

The Weicholz Sanctuary

Our beautiful worship space was opened in 1984 as (in true Broward County style) “Phase Two” of Temple Beth Orr. The original 1975 building— a multi-purpose “shoebox” with folding walls, which is still in use as classrooms one through six in the Rosenberg Religious School and Kuhn ECC— was deemed inadequate for the needs of a rapidly growing community. So in 1983 the membership undertook to capitalize and build a dedicated Sanctuary and Social Hall

Architect Barry Sugarman chose as the focal point of his design a cylindrical Ark, soaring high up to the ceiling to represent the Torah as God’s Will revealed to humanity from On High. Yet within that vast and dramatic space he used two special features to create an aura of intimacy. First off, the room is wider than it is deep, so that even those sitting in the back row are not too far from what is happening on the *bimah*. In addition, he made the parallel rows of seats curve so that worshippers on both sides of the room are visible to, aware of, and interacting with one another.

Symbolic numbers play an important part in the Sanctuary design. There are ten rows of chairs, front-to-back, for the Ten Commandments which are at the heart of the Torah. To get to the *bimah* you climb five steps, for the Five Books of the Torah, plus two more to get to the Ark, for a total of Seven Days of the Week. Even the removable back wall gets into the act, comprised as it is of a total of 18 sliding panels.

Beth Orr means “House of Light,” and Barry Sugarman’s design included two beautiful stained-glass windows to make colored light part of the décor at the side corners of the Sanctuary’s front wall. The one in the southeast corner, over the Choir area, is aptly enough a representation of the golden *M’norah* which is the oldest symbol of the Jewish people and faith, with all of its burning lamps united into a glowing flame of affirmation. The other window, in the northwest corner closest to the School wing, is an abstract depiction of a ram’s-horn *shofar* blown to announce the New Year, together with the five *m’gillot*, or festival scrolls, read on the respective holidays throughout the year to fill both its days and our lives with sacred meaning.

The theme of stained-glass is carried out in the *parochet*, or Ark curtain, which is the central focal point of the room. Designed by Connecticut fabric sculptor Jeanette Kuvin-Oren (who also produced the suite of five Torah mantles inside the Ark), the *parochet* depicts the Burning Bush from which God spoke to Moses. The renovation and enhancement of our beautiful Sanctuary in 2007 carried forward this theme: the Ark doors are open metal grillwork that reveal and compliment the Burning Bush, while the stained-glass pieces atop the Ark depict the flame of faith rising and spreading to give light to the world. The three central tongues of flame, which form the letter *shin*, the monogram of God’s Own Name, serve as our constantly lit *Neir Tamid*, an eternal symbol of undying devotion.

Our 2007 renovation made the dream of Sinai even more immediate. The rough-hewn Jerusalem stone alongside the Ark suggests the Mountain itself; the carpet underfoot is a textured beige reminiscent of desert sand; the upholstery of the seats is a golden bush backed by flaming red; and the strip of deep sky-blue overhead suggests the dome of heaven. All of that taken together creates the feeling that we, like Moses, are present to receive God’s call.

Best of all, the curving line of the ceiling overhead suggests arms embracing us, or angel’s wings enfolding us. It welcomes all who enter, drawing us together into a joyous and sacred circle of shared holiness.

- With love from Rabbi Emeritus Mark Gross