



Mitzvah Project. At NVHC, we expect *B'nai Mitzvah* students to complete a project as part of the *Kehilat Limmud tzedakah* curriculum, and to help communicate the centrality of Jewish values to our community, your family and friends. The goal of such projects is for our students to embody the meaning of becoming a *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*, a responsible Jewish adult congregant. Our clergy, education staff, youth group advisors and others are prepared to share ideas and support to help *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* students and their families take on important mitzvah projects in our community. We believe that *Mitzvot* – Jewish obligations - lie at the heart of Judaism. They are the commandments that teach us how to sanctify life - to take responsibility as adults, to make the right decisions, reaching out to others in need, continuing our Jewish learning, imbuing our lives with values and ultimately connecting with God.

- What is a *Mitzvah*?
 - A *mitzvah* is a commandment. There are 613 specific *mitzvot* in the Torah (plural of *mitzvah*), traditionally acknowledged to have been given by God or decreed by our Sages.
 - Doing *Mitzvot* connect us to God, bringing God's presence into our lives.
 - Doing *Mitzvot* is part of our history. Through our actions, we become connected to our people who stood at Sinai to witness God's eternal covenant with every generation.
 - Doing *Mitzvot* also connects us to our tradition, which at more than 5,000 years old, has contributed to some of our civilization's greatest values.
- Why should I do *mitzvot* as I become a *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*?
 - While we now call you a Jewish adult, it is actually up to you to become one. It is your time to search, study and accept Jewish responsibilities.
 - While many *mitzvot* may seem like 'good deeds', being helpful and important activities in our society, it is a Jewish responsibility to take them on and frame them in a way that elevates their purpose to something holy, toward making the world complete and whole.
 - The Jewish principle of *Tikun Olam*, of repairing the world, guides us to live out our Jewish values. You can change the world, one deed at a time.

Suggested Categories of Mitzvot for Mitzvah Projects

These Jewish values and practices have sources in our sacred texts and teachings. You may choose from values/themes below, or consider other Jewish values to learn and explore *Mitzvah* projects.

- *Ahavat Yisrael* - Love and support of Jews, Israel and Zionism.
‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ [Leviticus 19:18]
- *Bikur Cholim* – Visiting the Sick.
‘To attend to the sick is to attend to God.’ [Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel]
- *Chesed Shel Emet* – Honoring the Deceased and Comforting the Mourner
‘Weeping may linger at night, but joy comes with a new day.’ [Psalms 30:6]
- *Gemilut Chasadim* – Deeds of Great Compassion
‘Shimon [the son of Rabban Gamliel] says: It is not what one says, but rather what one does, that makes all the difference in the world.’ [Pirkei Avot]
- *Hachnasat Orchim* – Hospitality
‘You shall treat the stranger who dwells with you as the native among you, and you shall love that one as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.’ [Leviticus 19:34]
- *Hiddur P’nei Zakein* – Giving Honor to the Elderly
‘The prosperity of a country is in accordance with its treatment of its aged.’ [Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav]
- *Kibud Av va’Em* – Honoring one’s parents
‘Honor your father and your mother.’ [Exodus 20:12]
- *Mazon* - Feeding the Hungry
‘Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the stranger. I am Adonai your God.’ [Leviticus 19:10]
- *Sh’mirat haTeva* – Protecting our Natural World
‘When you wage war against a city, do not destroy its trees.’ [Deuteronomy 20:19]
- *Sh’mirat Shabbat* – Observing the Shabbat
‘Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.’ [Exodus 20:8]
- *Sh’mirat Halashon* – Watching your Words
“Whoever of you desires life....guard your tongue from evil.” [Psalms 34:12-13]
- *Talmud Torah* – Torah Learning
‘Study is greater than practice, for it leads to practice.’ [Talmud, Kiddushin 40b]
- *Tsa’ar Ba’alei Chayim* – Being Kind to Animals [Compassion for the pain of living creatures]
‘A person should feed his or her animal before eating.’ [Talmud, Berachot 40a]
- *Tzedakah* – Righteous Giving
‘Justice, justice shall you pursue.’ [Deuteronomy 16:20]
- *Zikaron* – Remembrance
‘Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Eternal your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.’ [Deuteronomy 5:15]

APPENDIX B – *Tzedakah* and Social Justice in Honor of One's *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*

Jewish tradition directs us to share our thanks with God throughout our lives. It is customary to give *tzedakah* and volunteer, participating in acts of *tikkun olam* and social action in honor of significant occasions in our lives.

