

# **CONG. BAIS YITZCHOK CHEVRA THILIM**

**(based on a history by Dr. Bernard Lichstein  
prepared for the 2009 Annual Gathering and Dinner)**

Although the official incorporation of Cong. Bais Yitzchok began on January 10, 1946, its presence in Elizabeth goes back even earlier as the Bellevue Street Shul. In fact, Bais Yitzchok is possibly the only Shul in Elizabeth routinely referred to by its Hebrew name rather than initials or street location. The Certificate of Incorporation gives us a glimpse into the vision of the Shul's founders.

The purposes for which this corporation is formed are the founding of a religious congregation of Israelites, otherwise called Hebrews, in the City of Elizabeth, for the establishment of a place of worship according to the tenets of the Torah; to provide a place for the assembling of its members in the worship of almighty G-d according to the Orthodox Precepts of the Hebrew faith and as set forth in the 'Shulchan Oruch," to stimulate an interest in Judaism and promote spiritual and moral welfare of the community; to further and foster the study of Thilim and for all religious activities connected therewith.

**The Certificate of Incorporation was signed by 15 people:**

**H. FELDMAN, B. LEVY, JULIUS BLANK, H. WASSERMAN, ADOLPH ISAACMAN,  
LOUIS WEISS, MEYER TARLOWE, EDEL SHELLOR, AARON POLTIS,  
LEON WEISSBERG, PHILIP FLEISHER, HERMAN LEHR,  
ABRAHAM OSTROFSKY, DAVID BRODKIN, MAURICE ENRIGHT.**

A group of people had broken away from the Bellevue Street Shul, then known as Bais Yehudah and owned by Max Fern. They davened in a storefront shul on Pennington Street. In 1945, Al Feldman assumed the mortgage from Mr. Fern and renamed the shul Bais Yitzchok, in honor of his father. The storefront people moved into Bais Yitzchok and each of the founders played pioneering roles in different ways.

Since its beginnings, Bais Yitzchok has welcomed, as its extended family, all who have come to stay, those who have come for a day, and those who have moved away or made Aliyah. Anyone that leaves does so with a sense of longing and still belonging. Bais Yitzchok has a way of accommodating everyone's needs and everyone's uniqueness; without compromising its principles. The shul, in turn, reflects the character of the people of Elizabeth's Jewish Community who value individuals for what they are and what they do for others, rather than who they are and what they possess.

Bais Yitzchok has always served and reflected the needs of its congregants. Until 1973, its weekday Shacharis minyan, known as the Shochochim's Minyan, started at 5:40 am to accommodate those who worked in the local slaughter houses, butcher shops and other businesses. That year, in addition to the closing of the slaughter houses, Daylight Savings Time was extended, thereby making it much too early to put on tefillin. Today, the minyan starts at 6:30 am.

In the 60s through the 80s, Bais Yitzchok was known as the Scientists' Shul; because of the large influx of chemists, physicists, mathematicians and engineers. Newcomers to Bais Yitzchok were often asked, are you a chemist or a what? In fact, during the 60s and 70s, the shul was home to the New Jersey Chapter of The Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists. The shul hosted many meetings and a Shabbaton, in which we were addressed by distinguished speakers who were expert in the physical, mathematical, biological, medical and social sciences as well as in halacha.

The Shul began with the Blank-Cohen Era, a period lasting 30 years. Julius Blank was President. David Cohen was Vice President. Mr. Blank set the tone for the Shul with his frankness, friendliness, good humor and especially laughter. His stories continue to be told and retold. Mr. Cohen guided the Shul's hashkafa (outlook), discipline and practices. It wasn't done unless DC (Dave Cohen) said it should be done. Examples: " Don't take your talis off until after Adon Olam" and on installing air conditioning: "We don't need it, I don't want it and we're not going to have it." He also exerted a powerful hashpoa (influence) on the congregants and their children.

Nate Glidear began the current three-year term presidency era; thereby recognizing that the leaders of the past were such Gibborim, that we cannot hope to attain their greatness, stamina, and charisma. Notice, that everyone quotes Blank and Cohen. Hardly anyone, except their own children, quotes the three-year group.

