



Congregation Berith Sholom

160th Anniversary Campaign
One Welcoming Community
1866 – 2026



OUR STORY

New York's Oldest Synagogue Building. Still Going Strong.

Congregation Berith Sholom: A lot of history packed into a little shul

By Shannon Oksman, Trustee, Congregation Berith Sholom

The year is 1866. The Civil War is over, and Troy, N.Y., is now a bustling center of manufacturing and commerce. Known as “The Collar City” for its massive output of removable shirt collars, Troy dominates the textile, steel and iron industries. It is one of the wealthiest cities in America, truly befitting its association with the Gilded Age. Coinciding with this growth is an increase in—and increasingly diverse—population, including a vibrant Jewish community.

The seeds for Berith Sholom, which means “Covenant of Peace” in Hebrew, were planted in the decade before the Civil War. During that time, our community was composed of two separate congregations within the City of Troy who simply held Jewish worship services in different rooms at “The Wotkyns Block”, a historic commercial building located on Congress Street.



In the summer of 1870, just in time for the High Holy Days, the cornerstone was laid and the building completed. Reform ritual didn't really start here until around 1890. The congregation joined the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in 1920 Rabbi Jacob S. Raisin served as Rabbi from 1912 to 1915. Around 1953 an addition was built that now serves as our religious school and administrative offices as well as the Rabbi's office.

The building is now part of the Central Troy Historic District. The Romanesque Revival and Italianate synagogue building is attributed to American architect Marcus Cummings, whose designs are well-known throughout the Capital Region and in Massachusetts. Many scholars believe the building design was reflection of the Gilded Age that Troy was going through at the time.

Today Congregation Berith Sholom is a small, but thriving Reform community, known for its beautiful sanctuary, historic architectural features, welcoming atmosphere, and its passion for Tikkun Olam. Our building is the oldest continuously used synagogue in New York State. The Gilded Age may be long gone, but it left in its wake a beautiful gift in our building, our community, and our chutzpah.

List of Subscriptions

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*“[After attending Berith Sholom],
I honestly saw a whole different
way of looking at Judaism. I
began to understand that there
is no one way to Jewish.”*

— Wendy Kay



Our 160th Anniversary Campaign

What We Are Building Together

Our goal is \$160,000—one thousand dollars for each year of our history. Every dollar protects New York State’s oldest continuously operating synagogue building and ensures that our congregation thrives for the next generation.

A Warm Welcome

SIDEWALK RESTORATION

You don’t get a second chance to make a first impression, as the saying goes. For many visitors to our shul, that first impression starts on the surrounding walkways, which have heaved and cracked with the passing years. We need to repair and restore them to ensure safe passage for all.

Smart Safety

SECURITY CAMERAS & TECHNOLOGY

Ensuring the safety of our congregants and guests is of the utmost importance. As expectations around security have evolved, so, too, has the equipment required. We must upgrade our systems so that everyone—from our youngest child to our oldest member—feels safe in our shul.

Essential Infrastructure

MAINTAINING BUILDING SYSTEMS

It’s expensive to maintain a nearly 160-year-old historic landmark, and our building is showing its age after years of deferred projects. We need to fund the essential work that keeps our doors open and our building prepared for another century of use.

Future Foundation

A PERMANENT RESERVE

Future generations of Congregation Berith Sholom deserve to inherit not only a beautiful, safe synagogue but also the resources to sustain it. We are investing in not only a structure—but also in a promise.

These investments are the foundation that allows every Shabbat, every celebration and every act of community to continue for the next 160 years.



A Community That Shows Up

For 160 years, Berith Sholom has been more than a place of worship. We have been a place of action — in Troy, in the Capital Region, and in the wider world.

Tikkun Olam

We speak out for equity, tolerance, and loving-kindness. Whether we are marching in the Pride Parade, participating in a Black Lives Matter protest, or to deliver meals to the unhoused, we are embedded with the needs of our community.

Good Neighbors

From helping Afghan refugee families build new lives in the Capital Region to delivering meals to those in need — ours is a Judaism that leaves the building.

Lifelong Learning

We offer Torah study, adult b'nei mitzvah, Hebrew classes, book clubs, and a Sunday school that roots children in both heritage and humanity.

