Temple Sinai Exemplar Congregation Application

Areas of Inclusion

**Advocacy & Community Partnerships**

*The Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester Jewish Family Navigator* program connects families with disabilities in the Rochester community and serves to enhance awareness and cooperation among agencies serving people with disabilities in the Jewish and Greater Rochester communities. [https://jewishrochester.org/familynavigator](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__jewishrochester.org_familynavigator&d=DwMFAg&c=4sF48jRmVAe_CH-k9mXYXEGfSnM3bY53YSKuLUQRxhA&r=tCZRaji8mN_TmJWKyeki5Ld4sFr698pzGLmB6d-HUAGa9m4EUtpe_ftEY9yGnb_j&m=oZIeGL-y0hxLYfkb8aZvs6ZScnIFWUMUrbJaM9CjqMM&s=q_UMHG4cd8rpXeWV2bYsrJa1CDSX31HLgvxG2Kzh52c&e=). Temple Sinai promotes the availability of *Kesher Monthly Support Meetups* , which the Family Navigator program offers. It gives members the opportunity to connect with other Jewish parents to share experiences, gain resource information, get support and a sympathetic ear. [https://cdn.fedweb.org/fed-6/2/Kesher%2520Group%2520.pdf](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__cdn.fedweb.org_fed-2D6_2_Kesher-252520Group-252520.pdf&d=DwMFAg&c=4sF48jRmVAe_CH-k9mXYXEGfSnM3bY53YSKuLUQRxhA&r=tCZRaji8mN_TmJWKyeki5Ld4sFr698pzGLmB6d-HUAGa9m4EUtpe_ftEY9yGnb_j&m=oZIeGL-y0hxLYfkb8aZvs6ZScnIFWUMUrbJaM9CjqMM&s=6s5EP-v8ydNZNesmyz6E4xgLIIe43FVfPSz117iT4L4&e=)

*Rochester City School District.* Temple Sinai has also developed and maintained a partnership with an inner city elementary school since 2009. This past year 16 volunteers provided weekly literacy tutoring to students, 21% of whom have disabilities. The Temple does an annual clothing/hat/mitten drive for the school and the Literacy team holds an annual ‘Choose a Book, Choose to Read’ event with books donated by the congregation or collected by our volunteers.

*ASL Interpreter Fund* . Temple Sinai partnered with this Jewish Federation fund to provide interpreters for attendees if needed at the Inclusion Awareness and Education Day. The fund exists to provide financial support and access to ASL interpreters for groups at Rochester synagogues and area Jewish events. alspanjer@jewishrochester.org

**Architecture, Physical Accommodations & Transportation-** Architecture of Temple Sinai- when an addition was designed in 2000, utilizing input from the Special Needs Committee, ease of movement through the building was emphasized, keeping all additional space on one level. Physical accommodations include ADA compliant ramps, door openers, water fountains and restroom facilities. With the original sanctuary construction in 1968 (see photo) not amenable to installation of a ramp, a portable wheelchair lift was purchased in 2006. New options for bima access are actively being investigated. Transportation – The Temple Sinai “Mitzvah Connection” committee can contact Sinai volunteers who have expressed availability to provide rides to services for members who might request transportation. In addition, we can provide information, and financial support if appropriate, to access available community and commercial transportation services, including Jewish Family Service Express Transportation for people over age 60.

**B’nai Mitzvah** – For students with learning disabilities, the rabbi matches each with a tutor who can best meet the student’s needs, strengths and learning style. The requirements are tailored to their abilities, with numbers of prayers, Torah verses and amounts of Hebrew modified as needed. Tutors, including member Ellen Goldenberg, have extensive experience working with these students, and have been highly successful and well-received by families. Deaf students were given special tutors and ASL interpreters as needed. Physical adaptations utilized have been the wheelchair lift to the bima and bringing the Torah to family unable to climb stairs. Every Bar or Bat Mitzvah is customized to each student. Rabbi Katz recalls the following anecdote: ”One child had a sensory problem and could only wear certain shorts, a certain tie-dyed tee-shirt and flip flops. He could not sit on the pew benches. He wore what he was able to and feel comfortable. He has a special cushion and often sat on his mother’s lap. In 32 years no child who wanted a Bar or Bat Mitzvah was ever denied and solutions were always found.”

