

# Beit Simchat Torah

CONGREGATION

קהלה קדושה בית שמחת תורה

# IMPACT REPORT 2024-2025



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# LETTER FROM RABBI JASON KLEIN



Dear Friends,

As I reflect on my first year at CBST, I do so with immense pride, gratitude, and a heart full of learning. This year has been one of experimenting, growing, and celebrating together. We have launched new initiatives, marked meaningful milestones, and gathered—again and again—to laugh and to grieve, to share and to sing.

I stand on the shoulders of those who came before me and I feel honored to walk this path alongside each of you. CBST draws its strength, its sustenance, and its vibrant spirit from its community—from your participation, your care, your feedback, and your willingness to journey together through sorrow and joy alike.

As we look to the future, we do so with hope. Hope that we will continue to show each other what it means to love boldly, to sustain a sacred community with an ever-widening tent, and to repair a world in need of our collective passion and purpose.

With gratitude and anticipation,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rabbi Jason Klein". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jason Gary Klein  
Senior Rabbi

# LETTER FROM BOARD PRESIDENT IVAN ZIMMERMAN

I am struck by the profound sense of change, growth, and connection that has defined this chapter in our community's journey over this past year. My first year as President has been both deeply meaningful and full of transformation—not only for me personally, but for all of us together.

This year, we welcomed our new Senior Rabbi, a moment of great significance and excitement for our congregation. With his arrival, we have stepped into a new era of spiritual leadership, vision, and renewed purpose. Rabbi Klein's presence has already begun to shape and inspire the next generation of CBST's spiritual and communal life.



Throughout these months, I have seen firsthand the dedication and resilience of our community. In a time marked by challenges—locally, nationally, and globally—we have continued to deepen our commitments to one another, to justice, and to Jewish life.

Whether through learning, prayer, activism, or acts of kindness, our community has shown what it means to show up with intention and heart.

This year has also been focused on strengthening the internal health of our organization: expanding our programming, supporting our staff and clergy, stewarding our financial sustainability, and ensuring that our sacred space continues to be a home for all. There is much important work ahead and I am honored to support us as we continue this journey—together.

I want to express my deep gratitude to each and every CBST member. Your presence, your generosity, and your care sustain our community and make our shared mission possible. It is your commitment that allows CBST not only to endure, but to thrive.

I am always here to connect with you—whether to listen, to learn, or to work in partnership. I look forward to all we will build together in the year to come.

With appreciation and hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Ivan Zimmerman". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light blue horizontal line.

Ivan Zimmerman  
President





# MISSION & VISION

Congregation Beit Simchat Torah is a spiritual home for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Passionate, provocative, and deeply Jewish, our community engages in spirited debate and activism: rejoicing in diversity, denouncing social injustice wherever it exists, and striving for civil rights for all people.

- We are a house of prayer, offering both traditional and liberal services and lifecycle events.
- We are a house of learning, continually expanding our knowledge and deepening our understanding of our religious and cultural heritage.
- We are a house of refuge and healing, offering community support and pastoral care.
- We are a house of conscience, fighting for the full equality of LGBTQ people locally, nationally, and internationally.
- We are committed to Israel and engaged in supporting efforts to secure peace, justice, and equality for all.



# RITUAL LIFE

From the joy of Pride to the depth of Yom Kippur, CBST's services provide space for connection and meaning, learning and dancing, music and candlelight. CBST's services are always open to all, always without charge, always egalitarian. No matter where community members fall on the spectrums of Judaism, gender and sexuality, and experience with the CBST community, each person's full self is welcome in our sacred community and in our prayer services. During the High Holidays, CBST's long-standing Open Door policy since the 1980s has ensured that anyone who wishes to join in our services may join, regardless of their financial circumstances. This policy speaks to the radical welcoming that CBST embodies.

## KABBALAT SHABBAT

- \* The cornerstone of CBST's religious observance, Kabbalat Shabbat services meet every Friday night at 6:30pm in person and online. Our community comes together to mark and welcome Shabbat.

## SHABBAT MORNING

- \* Our rotation of Shabbat morning services is a testament to CBST's pluralistic nature. Our Liberal Minyan meets twice a month and our Traditional Egalitarian Minyan and Avodat HaLev, a song-and-study-based service, each meet once a month.

