



Men's Club Shabbat Planning Guide

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General Tips for Planning a *Men's Club Shabbat*

1. Set aside a date.

Most Men's Clubs try to have *Men's Club Shabbat* coincide with the International *Men's Club Shabbat* date on Shabbat Hachodesh (which usually falls in March), but many are unable to because the synagogue has scheduled a Bar or Bat Mitzvah or other special event on that date. Your Men's Club can select any date that is convenient to you and your synagogue. If you have a choice of dates, you might want to consider other congregational or community events that weekend so that there isn't a conflict. If you want to include the rabbi and/or cantor, be sure that you check first that they will be there then. You also might select the date for which your synagogue is scheduled to have the FJMC's Sefer Haftorah scroll that is traveling from synagogue to synagogue in North America. Just make certain that your synagogue has you scheduled for the date you select and that you have reserved any necessary rooms, such as an auditorium for a related program.

Encouragement and help at any point in the process is just a click or phone call away. Contact *Men's Club Shabbat* Coordinator, Orin Rotman (orotman@comcast.net or 312-236-5375) for help with ideas about themes, program details, participation, service outlines, etc.

2. Create a *Men's Club Shabbat* Committee

Appoint a *Men's Club Shabbat* Chairman and committee as soon as possible. The more people involved in planning the event, the higher your attendance will be.

- The Chairman should be a good organizer and leader, because even the most basic Men's Club Shabbat is a multi-faceted task. (Select the chairman from among those who have helped plan a Men's Club Shabbat observance in the past.)
- At least one person on the committee who is familiar with all parts of the Shabbat service and who is also familiar with the abilities of your members. Not everyone is able to read Torah. In fact, some men will only want English parts or non-speaking parts like hagbah or opening the Ark. You need a committee member who is aware of these various abilities so that he knows who he can ask for which parts.

- It also helps to have someone on the committee who can put together a Shabbat handout that lists participants.
- You will also need a person to handle food arrangements. (If you are also having a Shabbat dinner at the synagogue, you will also need someone to take reservations.)
- You need someone who can be in charge of publicity.
- If you are going to ask an outside speaker, you should also have someone on the committee who has a general idea of who is available and is willing to ask. (NOTE: Before asking anyone to speak from the pulpit, you must first get clearance from your Rabbi.)

3. Determine the scope of the activities.

During this FJMC year, we are encouraging our clubs to focus on a topic including issues of Men's Role Models, Men as Volunteers, and Shomrei Ha'Aretz / Environmental concerns.

Additionally, we encourage coordination of the presence of the FJMC *Sefer Haftorah* as a focus. A special category for using the *Sefer Haftorah* has been developed and is available on request.

Another program technique that can be interesting in coordinating the *Men's Club Shabbat* with your *Hearing Men's Voices* or *Hebrew Literacy* programming, including encouraging your men to learn about formal and informal prayer and to write their own prayers to include in the Shabbat program.

Each club observes *Men's Club Shabbat* differently. Some hold it only on Friday nights, others only on Saturday morning, and some for both services. Most Men's Clubs will sponsor the Oneg Shabbat and some will also hold a Friday night Shabbat dinner. Here are some other ideas on how to expand your *Men's Club Shabbat* observance, but whatever you decide on, be certain that you have the resources, men and money, to pull it off.

- Men's Club Choir
- Father-Son *Men's Club Shabbat* participation
- Youth art or essay contest in conjunction with your *Men's Club Shabbat*.
- Friday night Shabbat dinner (Consider using the FJMC's 'Art of Jewish Living' Shabbat Table service.
- *Havdalah* service (Consider using the FJMC's *Havdalah* service)
- A breakfast program that Sunday morning
- Expanding the *Men's Club Shabbat* into a Men's Club Week observance that showcases several Men's Club activities.
- Skit or discussion presented after the first half hour of the Oneg Shabbat on Saturday morning

4. Maximize participation and involvement

When you have a *Men's Club Shabbat*, you should try to get as many people as possible to 'buy into' it, so that you can maximize attendance. First, you should include several people on the *Men's Club Shabbat* committee who are responsible for various aspects of the weekend. Second, you need to divide up the parts of the service into multiple parts in an effort to involve as many people as possible. Keep in mind that your officers and past club presidents are likely to attend even if they don't have a part, so you

really need to assign parts to members who aren't as involved. If you are going to honor a group, such as the ushers or past Men's Club presidents, that should also swell attendance.