- **NVHC Social Justice programs.** There are many avenues within our synagogue community, connected to local programming needs, where we live our values of social justice. Please see our website: <http://www.nvhcreston.org/live/nvhchange-social-action/>
 - **Forest Edge Weekend Snack Bag.** Did you know that hundreds of kids in Fairfax County go home from school on Friday knowing that their next meal will not be until they return to school Monday morning? NVHC Change is helping to fight food insecurity and fill hungry tummies through the Forest Edge Elementary School Weekend Snack Bag program. Twice a month, NVHC Change volunteers donate food and pack 225 gallon sized bags with healthy snacks to send home with children in need, right here in Reston. The needs at Forest Edge continue to rise and we need more helpers to coordinate this effort. We need more people “behind the scenes” helping with gathering food we need to purchase, getting the word out to the congregation, picking up bins from the school and more. The other need that we have right now is for more money. Every month we spend approximately \$1,000 to purchase all the food for the TAMID students to participate in this project, but OUR FUNDS ARE RUNNING LOW! We are looking for fundraising ideas. We are seeking food donations ALL year long. Please help to support this effort by bringing in as many food donations as you can give. If you have any questions please contact Alison. To find out how you can donate food or help pack bags, email Alison Behar at ForestEdgeBackpackProgram@nvhcreston.org.
 - **Reading program at Forest Edge Elementary.** The Reading Specialist at Forest Edge Elementary, Barbara Fant, is looking for individuals who will work one-on-one with students who are having reading difficulties to give them special help on an ongoing basis; to give them confidence, practice and additional skills. This would entail working with the same student every week (or 2X a week) and to establish a relationship with the student. Each session would be only 15 to 20 minutes in length. Application forms can be picked up from the NVHC temple office. If you have further questions, please contact temple member Sandee Byrne, Sisterhood member Brigitte Wazana or Forest Edge Resource Teacher, Barbara Fant at BDFant@fcps.edu.
 - **Hypothermia Shelter.** For several years, NVHC Change volunteers have supported Cornerstone's Hypothermia Shelter by shopping for, cooking, and serving meals for the guests of the shelter. During the cold months, NVHC Change provides a warm meal once every two weeks. Other ways NVHC congregants have supported the shelter include knitting and donating homemade scarves, as well as donating monetary funds. If you can help by providing materials or serving the meals, or even by making a small donation, please contact Sandee Byrne via email at G14iraffe@aol.com.
- **CORNERSTONES:** *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* and their families have become involved in Cornerstones in many ways. Donating financial resources (earned by the students through hard work), donating time and volunteer hours to support the work of Cornerstones, of which NVHC is a supporting member organization. The work and support NVHC members

share with Cornerstones ensures that in Northern Virginia needy individuals and families receive food, shelter, affordable housing, childcare and other supportive services. The **Embry Rucker Shelter** is a part of this effort, providing emergency shelter 365 days a year. Contact Cornerstones for more information about all of their programs at www.cornerstonesva.org or (571) 323-9555.

- **MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger**, is an organization that provides food to the needy at home and abroad. Families are encouraged to make a donation to MAZON on the occasion of their family's *simcha*, based on a percentage of their food expenses. Linking this mitzvah with the celebration of Bar/Bat Mitzvah is an important educational experience for your child, as well as a memorable part of a very special event. A wonderful mitzvah project is the donation of 3% of your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah food expenses to MAZON. This sensitizes your child to millions around the world who go in need and are supported by organizations that receive grants from MAZON. MAZON can be reached at (310)442-0020 or www.mazon.org.
- **Jewish National Fund**. Devoted to serving as the caretaker of the land of Israel for the Jewish people, many families choose to support the Jewish National Fund at their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* celebrations by sending Jewish National Fund personalized tree certificates as one-of-a-kind invitations, or using them as favors, table signs, or acknowledgements. These attractive, affordable certificates help beautify Israel, support Jewish environmental values and share with your child and your guests the special relationship and responsibility Jewish values teach us regarding Israel and the environment. To request a sample kit of JNF's one-of-a-kind certificates and enhancements, please call (800)700-1312 or see www.jnf.org.
- **Save a Child's Heart Foundation** provides urgently needed pediatric heart surgery and follow-up care for children from third world and developing countries. Contributions from *B'nai Mitzvah* celebrants enable indigent children to have lifesaving heart surgery. At one's *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* during their speech, the student shares more information about Save a Child's Heart and its vital life-saving work, consistent with the Jewish value of *pikuach nefesh*, saving of lives. The student will be presented with a certificate acknowledging a contribution to Save a Child's Heart and its sincere gratitude. See www.sachef.org or call 301-593-5763 for more information.
- **Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism** can assist you and your child in developing a mitzvah project that would encourage personal advocacy on behalf of an issue of social justice or activism. Letter-writing campaigns, participation in marches and demonstrations, and support of causes are wonderful mitzvah projects in which our *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* students may take the opportunity to lead. See www.rac.org or contact the Religious Action Center at 202-387-2800.
- **Lifeline for the Old - Yad Lakashish**: Myriam Mendelow z"l, a former school teacher, was working with the elderly of Jerusalem. After seeing countless people who had given up on living and whom society had allowed to give up, she created a series of sheltered workshops for seniors. Today they rebind the books of school children, make wooden and fabric toys, and create a whole line of ritual and gift items. Yad Lakashish is a wonderful organization for your *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* celebrant to support. Contact: <http://www.lifeline.org.il>.
- **Inova Blood Services**. NVHC Social Action Committee sponsors blood drives each year under the aegis of Inova Blood Donor Services. Although *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* students are not eligible to donate, they can assist in the mitzvah of publicity for these blood drives, contacting temple and community members to encourage donations. Over 200 blood and platelet

donations are needed every day, year round by patients at the fifteen hospitals served by Inova Blood Donor Services. Blood and platelets help: trauma patients, surgery patients, newborn babies, cancer patients and transplant patients. Although 60 percent of the population is eligible to donate, less than five percent actually do. Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebrants are encouraged to help out with Blood Drives or any Social Action project sponsored by NVHC. Contact our Social Action Chairperson for more details. For more information about blood donations or to schedule a donation appointment, contact **1-866-256-6372** or see www.inova.org.