The 60s and 70s saw the first Aliyahs, beginning with Gershon and Miriam Metzger and their family. This has continued up to the present, with subsequent waves of Aliyah by congregants and by children who grew up in Bais Yitzchok, married and made Aliyah. The ties remain strong between those who now live in Israel and those who have stayed in Elizabeth. These ties have extended to our children and their children.

During the 60s through the 80s, the Shul was crowded on Shabbos. It was difficult for newcomers to get a seat during the Yomira Noraim, unless someone was away for Yom Tov, moved or died. Today, because of people moving across the tracks, and elsewhere, the Shul has fewer people. Those who once lived closer, still come because they love the Shul, the quality of the davening, the comradeship and the honesty and unpretentiousness of its members. Those who have recently moved to Elizabeth, come because they are attracted for the same reasons; and because they are encouraged to play an active part in the day to day operation and ritual of the Shul. In a way, it is a bit like the 40s, 50s and 60s, the pioneering days of Bais Yitzchok, when Mr. Blank was happy to welcome a newcomer and mispronounce or replace his name, e.g., when Mr. Lachs was welcomed as Mr. Karp; Mr. Blank explained, "Nu, a fish is a

fish." Today, we again have the chance to encourage new people to experience the joys of Bais Yitzchok.

Some memories and innovations:

- Being continuously blessed with the finest Shlichei Tzibor, Baalei Koreh and Gabbairn.
- Rabbi Teitz teaching Mishneh Brurah on Sunday mornings.
- Lennie Brandwein teaching Mishneh Berurah on weekday mornings.
- Rabbi Oratz teaching Kitzur Shulchan Oruch on Sunday mornings.
- Rabbi Goldstone's Gemarah shiur on Monday night.
- Rabbi Lichtman's davening and being the "candy man".
- Purim gifts for the children.
- Little children confidently knowing their way around Bais Yitzchok, upstairs, downstairs, the ladies section, the men section.
- A Sefer Hachinuch mitzvah lesson every Shabbos before Laining, begun in 1988 for about ten years. The study of Mishlai is in place.
- Mendel Farkas leading the congregation in saying Thilim between Mincha and Maariv (when that minyan still existed).
- A sit-down kiddush, every Shabbos, with a "5 minute" dvar Torah, for birthdays, anniversaries, engagements, graduations, bar mitzvahs, bas mitzvahs, yahrtzeits or for no reason at all.
- Yonah Metzger preparing kiddush every shabbos including gehakte tsores (chopped herring) and mixing different liquors to make his Kol Haminim..
- Yonah taking care of our children as "his children" and catering their Simchas.
- The new kiddush room and Bais Medresh built in 1983.

The List of Presidents:

Julius Blank, z"l	1945-1975
Dr. Nathan Glidear z"l	1975-1978
Herbert Prager	1979-1981
Dr. Louis Schneider	1982-1984
Sheldon Rich	1985-1988
Dr. Daniel Scheinbein	1986-1987
Martin Knecht	1988-1989
Dr. Joseph Waldman	1990-1991
Michael Katz	1992
Rabbi Moshe Abramowitz	1993-1995
Bernard Lichstein	1996-1997
Leonard Lauer	1998 - 2000
Rabbi Moshe Abramowitz	2001 to present

So what makes Bais Yitzchok so special? Certainly continuity play a part. Rabbi Joseph Lichtman who was honored on his 40th anniversary as Sheliach Tzibur, is part of that continuum. (Although Rabbi Joe now has the title emeritus) When it

really counted, on Yom Tov, Shabbos Mevorichim, Arbah Parshiot, etc, he provided the beauty and continuity of proper Nusach Hatefillah. And then there is a singing. Everyone becomes a grand choir of harmony and song, regardless of who is actually leading the davening. And the annual dinners (which were sometimes dinners, sometimes Melava Malkas) are a unique Bais Yitzchok feature.

Maybe it is the crystal chandeliers? And who can help but be mesmerized by the "Shaar HaShamayim" mural with its peak into the world to come? As the inscription above the mural wall tells us, "Our Father our King, Open the Gates of Heaven for our Prayers."

For over a half century Bais Yitzchok Chevrah Thilim has stood out as place of warmth, sincerity and strength for the Elizabeth Community. May HaShem give us the means and resolve to continue this avodas hakodesh.