

# The Downtown Synagogue

## Statement of Principles and Objectives

### Background

The mission of The Downtown Synagogue is to foster traditional yet modern, inclusive, egalitarian Jewish worship, community, and learning. We seek to provide a permanent home in the downtown area that supports these activities. We plan to be engaged with the broader Jewish community and with the downtown community as a whole. We welcome families and individuals of all ages and all backgrounds to join us in vibrant, participatory Jewish observance. Visitors are always welcome at services and special events.

Jews actually arrived in the downtown area, then known as New Amsterdam, from Holland before 1650. However, the foundations of the Jewish community were laid in 1654, when a French ship from Brazil reached New Amsterdam with 27 Jewish refugees on board. The New Amsterdam Jews founded the first congregation the next year.

As the City grew over the next three hundred years, the downtown area lost most of its residential population and became almost exclusively commercial. Jewish life here during this period came to revolve mostly around a work-related schedule, and the area's Jewish institutions focused on meeting those needs. Today, as people have begun to re-establish a residential presence in the area's eclectic and vibrant mix of apartments, conversions and lofts, establishing an open and modern yet traditional Jewish community in the downtown area has been a challenge.

The Downtown Synagogue is a traditional synagogue which promotes Jewish observances, values, ethics and customs within a modern American framework, allowing for personal growth and identity, through educational and cultural activities; bridging our influences and heritage from the past, energizing our present, and thereby guaranteeing the future of our people.

### Goals

1. Establish and maintain a centrally located, community-based synagogue in the downtown area
2. Create and maintain an egalitarian, inclusive, traditional yet modern congregation
3. Foster a child-friendly, multigenerational atmosphere
4. Provide a permanent home for worship
5. Provide a vibrant Shabbat community
6. Provide educational opportunities for both adults and children
7. Maintain scholarly rabbinical leadership
8. Maintain active lay leadership
9. Nurture Jewish spirituality and a caring community within a traditional yet modern framework geared towards contemporary American life
10. Provide for the involvement of families from all backgrounds who are seeking a welcoming community for Jewish observance
11. Actively engage the wider Jewish community
12. Connect with the downtown community and the entire City of New York

## **Objectives**

1. Hold weekly Shabbat services and all holiday services
2. Maintain a robust and expanding membership base, with provision for members of varying financial abilities, such as seniors and students
3. Obtain a long-term worship space in the downtown area
4. Secure a part-time Rabbi, and plan for a full-time Rabbi, as circumstances warrant and permit
5. Arrange Shabbat and holiday programming for children
6. Provide for children's Jewish education, as well as the special educational and ritual needs of bar and bat mitzvah children
7. Create a strong financial base, with strong accountability and forward-looking financial planning
8. Lay a groundwork for daily minyans

## **Administration and Leadership**

### **Openness of the Board**

- Regular meetings will be held following a published schedule that is made available in advance
- Meetings will be open to attendance by the Congregation
- Agenda for meetings will be published and made available in advance
- Minutes, including the voting record, will be published and made readily available

### **Congregation participation**

- All members will be encouraged to participate in the Synagogue's activities and administration; the Synagogue will provide all interested members the opportunities to serve on the Board and on various committees, as well as to participate in lay leadership
- Members will be encouraged to make suggestions and comments, and the Synagogue will circulate them among the membership and provide a forum for their discussion

### **Openness of financial information, accountability and planning**

- The Synagogue will regularly publish and make available full financial statements—line item income statements and balance sheets; annual statements will be reviewed; the Synagogue will translate strategic objectives into multi-year budgets

## Purposes in Specific Areas

### ***Spiritual***

The Downtown Synagogue provides for the spiritual needs of the community with services that are traditional in philosophy, that encourage learning and growth, that are egalitarian in nature and that resonate in the spirit.

- Shabbat Services
  - Every Friday night, including one early family service each month
  - Scheduled Shabbat morning services for learning and traditional services
  - Shabbat baby-sitting
- Services for observance of all Festivals and Holidays
- Inspiring High Holiday services
- Special children's services for the High Holidays and Festivals
- Accessible prayer books—transliterations of prayers available for all services

### ***Community***

Traditionally, Jews focus not only on their community but also on the community at large. The Downtown Synagogue will build bridges to other faith communities to advance dialog, mutual understanding, tolerance, mutual respect and cooperation in actions that that foster spiritual and moral values and that are beneficial to the individual and to society. The Synagogue will promote *tzedakah* as a foundation of Jewish existence, and will sponsor and support activities that foster *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world).

### ***Social Activities***

The Downtown Synagogue plans to offer a wide range of social activities for all members.

- Shabbat dinners
- Holiday celebrations, such as a community Passover Seder
- 50+ Group
- *Chavurah* (fellowship) for families with young children
- Youth Group activities

### ***Education***

Believing that education is the key to a full Jewish life, teachers and parents will provide educational opportunities for congregants of all ages. All educational activities will be curriculum-based, include music and art as indicated, and subject to ongoing review and refinement and to input from the congregation. Our goals include:

- Adult education program that includes Hebrew and weekly discussion groups
- Courses and seminars on topics such as the Bible and Talmud theology
- Guest speakers
- Holiday workshops
- Hebrew School (Preschool through grade 12)
- Field trips and retreats
- Children's services

Hebrew School subjects cover the Bible, traditional texts, Jewish ethics and history, and a well-rounded Hebrew program primarily focused on prayer book Hebrew (Biblical Hebrew), as well as offering modern conversational Hebrew and the development of translation skills.