**67** Livestreamers of CBST's Kabbalat Shabbat services hail from 67 different countries around the world

**4,000** people joined CBST's High Holiday services in 2024/5785: 2,000 in person and 2,000 online





# PROGRAMMING & EDUCATION

## LEARNING AT CBST IS THRIVING!

At CBST, learning isn't just something we do—it's the heartbeat of our Jewish life. From thought-provoking Lehrhaus classes to joyful Alef-Bet Shabbat sessions, our community is buzzing with curiosity and connection. This year, we launched Shabbat Shalem, a new initiative to share a fuller Shabbat experience once per month, and saw our Teen Track, Limmud, and family holiday programs grow in exciting new ways—bringing Jewish learning to the next generation with heart and soul. For adults, whether you're diving into ancient texts or exploring Jewish themes in pop culture, CBST's Adult Ed program, Lehrhaus Judaica, offers something for everyone. For children and families, our program builds and strengthens a contemporary, learned, relevant, ethical, and deeply rooted sense of both Jewish and LGBTQ values and identity.

Learning here isn't just educational—it's electric!



- Lehrhaus Adult Education offered 27 classes to our community.
- Elul Zman learning session was launched to bring the community together in learning ahead of the High Holidays.
- We launched Shabbat Shalem, welcoming hundreds for fuller days of learning and community on seven Shabbatot throughout the year.
- Limmud B'Shabbat Hebrew School welcomed 34 children and 10 teens.
- Aleinu (20s&30s) hosted 22 Oneg Shabbat programs, online learning sessions, and other gatherings.
- L'dor Vador (40s&50s+) hosted 11 Oneg Shabbat Programs, Sundays at 4 with Ldor Vador, and other gatherings.
- Mishpachah/Aging Together (55+) hosted 43 Mishpachah Monday gatherings, 7 Aging Together gatherings, and 6 Mishpachah dinners with a total of 444 participants.



# SOCIAL JUSTICE



## TEAM FEATURE: DEMOCRACY! ACTION TEAM

Our Democracy! Action Team meets weekly to advocate for local, state, and national issues, and take action to get out the vote. The team takes action on issues the CBST community cares deeply about, including immigration, protecting the environment, common sense gun laws, ending mass incarceration, education reform, healthcare, and more.

The team worked diligently to get out the vote for the 2024 elections both locally and nationally, making calls, writing postcards, providing educational resources to the CBST community. Post-election, we continue to take action according to our values, bringing Democracy Actions to Shabbat Shalem, the community retreat, and to our weekly zoom gatherings and our monthly in-person meeting on the third Thursdays of each month at CBST.

At CBST, our prayers, plans, and actions are all dedicated to a world that recognizes every human being as created in the image of the divine, inherently deserving of equal rights, respect, and justice. Our social justice teams are founded and led by thoughtful groups of CBST members who have committed to learning and taking action on a particular issue. Each group is unique in its approach: a team may meet regularly to take action, connect people to volunteer opportunities with partner organizations, focus on education, or do direct service.

## OUR SOCIAL JUSTICE TEAMS

- Democracy! Action Team
- NYC Rapid Response Team (active 2017-22, revived in 2025)
- Emet: Trans and Nonbinary Team
- Ending Mass Incarceration Team
- CBST, the Middle East, and Me

## CLERGY ADVISORY TEAMS

- Green Team (Environmental Concerns)
- Chazak: The Red Ribbon Team (HIV/AIDS)



As an incubator of progressive religious thought, CBST's public voice is crucial at a time when the dominant role of organized religion in the U.S. is often to limit, impede, and even stifle informed dialogue on gender and sexuality and their interplay with religion. We are committed to showing up as our proudly Jewish and LGBTQ+ selves in our justice work.



# SOCIAL JUSTICE

# THE ARK

## IMMIGRATION CLINIC



The Ark at Congregation Beit Simchat Torah (CBST) provides *pro se* legal assistance to asylum seekers in NYC. *Pro se* means that we can assist asylum seekers with applications, but we cannot represent them. The majority of those we work with are LGBTQ and/or HIV+. We assist asylum seekers to prepare asylum, work permit, TPS, and other immigration applications. Our social work program provides referrals to other critical resources and through our partners we connect asylum seekers to immigration court accompaniment.

