

Everlasting Life

*A Guide to Jewish Death and Mourning
Customs*



Congregation Beth Israel
53 Lois Street
North Adams, MA 01267

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Please note that these page numbers differ slightly from the printed version which was mailed to CBI members.

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*This book of life is lovingly dedicated to the memory
of all those who came before us, who founded and
gave life to Congregation Beth Israel.*

May they rest in peace.

Dear friends,

Every human life begins with birth and ends with death. Two sacred transitions: from the womb into independent selfhood, and from independent life into the great Mystery we can hardly imagine. This book is meant to help guide you through the logistical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual challenges of thinking about and preparing for death and what comes after.

No matter what your relationship with Judaism, with Jewish practice, with Jewish tradition, and with God, you are welcome here when the time comes for you to mourn.

Judaism has always maintained an attitude of reverence for the dead, and one of the ways in which we enact that attitude is through maintaining our cemetery in Clarksburg. We strive to maintain the CBI cemetery in beauty and in dignity, and also in keeping with the high standards of Jewish tradition.

Each of us chooses to join a congregational community for a variety of reasons. One of those reasons may be in order to obtain a final resting place for ourselves and for our loved ones, in ground which is hallowed by our acts and our intentions. Burial in our synagogue cemetery also creates a perpetual memorial for the family through synagogue records, *yahrzeit* notices, and the bond created through the generations as we remember.

In Jewish tradition, the cemetery is called a House of Life. This may seem shocking, a kind of Zen-style *koan* (teaching-riddle): how is a place of death also a place of life? One answer is that although our bodies die, something in us is eternal, and when we engage in our time-honored burial rituals we honor that which lives on.

This Book of Life is here as a resource for you, to help you understand cemetery regulations and the processes which unfold around illness, death, and Jewish ways of mourning. If you want to discuss any of these issues, please don't hesitate to reach out to me.

Each of us walks the mourner's path at some point in our lives; each of us will someday die, leaving others to mourn. May we be generous and gentle with one another, and with ourselves, as we face this great Mystery of our humanity.

With blessings,

Rabbi Rachel Barenblat

CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL

North Adams, Massachusetts

Guide to Jewish Death and Mourning Customs

Because we love, when a loved one dies we feel sorrow and grief. These reactions are both normal and healthy. Jews have guidance at such difficult times in our lives because tradition has outlined ways to deal with death and its grief. Modern psychology has recognized the therapeutic value of the Jewish rituals and practices which help us to express our grief rather than repress it, to talk about our loss with friends, and to move step by step from inactivity to normal living. This booklet was prepared to provide an understanding of the Jewish customs of death and mourning. It is offered to guide our members and explain our traditions.

Serious Illness

When a death is imminent, it is appropriate for the ill person (or someone else on his/her behalf) to offer a *vidui*/a confessional prayer. There are different versions of this prayer. One version, found in the CCAR (Reform Rabbis') Manual, reads:

My God and God of all who have gone before me, Author of life and death, I turn to You in trust. Although I pray for life and health, I know that I am mortal. If my life must soon come to an end, let me die, I pray, at peace.

If only my hands were clean and my heart pure! I confess that I have committed sins and left much undone, yet I know also the good that I did or tried to do. May my acts of goodness give meaning to my life, and may my errors be forgiven.

Protector of the bereaved and the helpless, watch over my loved ones. Into Your hand I commit my spirit; redeem it, O God of mercy and truth.

(The following liturgy is then recited)

Adonai melech Adonai malach Adonai yimloch l'olam va'ed.
(God reigns; God has reigned; God will reign forever and ever.)

Baruch shem k'vod malchuto l'olam va'ed.
(Blessed be God's name whose glorious dominion is forever.)

Shema Yisrael Adonai eloheinu Adonai echad.
(Hear, O Israel: Adonai is our God, Adonai is One.)

