lainof |
| ✦ Iris Schwartz Ed.D.
Director of Education | ✦ Nami Ratki |
| ✦ Rabbi Ari Perten
Upper School Coordinator | ✦ Doni Remba |
| | ✦ Lincoln Richman |
| | ✦ Avi Slivko Ed.D. |

CARPOOL PROCEDURES

Drop-off:

Students may **ONLY** be dropped off at the temple entrance facing the parking lot.

Dismissal:

- ⇒ Cars are to proceed up the entrance ramp to the parking lot and form a **single line** with the **first car stopping PAST the temple entrance**. Children will be loaded into cars, 3 to 4 cars at a time. **Once loaded, cars are to make the entire loop around the parking lot to the exit**. Cars **MUST** make a right turn onto Broad Street upon exiting the parking lot.
- ⇒ Do not park in front of the temple's parking lot entrance or leave your car unattended anywhere on the entrance ramp.
- ⇒ Please observe the **NO STANDING** sign.
- ⇒ If your child is not waiting for you outside, please park your car and go inside the building to find your child. **DO NOT HOLD UP THE ENTIRE LINE OF CARS BY WAITING FOR YOUR CHILD AT THE ENTRANCE CURB.**
- ⇒ Parents may park their cars either in an available space in the parking lot or on Broad Street (no double parking please) and walk into the temple to pick up their children.
- ⇒ No student will be permitted to run across the parking lot to meet a parent.
- ⇒ No student will be permitted to use the Broad Street exit for dismissal unless accompanied by an adult.

**The above guidelines have been established to ensure our students' safety.
Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated.**



CLASS SCHEDULE

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL BEGINS:

Wednesday, October 3 for grades 7 through 12

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL ENDS:

Wednesday, May 15, 2019 for grades 7 through 9 and 11–12

Grade 10 class continues to meet until Confirmation ceremony

GRADES 7, 8, 9:

7th, 8th and 9th grades meet on **Wednesday evenings from 6:45 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.**

GRADE 10 - CONFIRMATION CLASS:

10th grade meets on **Wednesday evenings from 7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.**

Confirmation ceremony takes place on Saturday June 8, 2019

GRADES 11 and 12 – L IMMUD CLASS:

11th and 12th grades meet on **Wednesday evenings from 7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.**

Graduation ceremony takes place on Friday, June 16, 2019

DINNER OPTION

Pizza and soda will be served from for those registered to participate in the dinner program.

- **7–12 Grades: 6:15 - 6:45 p.m.**

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The Jewish education that is offered to the students enrolled in Temple Ner Tamid's religious school reflects the core educational values of our congregation. First and foremost we value our students. They represent the next link in an unbroken chain of Jewish continuity that has spanned generations. We share with their families the responsibility of teaching them that Judaism is a way of life. Judaism does not begin or end when our students enter or leave the temple building. Rather, they enter the temple building to learn how Judaism and the teachings of Torah are resources and guides for all they do. They enter the temple building to be part of a larger Jewish community. They enter the temple building to affirm their Jewish identity.

We value Jewish identity. A strong Jewish identity is based on knowledge and competence in the skills necessary to fully participate in the life of the community. Our students learn the "how-tos" of Jewish life, which includes full participation in the worship service, holidays and other life cycle events. Jewish identity is also rooted in knowledge of our shared history and identification with the State of Israel. We share the vision of Israel as a Jewish nation and have a commitment to Israel's future. Our students connect to Israel through an examination of history and a look at the modern state. They learn many different answers to the question, "What's an Israel?"

The word Israel means "one who struggles with God." We strive to create opportunities for our students to struggle with their personal relationships with God through involvement in discussion, worship, mitzvot, and as a safe haven for asking questions. We try to create an environment in our school where students feel free to ask about what is most important to them. Our students are taught to question Judaism and its teachings in order to find meaning for themselves in our traditions. Judaism is our light for life's road, wherever that path may lead.

The religious school experience would not be complete without family. Our students do not live in a vacuum. Families are involved in all aspects of our religious school program. Each family's Jewish journey is unique and special yet made of the same threads of connection. We are partners in the weaving of these threads with our religious school families.

Last and perhaps most important is our dedication to building and sustaining a strong Jewish community. We believe that Jewish values and traditions have much to contribute to making our world a better place, and that ensuring a vibrant Jewish future is important for the Jewish people and for society as a whole.