- **New Israel Fund** provides critically-needed support to hundreds of national and community-based organizations working to safeguard civil and human rights, promote religious tolerance and pluralism and narrow economic and social gaps in Israel. www.nif.org.
- **Locks of Love**. This organization accepts donations of lengths of hair grown by young people so that it might provide (free-of-charge) hairpieces to financially disadvantaged children under age 18 suffering from long-term medical hair loss. More information is available at 1-888-896-1588 or www.locksoflove.org.
- **World Federation of Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust**. A million and a half Jewish children under the age of 16 were murdered during the Holocaust. We know very little about them; however, there are special ways to remember them in the course of your child's upcoming *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. The "Twinning and Remembrance" concept is to have a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* student "twin" and in this way remember a young Jewish person who perished in the Holocaust in his/her ceremony. You may contact them at www.wfjcs.org to arrange the specifics of twinning with a Holocaust victim.
- **Remember Us: A Bar/Bat Mitzvah Project for Holocaust Remembrance**. This project invites a child who is preparing to become a Bar or Bat mitzvah to remember a child who was lost in the Holocaust as part of this joyous time of being called to the Torah. Students choose from the list of tens of thousands of children's names who died the Holocaust and they then "share" their sacred event with this lost child. This might include doing *mitzvot* in their name, including information about the child and their history in *D'var Torah*, choosing to remember this child before the Mourner's Kaddish or additional ideas for remembrance. To learn more about this special and important project, email remember@sonic.net.

In addition:

NVHC Funds. Many *B'nai Mitzvah* families choose to share donate in honor of their child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah to the NVHC Rabbi's or Cantor's Discretionary Funds, the Selden-Dixon Memorial Endowment for Jewish Youth and Community Development, the Lifelong Learning Fund, or one of the other dedicated funds that support the activity of the NVHC community. Please contact the office for more information about contributing to NVHC.

- **Other Ideas -**

There are many agencies in Virginia, North America and around the world can be helped through volunteering time, generous resources, and *tzedakah* on the occasion of a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. NVHC lists agencies below which the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* student and family can contact for assistance in supporting work of *Tikkun Olam*. At the time of publication, we believe all these to be reputable agencies, but by no means is this list exhaustive.

Of course, please let us know of your experiences and potential additions to this list for future students preparing *B'nai Mitzvah* projects.

- American Friends of Magen David Adom (<http://armdi.org>) or (212)757-1627
- American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam - supporting dialogue and peace in an Israeli/Arab community (<http://nswas.com>) (856) 235-6200
- American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (<http://jdc.org>) or (212) 687-6200
- American Jewish World Service (<http://ajws.org>) or (800) 889-7146
- American Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (<http://wzo.org.il/en/resources/view.asp?id=1033>) or (212) 398-6750
- Association of Reform Zionists of America (<http://arza.org>) or (212) 650-4280
- Capital Hospice (<http://capitalhospice.org>) or (703) 383-9222
- Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (<http://coejl.org>) or (212) 532-7801
- FACT (Family and Children's Trust Fund) in VA supports shelters, self-help groups, hotlines, counseling centers responding to family violence (<http://vadv.org/>) or call 804- 692-1823
- Jewish AIDS Network of Greater Washington at 202-546-8574
- Jewish Federation of Greater Washington (<http://shalomdc.org>), 703-425-0066
- Jewish Social Service Agency (<http://jssa.org>) or 703-204-9100
- **Jewish Youth Philanthropy Institute (<http://jypi.org>) or 301-348-7346**
- **Jews for Judaism (<http://jewsforjudaism.org>) or 410-602-0276**
- Joseph and Betty Harlam URJ Camp Institute for Living Judaism Scholarship Fund (<http://campharlam.org>) or 215-563-8183
- Lauri Strauss Leukemia Foundation (<http://lslf.org>) or 212-696-1033
- Miriam's Kitchen (<http://miriamskitchen.org>) or 202-452-8927
- NFTY, North American Federation of Temple Youth Camp Scholarship Fund (<http://kutzcamp.org>) or 845-987-6300
- One Family Fund (<http://onefamilyfund.org>) or 1-866-91FAMILY
- Project Keshar (projectkeshar@projectkeshar.org) or 847 332 1994
- Save a Child's Heart Endowment Fund (<http://sachef.org>) or 301-593-5763
- Terror Victims Association – Almagor (<http://terrorvictims.com>)
- URJ Fund for Reform Judaism (<http://urj.org>) or 212-650-4000