Alternate Vidui Prayer (to be recited before death)

*I acknowledge before the Source of All that life and death are not in my hands.
Just as I did not choose to be born, so I do not choose to die.
May my life be a healing memory for those who knew me.
May my loved ones think well of me, and may my memory bring them joy.
From all those I may have hurt, I ask forgiveness.
To all who have hurt me, I grant forgiveness.
As a wave returns to the ocean, so I return to the Source from which I came.
Shema Yisrael, Adonai eloheinu, Adonai echad.
Hear, O Israel; Adonai is our God; Adonai is One.*

Prayer When a Death Occurs

After the moment of death, the following liturgy might be recited:

Adonai natan, Adonai lakach, y'hi shem Adonai m'vorach.
(God gave and God has taken away; blessed be the name of God.)

Barukh dayan ha-emet.
(Blessed be the Judge of Truth.)

What to Do When a Death Occurs

When there is a death, whether local or outside the North Adams area, please immediately notify the rabbi at 413-663-5830 (CBI) or 413-822-5267 (Rabbi Barenblat's cell) and/or Flynn and Dagnoli Home for Funerals at 413-663-6523, or the funeral home you have chosen. In most cases, the Rabbi will meet with members of the family as soon as possible to counsel them through the funeral process and to learn their wishes.

Before the Funeral

Set time and place of the funeral with the Rabbi and the funeral home. Although our tradition prefers having the funeral as soon as possible after death occurs, there are times when a delay is proper. Generally, no funeral arrangements are made on the Sabbath. If a person dies on the Sabbath, it would be preferable, if at all possible, not to move the body until after sundown. Hospitals will generally cooperate in keeping the deceased in a special room until removal can take place. However, in cases where this is not possible, the non-Jewish funeral director may arrange for the transportation of the body.

If a question arises concerning the postponement of a funeral or permission for a post-mortem examination, the Rabbi should be consulted. Except under special circumstances, postponement and post-mortem examinations are not consistent with Jewish law.

Donation of organs for transplantation is permissible. This can be arranged through the funeral home of your choice.

The service can be held at graveside or in the synagogue. Telephone immediate family, close friends, and employer or business colleagues. Once the funeral time has been set, the funeral home will help prepare the obituary. Items to consider including are: age, place of birth, cause of death, occupation, college degrees, memberships in organizations, military service, and other noteworthy achievements. Names of survivors, usually the immediate family, should be provided. Give the time and place of the funeral. Suggest where memorial contributions, in lieu of flowers, may be made. Choose the pallbearers: generally six men and/or women are needed. It is customary not to choose immediate family members. You may choose as many others as you wish to serve as honorary pallbearers. You will need to discuss the eulogy with the officiating Rabbi. Be open and give as much personal insight as possible.

In our tradition, in keeping with the value of simplicity and equality of all in death, a plain wooden casket is used for burial.

The Mourner

The period of time between death and burial is called *aninut*, and the bereaved is called an *onen*. The prime responsibility of the *onen* is to arrange the funeral. During this time, an *onen* is exempt from certain religious obligations. As such, prayer at synagogue is not obligatory at this time. However, an *onen* who finds it helpful to express feelings through personal prayers may do so. Only relatives or very close friends should visit during this time, primarily to help make arrangements for the funeral and *shivah*. After the funeral, the mourning period is called *aveilut*, and a mourner is known as an *aveil*. One is a mourner by obligation for parents, children, siblings, or spouse. However, anyone is allowed to observe the mourning rites.

Preparation for Burial

Our tradition has long stood for simplicity in funerals and mourning. A simple wooden casket is preferred. An ornate all-wood casket, though ritually acceptable, is not in the spirit of the law. Cremation is not in keeping with Jewish tradition. Before the deceased, called the *meit*, is dressed for burial, we observe the ritual of *taharah*, ritual washing, done by the chevra kadisha, the Holy Society. The *chevra kadisha* is comprised of synagogue members who have taken on the responsibility of doing this most sacred work. Men prepare men, and women prepare women. We dress the body only in traditional burial shrouds, *takhrikin*, which are simple white garments.

It is believed that the soul lingers and should not be alone before interment. Ideally, the body is guarded from the moment of death until burial. Those who participate in this mitzvah are called *shomrim*/watchers and should spend their time reciting psalms while they sit at the funeral home. Shomrim are also welcome to sit in quiet contemplation, and/or to say whatever they need to say to the soul of the person who has died.