**General Inclusion** – Temple Sinai has been taking tangible steps to project our value of inclusiveness, consistent with the words displayed in stone artwork over the building main entrance from Isaiah 56:7 “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” We have an ongoing effort of reviewing existing printed materials and creating new materials to reiterate our commitment to a policy of inclusion and providing needed accommodation.

Our “Welcome to Temple Sinai” brochure describes how the goal of our Temple Sinai founding families in 1959 was to create a synagogue “that provided a safe and inclusive environment.” We are “individuals with abilities and disabilities, individuals, couples and families, gay and straight, Jews by birth and by choice, non-Jewish partners and spouses.” We do all we can to maintain a “culture of warmth and connectedness” and “nurture and cherish our culture of inclusiveness, our sense of community and our sense of respect for all.”  (see attached file)

The Temple Sinai website section *Mission: About Us* reiterates this inclusion statement, as well as the *School of Jewish Life and Learning* section, and the *Membership* section statement on Inclusion.

Attitudes among leadership and congregants are being addressed in the following ways: 1. The attached document, *“Report to the Temple Sinai Board of Trustees” ,* represents a series of observationsresulting from a collaborative discussion of attendees at the 2018 “Inclusion Awareness and Education Day*”* Recommendations from this report have begun being implemented. 2. A “*Panel of Members with Disabilities*” on November 11 2018 has a goal to raise awareness and understanding among all congregants. 3. Revisions are occurring to the “*B’nai Mitzvah Parent Handbook*” to read: **Each student has unique needs when it comes to preparing for Bar/Bat Mitzvah. The clergy and religious school will work closely with individual families to determine how best to support each student in preparation for a meaningful ceremony.**4. An “Accessibility Checklist” for events at Temple Sinai is currently in development.

Organizational and programmatic changes at Temple Sinai occurring include: 1. Employment of one custodial staff member with a disability, and one Religious School teaching assistant with a disability. 2. Inclusion Committee members with disabilities now constitutes 50% of the membership, leading to additional insights and advancement of Temple Sinai’s mission. 3. Planning is underway with clergy to incorporate disability inclusion themes into weekly Shabbat services for Jewish Disability Awareness Month in February 2019. 4. Language changes made on The Temple Sinai website display the mindset of inclusion in Temple policies and approaches to membership activities. https://www.tsinai.org/about-us; <https://www.tsinai.org/school-of-jewish-life--learning.html>; https://www.tsinai.org/https//temple.shulcloud.com/membership

**Parents with Children with Disabilities** – Temple Sinai 2018 Inclusion Awareness and Education Day with Shelly Christensen included one session for parents, “Parenting a Child with a Disability: Understanding Our Challenges on the Journey to Hope”. Parents present were connected to resources and support at Sinai and in Rochester. A parent and her adult child with a disability became active members of the Accessibility and Inclusion Committee as a result of the educational event. In 2018 Sinai hired Inclusion Consultant Sandra Ordan, M.A., a school psychologist and Sinai member. Parents and teachers use her as a resource for children with disabilities, working with 10 students and 6 families since January 2018.

**Religious School** –The philosophy of Principal Ilan Adar, Ph.D. of Temple Sinai’s School of Jewish Life and Learning, is that the school’s approach to inclusion should be as broad as possible. Students are provided help as needed within the synagogue’s means, aided with the hiring of Inclusion Specialist Sandra Ordan, M.A. in 2018. Teaching techniques and accommodations utilized include: 1. Observation of the entire school population, as well as educating teachers and parents, so approaches to an individual student’s needs can be adjusted to their learning style. 2. Identification of learning issues early, utilizing tools and expertise to get help when necessary. 3. Purchase of special chairs and cushions to accommodate students unable to sit easily in traditional desks. 4. One-on-one aides have been provided to students requiring them. 5. Shabbat services, when led by classroom grades that include a child with mobility issues, are conducted on the sanctuary floor level allowing full accessibility.