Besides dividing up the service among several people, don't forget that you can involve additional men as Torah readers, *B'alei Tefilah*, *Gabayim*, Torah carriers, Torah dressers, openers and closers of the Ark, presenters of a *d'var Torah* and *d'var Haftorah*, and sitters on the *bimah*. In addition, you can have a virtually unlimited number of greeters and ushers, as well as a few men to give special readings or to participate in after-service activities.

5. Involve your Rabbi and Cantor

It probably goes without saying that the rabbi and cantor need to be involved in your planning, especially if you are proposing a departure from the normal service, such as the insertion of English readings, having a choir, or having a guest speaker. In fact, your rabbi might be able to suggest an appropriate speaker for the weekend, and they also could suggest some men who are able to read Torah. The cantor might be willing to help a men's choir practice some of the tunes.

6. Ideas for a Men's Club Shabbat

At the very least, you need to have a hand-out that identifies the participants of the service next to the parts they will be leading. But you can expand this hand-out significantly. You might consider the following:

- A few paragraphs of welcome from the Men's Club president
- One or more special responsive English readings or unison readings you are including in the service
- Various congregational announcements, including the list of yahrzeits and recent deaths
- A page or two promoting other Men's Club activities, especially if they will part of an extended *Mens' Club Shabbat* observance.
- A list of the people being honored (such as ushers)
- A short bio and photo of a guest speaker
- Thank yous to the members of the *Men's Club Shabbat* committee

7. Rehearsal

Many Men's Clubs find it preferable to have a *Men's Club Shabbat* rehearsal at some point during the preceding week. There are several reasons why this is a good idea. First, many of the participants might not be regular attendees at Shabbat services and may not be aware of the melodies that are used. Also, if someone over-represents his Hebrew ability, you can catch it early, before he is embarrassed in front of the entire congregation. A rehearsal also provides an opportunity to check that Torah readers are aware of their parts and are able to handle them. But probably more important than all of this is the choreography. Participants might be pros at leading the service, but they probably won't know when to come up to the *bimah*, where to stand, and what to do while they're up there. A mid-week rehearsal makes all of this look effortless on Shabbat. And, because you won't be able to take photographs on Shabbat, you might consider taking some photos of the rehearsal for your Men's Club scrapbook or for a Torch Award entry.

8. Publicity

The extent of your publicity depends largely on how expansive your Men's Club observance is. At the very least, you will want to have an article about it in your synagogue newsletter, and it is also desirable to have a poster on display in the synagogue lobby. If you are set up to send our group emails, you should send a couple of reminders to people. Of course, the more add-ons you have, the more you will need in the way of publicity. You will need a lot of lead time for advertising for a Shabbat dinner to give people ample time to make reservations. If you have a youth art or essay contest in conjunction with your Men's Club Shabbat, you will need to start several months early with fliers to Religious School students and articles in the synagogue newsletter. Be sure that the rabbi makes announcements from the bimah a couple of weeks in advance to remind the congregation of your *Men's Club Shabbat*. If your observance will be particularly distinctive because of a noted guest speaker, you might also consider sending a press release to the local Jewish press.

At the observance itself, most Men's Clubs distribute a hand-out (see above). Some also set up an exhibit table outside the sanctuary or in the room holding the Oneg Shabbat to display Club scrapbooks, trophies, awards, and fliers.

9. Evaluation and thank yous

After any big program, it is important that the planning committee have a meeting to evaluate the activity, and your *Men's Club Shabbat* should be no different. Make certain that the comments are written down and made available to next year's chairman.

It should be a general policy of the Men's Club to extend thanks to those who work on specific projects or activities. Your Men's Club president should thank the chairman in his comments from the bimah on *Men's Club Shabbat*, and there should also be a thank-you pamphlet distributed at the service, as well as in a follow-up article in the synagogue newsletter. It is a nice touch for the president to send a written thank-you to each member of the Men's Club Shabbat committee. When your club has its closing event in May or June, you should again thank those who worked on the committee with something like a Yasher Koach certificate (available for free from the FJMC) or something more tangible, like a book dedicated in a person's name to the synagogue library or a tree in Israel purchased from the Jewish National Fund.