Embalming

Jewish tradition frowns on embalming. Therefore, according to Jewish law, a funeral takes place as soon as possible after death as a way to honor the deceased.

Cremation

While cremation is highly discouraged in Jewish tradition, Congregation Beth Israel does have a separate section of its cemetery reserved for cremated remains (cremains).

Flowers

Flowers are not part of Jewish mourning practice. In the spirit of honoring the memory of the dead by helping the living, it is customary to suggest in the obituary that in lieu of flowers, donations be directed to an appropriate charity. If flowers are sent, share them with the living by giving them to a hospital or other institution where they could give joy to others.

***Ke'riah* (tearing of one's garment)**

A few minutes before the funeral begins, the first formal act of mourning, *ke'riah*, the tearing of one's garment or a ribbon, takes place. *Ke'riah* is a centuries-old symbol of inner grief and mourning. Mourners stand as they perform it, showing that we face grief directly and that we will survive, even without our beloved departed. Before the cut is made, mourners say the words of Job, "Adonai has given and Adonai has taken, blessed be the name of Adonai," and recite a blessing which is a reaffirmation of faith: Blessed are You, the true judge: *Barukh atah Adonai, dayan ha-emet*.

The *ke'riah* ribbon (or cut to one's clothing) is generally worn for one week during the shiva period.

The Funeral Service

A funeral can be held at graveside or at the synagogue. Selections are read from Psalms, and there is a eulogy depicting the life of the deceased as a guide for the living. *Eil Malei Rachamim*, which expresses our faith in the immortality of the soul, is recited. Once at graveside, the service consists of recitation of *Tziduk ha-din*, a prayer which expresses our acceptance of God's decisions, followed by the recitation of the Mourners' *Kaddish* and *Eil Malei Rachamim*.

After the funeral, those attending form two lines to let the mourners pass between them. As they do, traditional words of comfort are said,

"*Ha-makom y'nakhem et-khem b'tokh she-ar avlei tziyon vi'yerushalayim*, May God comfort you among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem."

Shoveling Earth

After the casket has been lowered, family members and friends are invited to shovel earth into the grave. This mitzvah, like *taharah*, is considered *hesed shel emet*, true loving kindness, for which one cannot be repaid. This mitzvah demonstrates our continuing concern for the deceased as we make sure the final journey of the deceased is completed. Participating in this mitzvah has been shown to be of great psychological benefit for mourners since it is meant to serve as an important action of finality and closure.

Other Cemetery Customs

An observant Jew who is a *Kohain*, a descendant of the priestly class, will only attend the funeral and burial of his immediate family, as he is otherwise forbidden to be near a corpse. You may see a close friend or relative who is a Kohain remain outside the funeral parlor or cemetery because of this law. Reform Judaism does not recognize the distinction between *Kohanim*, *Levi'im*, and *Yisrael* (descendants of the two priestly castes and ordinary Jews), but we recognize that some of our members come from other backgrounds and may find meaning in these distinctions.

At the cemetery, another custom in traditional funerals is to pause seven times as the coffin is carried to the grave. Seven is a sacred number in Judaism, representing the days of the week including Shabbat, as well as the seven most accessible qualities of God.

Children at a Funeral

Families often question whether children should attend a funeral. There is no hard and fast rule that applies. If a child is old enough to understand the purpose of the funeral and to know that people will be visibly grieving, then generally that child should come to the funeral. The child should sit with an adult he or she knows during the service. Remember that children need the opportunity to say "good-bye" to a loved one, as do adults. A child who is old enough to understand should not be deprived of an opportunity to say farewell and to begin to grieve.

After the Funeral: Shivah

Upon arriving at the house of mourning, it is customary for all those who have been at the cemetery to pour water over their hands. The washing of hands is a symbolic cleansing of ourselves after being at an interment. For this purpose, a pitcher and towels are placed outside the door of the house.