*"It's with immense joy that I share with you that I have been approved for asylum with USCIS. This journey has taught me a lot. It has taught me how to be humble. It has taught me patience. It has taught me grace. I am extremely grateful to every individual from CBST. I'm truly grateful for their help and support in the entire process. I filed for asylum in 2020 and in 2024 I was granted. I'm overwhelmed with joy. Today I am free free free to express myself — free to live the life that makes me happy to be gay."*

~A.



This year, the Ark received unprecedented funding and support for our work. A special proclamation, bestowed by the New York City Council, recognized that the the Ark “represents the very best of New York City’s values -- inclusivity, compassion, and action.”

This year, Ark staff members also visited the California-Mexico border with HIAS to understand the journeys of our immigrant friends and enrich our work and connections.

Pictured above, Ark staff lobbied and shared knowledge on two trips to Albany this year. While there, staff made connections with other organizations and offices working toward welcoming our newest New Yorkers.

At this time of immense hardship for immigrants, the Ark is committed to navigating the immigration systems with expertise and love.

Asylum Grants

13

Asylum  
Applications Filed

169

EAD Applications  
Filed

257

Friends Served

825

Volunteers  
Engaged

1,032

# MUSIC



\* CBST's commitment to arts and culture makes our synagogue unique. Each of our services, concerts, and performances is carefully curated to be a spiritual, educational, relevant, and uplifting experience encompassing many diverse musical expressions: from choral music by German/Austrian composers to traditional Eastern European *chazzanut*; from chamber music to contemporary folk settings; and so much more.



Throughout every generation, composers have sought to find beauty and new meaning in our sacred texts. CBST is well-known throughout the world for its ground-breaking musical programming. Music at CBST is not limited by genre, composer, era, or origin. CBST celebrates the broadest range of Jewish music and we pride ourselves on eclectic and joyful services that incorporate music from many traditions and time periods.



## CBST COMMUNITY CHORUS

The largest lay chorus in New York and leading synagogue chorus in the U.S., our Community Chorus is an integral part of CBST's spiritual life, participating at services and life cycle events and representing CBST at LGBTQ PRIDE, interfaith choral festivals, nursing homes, and other synagogues.





# 2024-25 IN REVIEW

**JULY 2024**  
CBST celebrated Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum's transition to Senior Rabbi Emerita following 32 years of spiritual leadership.

CBST welcomed Rabbi Jason Klein as the new Senior Rabbi.

CBST welcomed new Board president Ivan Zimmerman.

**AUGUST 2024**

Elul Zman learning was launched through Lehrhaus Adult Education to share teachings and spiritual preparations ahead of the Yamim Nora'im.

**SEPTEMBER 2024**

Thanks to CBST's Open Door, we hosted 2,000 people in person and 2,000 online at our High Holiday services, welcoming the year 5785 at CBST's home at 130 W 30th, the Masonic Hall, and the Jacob Javits Center and online.

**OCTOBER 2024**

CBST launched Shabbat Shalem, a monthly immersive Shabbat with community, play, learning, music, and togetherness for all ages.

**NOVEMBER 2025**

Rabbi Marisa James and Ark Immigration Clinic Director Noah Habeeb travelled with HIAS to experience the U.S.-Mexico border and strengthen the Ark's work.

**DECEMBER 2024**

CBST's Chesed & Membership teams made calls to every CBST member to say "Happy Chanukah!" These teams also made calls for Rosh Hashanah and Passover.

**JANUARY 2025**

Rabbi Jason Klein installed as the new Senior Rabbi of CBST in a festive celebration.

**FEBRUARY 2025**

Elise Keppler, Director of the Global Justice Center, spoke about the state of reproductive rights legally and globally, and what we can do, on Repro Shabbat.

CBST celebrates Trans Week of Visibility & Equality.

**MARCH 2025**

CBST contingent joins Hands Off NYC March from Shabbat Shalem.

**APRIL 2025**

**MAY 2025**

CBST members joined together to play, pray, sing, study, and more at the CBST Annual Congregational Retreat. The retreat is a way to get away and immerse in CBST at the same time.

