

# Teens Find Their Place at Or Olam in Cabarrus County

Teenagers can have a hard time finding their place in many areas of their lives, and the synagogue is no exception. Think about the most hackneyed Bar or Bat Mitzvah speech proclamations. "Today I am a man!" Really? You're not even as tall as your mom yet! "This is not the end of my Jewish education, but the beginning." If only that were always true.

Unfortunately, for many teens, what they feel at the conclusion of their Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony is a sense of relief – the lifting of responsibilities. Ideally, of course, it should be the opposite – the assumption of greater responsibilities in the congregation.

At Temple Or Olam, our teens are finding their places with grace, individuality, and enthusiasm. Instead of a traditional confirmation program, we welcome teens to take on genuine leadership roles and to continue their Jewish educations in the ways most meaningful to them.

### Prayer and Torah

For many of us, the only time we chanted from the Torah was on our Bar or Bat Mitzvah. That is not the case at Temple Or Olam. Almost every month, at the Fourth Friday service, you'll find a teenager performing one of the most important roles in the synagogue: chanting Torah. This serves several purposes. The teens are required to keep their skills sharp, the congregation gets the benefit of their hard work, and younger kids get what is often in short supply: real role models who show by their actions that Torah is "cool."

Teens also routinely lead prayers at services, sometimes individually and sometimes as a group. The key is that they do what they're comfortable doing, and our warm and appreciative congregation helps to make them more comfortable.

Anyone who's attended our Friday night services knows how integral the musical contributions of teenagers are to the spirit of the congregation.

### Community

Coming up are seminars from some of the adult members of our congregation on life lessons that they have learned. Just as our teenagers serve as role models for younger children, the adult members of our congregation will share their wisdom and experience with the teens.

### Teaching and Learning

We couldn't do without the contributions of our teenagers at our religious school. They bring energy and freshness to Hebrew teaching. An adult might think of a clever mnemonic to help young students remember new Hebrew letters, but a teen will group letters into a silly family, get the kids laughing, and help them remember even better. Teens also help to create the hands-on Hebrew materials that make our religious school so much fun.

They frequently tutor students who are a little older than typical new Hebrew learners so that they



Thirteen-year-old Kyla Mace (right) plays bass at the community Seder. Also pictured are Dr. Barbara Thiede and Stan Mace.



can join their age-mates as soon as possible.

But they are learning too. At religious school this fall, teens will have their own Torah study group, where they will tackle hard questions and gain a deeper understanding.

Several teens are doing further study into Torah trope. Instead of learning by studying recordings, they are focusing on the music of the trope symbols, the Hebrew phrasing, and the relation of the trope symbols to each other. One teenager is researching and documenting a little-known middle-Eastern trope system. Other teens are just now learning Hebrew for the first time. We welcome teens with any and all Jewish backgrounds to join us. We will meet them where they are.

The teens also get together to watch and discuss movies with Jewish themes. And of course nosh a little too.

What else can teens learn at Temple Or Olam? It's really driven by the individual teenagers. As our congregation grows and we find out about the interests and gifts of new teens, we look forward to encouraging and helping them to follow their Jewish interests. And of course we can't wait to find out what they will teach us.

If you'd like your teen to have a Jewish place where he or she can truly be him or herself and feel a sense of belonging, please visit us. We have services the 2nd and 4th Friday of the month, at 7PM at McGill Baptist Church, 5300 Poplar Tent Road, Concord. Our website is [www.or-olam.org](http://www.or-olam.org). Any questions? Contact us at [info@or-olam.org](mailto:info@or-olam.org) or 704-720-7577. ☆

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