Mourners should partake of a light meal (*se'udat havra-ah*) following the funeral service. This meal is prepared by someone other than the immediate mourners (spouse, children, parents, and siblings of the deceased). While this meal is mainly for mourners, those who come to comfort them may also partake. The menu for this meal, traditionally provided by family and friends for the mourners, includes hard-boiled eggs, a symbol of life, and simple foods. Neither meat nor wine, two symbols of joy, should be served at this meal.

Shivah lasts seven days. Many liberal Jews choose to sit *shivah* for less than seven days. You should discuss your options with the Rabbi. The day of the funeral is the first day, and one hour of the seventh day counts as a full day. *Shivah* is suspended on Friday afternoon and is resumed after Shabbat is over. On that first Shabbat during *shivah*, the mourners should attend synagogue and be welcomed into the community with the phrase, “*Ha-makom y’nakhem et-khem b’tokh she-ar avlei tziyon vi’yerushalayim*, May God comfort you among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem” as was recited at the cemetery. If a major holiday, such as Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, Rosh Hashana, or Yom Kippur falls during the *shivah* period, formal *shivah* is concluded on the eve of the festival. Please speak with the Rabbi for further details.

Observing Shivah

Mourners should try to stay together where *shivah* is observed. Mourners should not go to work during this time. In its wisdom, our tradition recognizes that when a major change in life has taken place, the survivor needs to step out of everyday activity for a while. There are a number of practices associated with observing *shivah*. A seven-day candle (provided by the funeral home) is lit upon returning from the cemetery. Mourners refrain from and avoid forms of entertainment, such as television, during the week. There is also a custom to cover mirrors in the home, to show that we reduce the importance normally placed on personal vanity. Mourners are encouraged to observe the customs of not wearing shoes (a symbol of wealth and status) and sitting on low stools (a symbol of dwelling close to the deceased) during *shivah*, which show that we change the way we live during this time.

A *shivah minyan* (prayer service) can be arranged at the home for the purposes of providing mourners and guests a structured opportunity to share memories of the deceased and to recite the Mourners’ *Kaddish*. Please inform the rabbi and the CBI office if you would like these services to be arranged.

For those who cannot pay a personal visit to the mourners, a telephone call or a note of condolence should be sent. It is also customary to make a *tzedakah* donation in memory of the deceased.

Visiting Mourners

People pay “*shivah* calls” to fulfill the mitzvah of *nihum avelim*, comforting the mourners. These visits demonstrate community concern at the time of loss. The visits can help the mourners navigate through feelings of isolation, a natural feeling after the death of a loved one. Conversation should center on the life and memories of the departed. Contrary to popular belief, talking about the deceased is helpful to the mourner. Such conversations help the mourners to begin the process of grieving. If you have been through a time of personal grief, and the mourner asks

you how you felt or how you managed, share your own experience. Mourners often take comfort in knowing that others have experienced similar feelings.

Mourners are not obligated to have food or drink available for those who come to visit.

Shivah Services

It is traditional to hold services at a house of *shivah*. Congregation Beth Israel provides siddurim for use in homes. Family members or friends can lead the service. Service times are scheduled with the Rabbi. As mentioned previously, mourners attend Shabbat services at the synagogue during *shivah*.

After Shivah

The length of the mourning period varies depending on the mourner's relation to the deceased. Traditionally Jews conclude the mourning period for parents at eleven months. For all but parents, *aveilut*, the mourning period, customarily ends with *sh'loshim*, the thirty-day period which is the second stage of mourning. Mourners may return to their regular activities in business and home. However, it is a traditional practice for mourners to refrain from festive activities such as going to the movies, theater, dances, or parties. Reform Jews are generally less stringent regarding these deprivations.

During the remainder of the mourning period, what may be considered appropriate activities is left to the discretion of each mourner.

Saying the Mourners' Kaddish

Anyone who feels close to the deceased may elect to say the Mourners' *Kaddish*. However, children who lose a parent, and parents who lose a child, are obligated to say *Kaddish*. Saying *Kaddish* is helpful since it offers both regularity in life and social contact with others at a disconcerting time. Because it is a call-and-response prayer, it is a prayer that requires a community in which to recite it. Therefore, efforts should be made to say *Kaddish* on a regular basis.