Our Concert for Social Justice brought chamber music to beautify and sustain our work.

# THE PROFESSIONAL TEAM

Assaf Astrinsky, Director of Finance & Administration  
Jackie Baker, CRM/Salesforce Manager  
Amelia Bienstock, Educational & Pastoral Administrative Assistant  
Taty Birenbaum, Alef-Bet Shabbat Songleader  
Debbie Broshi, Teacher  
Tasha Calhoun, Assistant to Senior Rabbi  
Rachel Chang, Songleader and Assistant Teacher  
Diana Chiarella, Development Associate  
Laura Clark, Ark Immigration Clinic Coordinator  
Carrie Connor, Director of Operations  
Adina Gerver, Finance Manager  
Noah Habeeb, Ark Immigration Clinic Director  
Marques Hollie, Cooperberg-Rittmaster Rabbinical Intern  
Rabbi Marisa James, Director of Social Justice Programming  
Ariel Kates, Director of Communications  
Miriam Kersey Paisner, Program Operations Manager  
Azeem Khan, Ark Immigration Clinic Navigator  
Rabbi Jason Klein, Senior Rabbi  
Jennifer Kleinbaum, Teacher  
Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, Senior Rabbi Emerita  
Ruth Kleinman, Membership & Engagement Manager  
Alex Kogan, Chief Operating Officer  
Alana Krivo-Kaufman, Cooperberg-Rittmaster Rabbinical Intern  
Chelsey Linkens, Operations Assistant  
Jorge Loyola, Facilities Coordinator  
Ari Mosbacher, Administrative Coordinator  
Rabbi Mike Moskowitz, Scholar-in-Residence  
Elle Nelson, Administrative Assistant  
Mandy Paige, Teacher  
Judy Ribnick, Director of Aging Together  
Cantor Sam Rosen, Cantor  
Teri Rosenberg, Development Director  
Joyce Rosenzweig, Music Director  
Miya Rotstein, Education Manager  
Rabbi Yael Werber, Associate Rabbi





# IN OUR OWN WORDS

"CBST has been a home for me for 42 years. It is here that I found friends and chosen family. I have found purpose and community by volunteering in many ways over the years such as the welcoming committee, lay leadership, the Chorus, and Emet, the Trans Non-Binary committee. At CBST I have been able to evolve in my Queer and Jewish identities. It is here I find deep spiritual connection, essential to my well-being."

**RAFAELA  
ANSHEL**



**"Every time I walk through the doors at CBST I know I'm going to encounter something I've never thought about before. I come to CBST to learn, to laugh, to sing and connect with my Jewish spirituality, and to know that I am in a space that cares in and acts on that care in such broad ways. Thanks for bringing me under your tallit!"**

**ANONYMOUS**

**MADELEINE  
GOLDFISCHER:**



"I first came to CBST because of the Open Door. I didn't know what to expect. I was just looking to bring a friend to Kol Nidre services. As an unaffiliated Jew, who was brought up by an atheist scientist with a very strong Jewish cultural identity, I didn't know where to go. Seventeen years later, I'm still here! CBST welcomed us with open arms at the Javits Center and I'll never forget the experience. My background didn't matter... all were welcome, and it was truly transformative. We learned, we laughed, we sang, we prayed, and reflected with thousands of diverse New Yorkers, and I'll never forget the feeling. It was powerful to be in community from the sun setting over the Hudson to the beautiful music to the wise words of the Rabbis to the silence during the Amidah.

After only attending the High Holiday services for years, I started going services a little more frequently, and my relationship to my Judaism and CBST changed. I decided that I couldn't just take advantage of the Open Door. I had to become a member and support the incredible work CBST does providing a spiritual home for LGBTQ+, straight Jews, and their non-Jewish friends and family. CBST's steadfast commitment to social justice for all, especially through the Ark Immigration Clinic, and its commitment to building bridges to other faiths, embodies *Tikkun Olam*, and makes me proud to be a member."

# CONTACT US

## CONGREGATION BEIT SIMCHAT TORAH

Phone

**212-929-9498**

Email

**[info@cbst.org](mailto:info@cbst.org)**

Website

**[www.cbst.org](http://www.cbst.org)**

Address

**130 W. 30th St.  
New York, NY 10001**