We believe community is built through showing up — for Shabbat, for a holiday, for a moment of grief, for a neighbor who needs a meal. We have spent 160 years demonstrating that a small congregation can do enormous things.

“A caring community, warm, open, and diverse — where the teachings of Judaism catalyze action and inspire the pursuit of meaningful lives.”

— Mission of Berith Sholom



This mission is only possible because this building exists. Because this community has a home. The 160th Anniversary Campaign ensures that our home remains worthy of everything that happens inside it.

A TRIBUTE

29 Years of Sacred Leadership



Rabbi Debora S. Gordon

CONGREGATIONAL RABBI • 1997–2026

For 29 years, Rabbi Debora S. Gordon has been the spiritual and moral center of Congregation Berith Sholom. She has officiated at our most sacred moments — b'nai mitzvah, weddings, and funerals. She has counseled us in sorrow and danced with us in joy.

She has welcomed the uncertain and the searching. Under her leadership, this synagogue has become a place where people who never expected to belong have found themselves, improbably and permanently, at home.

The best way we know to honor her legacy is to ensure that the synagogue she tended will stand strong and welcoming for the generation that follows.

She would be the first to say: “Give for this place, not for me. Give for every person who has found community within these walls — and for every person who has not yet found their way here.”

“Congregation Berith Sholom really is a community treasure that we need to keep supporting as generously as we can.”

— Amy Vastola, Congregant



Mission & Values

Congregation Berith Sholom is a progressive Reform congregation rooted in a long, proud history.

We are, above all, a caring community, warm, open, and diverse. We welcome traditional and non-traditional families to pursue joyous worship, lifelong learning, and acts of loving kindness.



Smart Ways to Give

Appreciated Stock

Donating stock held more than one year lets you avoid capital gains tax while receiving a deduction for the full fair market value — often the most tax-efficient gift available.

DTC: 0374 / Janney Montgomery Scott, LLC

FBO: Congregation Berith Sholom

Account: 3011-2553

Notify Beth Hershenhart at president@berithsholomtroy.org with your name, shares, and stock name.

Donor Advised Fund

Recommend a grant from your DAF at Fidelity Charitable, Schwab Charitable, Vanguard Charitable, or any sponsoring organization.

EIN: 14-6014559

Contact: president@berithsholomtroy.org

IRA Charitable Rollover (QCD)

If you are 70 or older, a Qualified Charitable Distribution directly from your IRA counts toward your Required Minimum Distribution and is excluded from taxable income — up to \$105,000 per year.

EIN: 14-6014559

For stock transfers, DAF grants, or QCD arrangements, please contact Board President Beth Hershenhart at president@berithsholomtroy.org

By Mail

Send a check payable to
Congregation Berith Sholom
167 Third Street, Troy, NY 12180

Online

Give securely by credit card or bank transfer
www.berithsholomtroy.org/support#giving

By Phone

Call us — we are glad to assist you personally:
518.272.8872

HOW TO GIVE

Every Gift Carries Us Forward

This campaign succeeds through the collective commitment of everyone who has ever been touched by this community — member or guest, lifelong congregant, or first-time visitor. Every gift matters.

ALL GIFTS MAY BE PLEDGED OVER 3–5 YEARS

FRIEND

\$1,800 | Legacy Circle

\$360/year over 5 years — or \$600/year over 3 years.
A meaningful commitment to the next chapter of our community.

PILLAR

\$5,000 | Building Pillar

\$1,000/year over 5 years. Your name or a loved one's permanently inscribed in our 160th Anniversary Pillar of Honor.

CORNERSTONE

\$10,000 | Cornerstone Gift

\$2,000/year over 5 years. A transformational investment that anchors this campaign and ensures its lasting success.

Congregation Berith Sholom is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. EIN 14-6014559.
All gifts are tax-deductible to the fullest extent permitted by law.



Will You Help Us Carry It Forward?

Since 1866, this synagogue has stood — through wars, through upheaval, through every chapter of American Jewish life. The building that holds 160 years of our community's history needs us now.

One campaign. One community. One synagogue, for the next 160 years.

TO MAKE YOUR GIFT OR LEARN MORE

Contact our 160th Team: Margaret Harvey, David Gittelman,
Beth Hershenhart, Jane Ginsburgh, Amy Lovett, Wendy Wheeler

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