Please inform the CBI office if you will be attending services during your period of mourning, so that a *minyan* (quorum of ten) can be assured for the recitation of the Mourners' *Kaddish*. (A *minyan* can also be arranged on the *yahrzeit*, for this purpose, see below.)

The obligation to say *Kaddish* should not be transferred to another person.

Some believe that saying *Kaddish* offers a mystical redemption for the soul. Others see it as a way for survivors to re-establish their ties with the Jewish community

and to see that they are not alone in grief. For those reasons, among others, recitation of *Kaddish* is important.

Unveiling / Dedication of a Grave Marker

The dedication of a grave marker is not mandatory. If a dedication is desired, it can be led by the Rabbi or a member of the family. The usual dedication ceremony consists of reading selections from Psalms, the *Eil Malei Rachamim* prayer and the mourners' *Kaddish*, if there is a minyan. The usual custom is to wait a year before having the ceremony, though any time after thirty days is appropriate. For more information about an unveiling, contact the Rabbi.

Monuments

The Cemetery Committee or the synagogue office must be consulted before a monument is ordered to assure that it is of appropriate size and style. Berkshire Monuments in North Adams has provided excellent service to our Jewish community for many years. They, or the monument provider of choice, must contact our synagogue liaison for proper instructions on location, foundation, size, and lettering.

***Yahrzeit* (the anniversary of the death)**

Yahrzeit is observed each year on the date of death according to the Hebrew calendar. Therefore, the timing of *yahrzeit* on the secular calendar will vary from year to year. The synagogue notifies members of the secular date if the *yahrzeit* records are on file. The names of the deceased are read at the appropriate Shabbat service during the week before the *Yahrzeit*. The *yahrzeit* observance lasts a full day, and it is customary to attend services.

Perhaps the best known custom for observing *yahrzeit* is lighting a candle made to burn for at least 24 hours. The candle is lit the evening *yahrzeit* begins. If *yahrzeit* falls on Shabbat or *Yom Tov*/a holiday, the candle is lit before the Shabbat or holiday candles. Although there is no formal blessing when lighting the candle, a meditation such as the one which follows, may be said. It is appropriate, of course, to use your own words and thoughts in addition to, or in place of, this meditation:

Dear God, I light this candle on this the yahrzeit of my dear _____. May I be inspired to deeds of charity and kindness to honor his/her memory. May the light of this candle be a reminder to me of the light my dear _____ brought to my life. May his/her soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life. Amen.

Also, it is traditional to make contributions to charity on a *yahrzeit*. The synagogue notification form may be used in order to make such a contribution.

Please inform the synagogue office if you would like to have a *minyán* arranged on the actual *yahrzeit* date or if you will attend services on the closest Shabbat for the purposes of saying the Mourners' *Kaddish*. It is the obligation of the community to support its members in this meaningful mitzvah of remembrance.

Yizkor

Yizkor, the memorial service, is recited four times a year: on Yom Kippur, Shmini Atzeret and the last days of Pesach and Shavuot, during the morning service. Our tradition wisely includes this service on these days since it is recognized that holidays bring with them reminders of loved ones who are no longer with us. It is most appropriate to come to the synagogue on those mornings and join with the congregation in reciting *Yizkor*.

Dealing with Grief

Every person has a different reaction to stress, grief, and loss. It is not unusual for a mourner to feel depressed one day and happy another or for bouts of depression to come and go for a long period of time after the death of a loved one.

These ups and downs are part of the process of returning to normal living. Our tradition understands that life will never be the same again after the death of a loved one, while at the same time urging one to “choose life” in order to regain a sense of normalcy as one goes through the mourning period. In cases of extreme depression or long-lasting grief, mourners are urged to speak with the Rabbi or another counselor to help get through this most difficult time. The synagogue can provide many resources to those who are in need, including rabbinic counseling and written materials.

Conclusion

This booklet is intended to provide basic information for mourners, not to be an exhaustive description of traditional customs or to explain customs as they may be observed in other synagogues. As always, we, the CBI community, are ready to serve you.

