

## A History of Temple Beth El

The roots of Temple Beth El were planted in 1922 when the first organized Jewish religious services held in San Pedro were held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Levin. There were 25 known Jewish families then living in San Pedro.

Prior to 1922, a group of Jewish men had formed a social club that met in a photographer's studio on Beacon Street. In 1923, their wives established the San Pedro Jewish Sisterhood, dedicated to supporting a Jewish community and giving aid to the poor and needy in our community. This remarkable group of women donated our first Torah scroll in 1928 and became, in time, the primary force in raising funds for the growth of our community. It was the San Pedro Jewish Sisterhood that held the grant deed for the Center soon to be built.

As services and activities continued and grew, the "founding" men and women raised the money to build a Jewish Center. In 1935 the San Pedro Jewish Community Center was dedicated at the corner of 19<sup>th</sup> and Cabrillo Streets. In 1936, the Beth El Women's League was formed for the primary purpose of developing a Religious School. Rabbi Dubin of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple helped develop its curriculum and trained the volunteers who would serve as its teachers.

By 1938, approximately 75 Jewish families lived in San Pedro and the name "Congregation Beth El" was adopted. In 1944, however, the original charter was amended and we became the San Pedro Jewish Community Association.

It soon became clear that our Jewish community would outgrow that facility, and in 1942, several lots on Seventh Street were purchased for future development, though that was not to happen until 1955. In the meantime, we welcomed our first resident Rabbi in 1940, involved ourselves in the considerable support that San Pedro gave to the war effort (including San Pedro's most "infamous" Jewish resident, "Shanghai Red" Eisenberg) and we continued to grow through the post-war boom.

In 1955, the San Pedro Jewish Sisterhood sold the building at 19<sup>th</sup> and Cabrillo Streets and donated the proceeds to the construction of our current facility on Seventh Street. The San Pedro B'nai Brith Men and Women joined in the fundraising as well, and in 1956, the Torah Scrolls were brought to our new home. It consisted of classrooms, offices, a kitchen and the combination Social Hall-Sanctuary. At the same time, the Beth El Women's League changed its name to the Temple Beth El Sisterhood, and joined the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods of the Reform movement. In 1959, following the lead of the Women's League, our charter was changed one last time and we became Temple Beth El, a Reform congregation affiliated with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (which is now known as the Union for Reform Judaism).

Our beloved Sanctuary was dedicated in 1966. In 1967 we acquired our Torah from Ceske-Budejovice, then in Czechoslovakia. Rabbi David Lieb began his 34-year tenure at Temple Beth El. These were years filled with tremendous growth, in large part due to Rabbi Lieb's leadership. In 1974 the congregation sponsored its first trip to Israel. In 1975 we welcomed our first professional Jewish educator. In 1976 we elected our first woman President and in 1977, we hired our first Jewish Cantor. As we grew into the 1980's, we chose to enlarge our Seventh Street facility, and on November 10, 1985 we consecrated the home in which we now reside, with the blessing of Rabbi Alex Schindler, z"l President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. In 1994, Temple Beth El received the "Freedom of Light" award from the Religious Coalition on Reproductive Rights for a special program on religion and reproductive choice, and in 2002 we celebrated our 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought change and innovation to Temple Beth El. We operated a satellite facility in Torrance for three years to reach out to the Jewish community in that part of the South Bay; we remodeled our historic sanctuary making it softer, more intimate and more inclusive; we've received foundation grants that have enabled us to reach out to unaffiliated Jews and also increase our visibility throughout the South Bay.

An experienced Board of Directors currently serves Temple Beth El. Their affiliation with the temple ranges from 4 years to 50 years. In

2005, Rabbi Charles Briskin became Temple Beth El's new spiritual leader, joining Cantor Ilan Davidson and educator and program director, Debi Rowe, RJE; Temple Beth El's professional team and its Board of Directors are proud to call Temple Beth El the center for Reform Jewish life in the South Bay.

Temple Beth El has served the Jewish community of San Pedro and the Palos Verdes Peninsula for more than eighty years. We maintain our vital presence as a historic bastion of Jewish life in the South Bay and as a beacon shining brightly into the future of the South Bay Jewish community. We continue to be inspired by the devotion and generosity of so many people who have brought us here, לדור ודור, *L'Dor va'dor*, from generation to generation.

חזק חזק ונתחזק, Hazak Hazak v'nit'hazeik;  
may we go from strength to strength.

Based on the meticulous research and loving devotion of Ida Frumes ז"ל,  
Temple Beth El's first official historian