

Mitzvah Project Guide

***A mitzvah occurs when, by acting on our Jewish values,
something good happens for ourselves or others.***

Mitzvah Cards by Rabbi Goldie Milgram, copyright 2002

A "Mitzvah Project" at Congregation Agudas Achim is a project that gives the Bar/Bat Mitzvah an opportunity to do a certain type of mitzvah, that is, a mitzvah "ben adam l'chavaroh", "between a person and his or her fellow human beings". By requiring such a project from our B'nai Mitzvah candidates, our synagogue shows their importance in living a life according to Jewish values.

How to choose a Mitzvah Project

1) Ask your child, "If you could solve one of the world's problems today, what would it be?"

World hunger? Homelessness? Illiteracy? War? A cure for a disease? Work from his/her answer. Identify a way for them to tangibly experience their contribution to solving that problem.

For every problem identified, there are a myriad of ways to approach a small solution. For example, if your child answers, "I've seen the homeless begging on the streets in Austin. I'd like to do something to help them."

Agudas Achim has been partnering with University Baptist Church downtown in their efforts to feed and clothe the poor. As part of Micah 6, a food pantry is open two days a week. Their "God's Family Dinner" on Thursday nights provides a hot meal for anyone who walks in the door, from the working poor to the homeless. There is also a clothing closet to provide clean, used clothing for the needy.

To support the food pantry, a neighborhood food collection drive where a child can distribute grocery bags with a message attached telling about the food drive, collecting the food, then personally delivering it and working in the food pantry the day their collected items are distributed. A child learns to communicate the need to the neighborhood, use his/her personal time and efforts to collect and deliver, and then gets the *personal experience* of seeing the result of their hard work.

Likewise, working on one of the two Thursday nights each month that Agudas volunteers help with God's Family Dinner. If it's during the summer, the child could actually go in the kitchen and help cook the meal that will be served that evening. During the school year, shifts are from 4:30 until 6, when there are opportunities to serve, bus tables, and wash dishes. If the child is interested, there is a member of the congregation that can introduce them to a few of the people to put a face on the problem.

2) Consider the child's natural interests - Is your child a nature buff? Perhaps a project linked to saving the environment, preserving an endangered species, or perhaps organizing and executing a project to clean up the banks of Shoal Creek several times a year with friends.

3) Is there something that has touched your family that may be suitable? For instance, if a relative or friend has had a serious disease such as cancer. To plan a project that supports a cure, a treatment phase, or even Hospice for caring in the final stages if the illness was terminal and Hospice was used. Perhaps sewing or purchasing caps for chemo patients and *helping distribute them to patients one day*. Maybe soliciting caps signed by celebrities and having an auction whose proceeds are donated? Taking Hospice training and learning how to be a support person for someone terminally ill.

"You must be the change you wish to see in the world." Mahatma Ghandi An opportunity, once again, to teach our children what is even more important than the tastiest caterer, the most eloquent dvar torah, and the most beautiful floral arrangements. That becoming a bat/bar mitzvah is to become a blessing, not only within one's family, but for all.