

CONGREGATION BEIT SIMCHAT TORAH FACT SHEET

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- Contact:** Sharon Kleinbaum, *Senior Rabbi*
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- Vision:** CBST is a deeply Jewish spiritual community serving people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and providing a religious voice for social justice and equality everywhere.
- History:** CBST was founded in 1973, by a group committed to the proposition that it is possible to be both openly gay and deeply Jewish. The congregation flourished under lay leadership and hired its first rabbi, Sharon Kleinbaum, in 1992. Today, with a budget of \$2 million and a professional staff of 6 full-time and 10 part-time employees, including a Director of Social Justice Programming, two Cooperberg-Rittmaster Rabbinical Interns, and one cantorial intern, CBST is the largest LGBTQS synagogue in the world.
- Congregation:** CBST is sustained by 600 member households, several thousand friends attending programs and Shabbat and High Holy Day services, and foundations and grant-making institutions. The congregation is egalitarian and diverse: people of all sexual orientations; age cohorts, singles, couples and families with children; liberal and conservative Jews with a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences with Judaism. Our award-winning 320–page publication, “Changing Lives, Making History” is filled with information, quotes, and photos that trace the first forty years of the congregation.
- Programs:** CBST is a house of worship, learning, and community, providing a broad spectrum of ritual observance, liturgy, educational and social justice activities: Lehrhaus Judaica Adult Education Program; youth and adult B’Nai Mitzvah programs, Limmud B’Shabbat Saturday religious school for families with children, and social and cultural activities with active groups for 20’s & 30’s and for seniors. In our new synagogue, and in partnerships with like-minded organizations, CBST will establish such new projects as a new youth drop-in center and a new seniors drop-in center. CBST’s hallmark Open Door policy ensures open admission to all High Holy Day, Shabbat and Holiday services, always free of charge.
- Advocacy:** CBST is a progressive voice within Judaism, a leader in the world-wide discourse on the nature of religious values, and a vital partner in the movement to secure basic civil rights for LGBTQ people everywhere.

Services: CBST's Shabbat services will be held at our new synagogue throughout the year. Annual Pride Shabbat Service, with hundreds in attendance, and High Holy Day services with thousands in attendance, are held at larger venues.

Affiliation: CBST draws its members from across the spectrum of Jewish backgrounds and is not formally affiliated with any Jewish movement or denomination.

MORE ABOUT CBST

CBST is the world's largest synagogue serving people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Building upon the ritual, liturgical and theological heritage of Judaism, CBST provides a spiritual home for Jews and non-Jews affected by and seeking to transform a homophobic, sexist, racist society. The synagogue's boundaries and impact extend well beyond the tri-state area, where it draws the majority of its 600 member households.

CBST is a crucible for social justice. Its very existence is a political act, an act of courage and perseverance. CBST serves as a symbol for marginalized people everywhere seeking to revision traditional religious communities. CBST is actively engaged in advocacy, reaching out to people of all faiths to promote equality. As the escalating values debate centers more on the intersection of religion and homosexuality, CBST provides a much-needed progressive and Jewish voice to counter the religious right. CBST is committed to advancing human rights locally, nationally and throughout the world, including the State of Israel, institutionally and through the work of its activist members.

CBST is a distinguished center of LGBTQ, feminist and activist theological innovation, such as writing *siddurim* (prayer books) with inclusive, non-sexist language; creating liturgy that addresses LGBTQ issues and life cycle events; and reinterpreting and adapting traditional Jewish law and custom to reflect and support the needs of its congregation. The **38** students to date who have participated in CBST's Rabbinical Internship program are transforming the mainstream Jewish world, making it a safer and more welcoming place for everyone.

CBST is a rare example of religious pluralism in action. CBST is not formally affiliated with a Jewish movement or denomination. Its membership reflects a diverse background and relationship to Judaism, across the spectrum of observance, Jewish and non-Jewish. CBST offers a variety of religious experiences, including traditional and liberal services, to meet the needs of its vibrant, inclusive community.

CBST's High Holy Day services attract thousands. Through its Open Door fund, created in response to the historic exclusion of gays and lesbians from participating openly in most Jewish communities, CBST dispenses with the standard admission fees required to attend these important services. As a result, thousands, including some of the most notable New Yorkers and visitors from around the world, celebrate the High Holy Days with CBST. Many of its members first came to CBST through the Open Door.

Even ma'asu habonim haitah l'rosh pinah – The stone that the builders rejected has indeed become the corner stone. Psalm 118:22