*Madrachim training* is provided by an LMSW with extensive professional experience working with diverse youth with varying abilities in many school, youth group and camp settings. Her work as Madrachim program coordinator uses the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, building upon the strengths of individuals and groups.  Her approach relies on: the research of Karen Pittman (Forum for Youth Investment) and  the David Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, and the Advancing Youth Development (AYD) curriculum from Cornell University and for best practices for positive youth development;  Howard Gardener's work on multiple intelligence and ways of learning; Peter Benson's (Search Institute) 40 Developmental Assets for engaged, healthy youth; and David Kolb's Experiential Learning Model for youth engagement and reflection.  For the past two years Temple Sinai Madrichim have participated in the the Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester four-session Inclusion training, based on a curriculum from Matan.  At our synagogue, she meets with Madrichim by grade level for 4 sessions, starting with the 8th graders.  During that time they talk about role modeling and leadership skills, different styles of learning, behavior management, and concerns they have working with youth and how to provide a welcoming environment for each youth who comes to Temple Sinai. Each session is individualized to meet the group's needs and experience. She connects with the madrachim group and one-on-one to build their competencies working with youth of differing abilities and needs.

**Worship -** Temple Sinai strives to provide accommodations to make its religious services inclusive and accessible. There are ramp entrances, automatic entrance doors, and a wheelchair available in the coat room. Hearing loop assistive devices on lanyards are available in the sanctuary foyer for those with hearing aids. A new sanctuary sound system was recently installed, a great improvement on the previous system; it includes wireless headsets so that the Rabbi and Cantor can move freely off the raised bima into the sanctuary main aisle.  Reading glasses are available in the sanctuary foyer, as well as large print prayer books for Sabbath, weekdays/festivals, and the High Holy Days; there is an understanding of how the pagination in parentheses in the large print books matches the regular prayer book.  Ancillary printed materials for services are reviewed for ease of reading and low vision. For families, an attractive display of childrens’ books allows parents to occupy young children during an adult-oriented service. Services are live-streamed via the Temple website for those unable to attend in person; these services are archived back approximately a year, with a “watch on demand” feature. At an Oneg or Kiddush, signage is used to identify gluten-free, dairy, pareve, etc to accommodate dietary needs. The recent review of the Temple’s Kashrut policy set forth the goal of “creating an environment as inclusive and welcoming as possible to all people” and included review of dietary accommodations.

Temple Sinai’s clergy and Inclusion Committee recognizes that weaving the message of inclusion awareness into the message of worship services needs to be advanced. To this end, during Jewish Disability Awareness Month in February 2019, the weekly Shabbat services will be devoted to acknowledging different disability challenges. The following will be incorporated into services and activities created by the rabbis, cantor and the Accessibility and Inclusion Committee members: visual impairments; mental health; developmental and mobility; deaf and hard of hearing.

Board members function as “greeters” for the Friday evening service, and Board materials describe the role of the greeter in identifying/assisting people who might have special needs. Indented row space for wheelchairs is included in the sanctuary pew layout, as well as rows closer to the front where part of the pew can be removed. Due to the unique architectural design and intimate size of the 50 year-old sanctuary, bima access requires a two step ascent; the Temple purchased a wheelchair lift that can be set up for use with advance arrangement. During the family meeting for life cycle events (B’nai Mitzvah, weddings, baby namings, conversion ceremonies, etc) Rabbis review the needs of the family for ceremonies such as Passing the Torah through the generations and Aliyot. A bar mitzvah service for a family with a multi-handicapped child was conducted on the sanctuary floor to allow the entire family full participation in the service rituals. The monthly Young Family Service is conducted directly on the sanctuary floor; unless there is a Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony, most Shabbat morning services are also conducted from the sanctuary floor.  The Sukkah is accessible. Throughout the year, speakers on pertinent topics are included as part of the Friday evening service; for example, social issues, mental health, racism, issues that affect the LGBTQ community.