Suggested Written Materials on Mourning

Mourning & Mitzvah: A Guided Journal for Walking the Mourner's Path Through Grief to Healing, Anne Brener, Jewish Lights

Saying Kaddish: How to Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead, and Mourn as a Jew, Anita Diamant, Schocken Books

The Lord Is My Shepherd: Healing Wisdom of the Twenty-third Psalm, Rabbi Harold Kushner, Anchor Books

Beloved on the Earth: 150 poems of grief & gratitude, edited by Jim Perlman, Deborah Cooper, Mara Hart and Pamela Mittlefehldt, Holy Cow! Press

Consolation: The Spiritual Journey Beyond Grief, Rabbi Maurice Lamm, JPS

Congregation Beth Israel Interment Fee Schedule and other general information

In order to be a “member in good standing” all financial obligations to the Congregation must be current. If a congregant has an outstanding financial obligation at the time of the death, that obligation may be paid prior to the funeral or else charges will be assessed at the non-member rate.

The following are considered family members covered under a membership, and member rates will be applied for: heads of household, spouse, unmarried children under 26, children who are unable to support themselves due to disability.

FEES FOR INTERMENT AT CBI CEMETERY

For CBI members in good standing , two separate payments as follows:

Funeral Home portion payable to **Flynn and Dagnoli Funeral Homes.**

\$2,950.00

Synagogue portion payable to Congregation Beth Israel:

	CBI member for 5 yrs or more	\$3,550.00
	Membership at CBI up to 5 yrs.	
\$ 4,000.00	Membership at CBI up to 4 yrs.	
\$6,000.00	Membership at CBI up to 3 yrs.	
\$8,000.00	Membership at CBI up to 2 yrs.	
\$10,000.00	Membership at CBI up to 1 year	\$12,000.00

NOTE: THESE FEES APPLY TO CURRENT AND CONSECUTIVE MEMBERSHIP ONLY

For non-members or members not in good standing, payable in two separate payments as follows:

Synagogue portion payable to **Congregation Beth Israel** **\$14,200.00**

Funeral home portion payable to **Flynn and Dagnoli Funeral Homes** **\$ 2,950.00**

ALL FEES ARE DUE WITHIN 30 DAYS OF BURIAL AND INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

From Flynn and Dagnoli Funeral Homes

- Professional services
- Facilities and supervision
- Transfer of remains
- Use of hearse
- Use of two limousines
- Service car
- Standard casket
- Register book
- Burial permit

NOTE: Long-distance transportation (over 20 miles) of the deceased is NOT included in fees.

From Congregation Beth Israel:

- Opening and closing of grave
- Supervision and administration
- Ritual supplies
- Lot and perpetual care
- Hevra Kadisha
- Rabbi or other Congregation representative conducting service
- Use of synagogue facilities (\$250.00 waived if graveside only)

FEES FOR SERVICE AT CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL WITH INTERMENT ELSEWHERE: Members in good standing

\$1,000.00

Non-member

\$1,800.00

Fees above include the following:

From Congregation Beth Israel

Rabbinic services

Ritual supplies

Hevra Kadisha

Use of synagogue facilities

**FEES FOR PREPAID FUNERAL AT CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL
(AVAILABLE FOR MEMBERS in good standing for 5 YEARS OR MORE):**

Synagogue portion payable to Congregation Beth Israel:

CBI member for 5 yrs or more

\$3,730.00*

***NOTE: If membership is not maintained, the \$3,730.00 will be deducted from the non-member fee at time of funeral.**

***FEES ASSOCIATED WITH CREMATED REMAINS:**

There is a separate area in the Congregation Beth Israel Cemetery for interment of cremated remains for members in good standing for 5 years or more.

Synagogue portion payable to Congregation Beth Israel:

CBI member for 5 yrs or more

\$3,260.00

RESERVATION OF PLOTS:

\$750.00

1. Cemetery plots may be reserved only by Congregation members in good standing. A **non-refundable** reservation fee will secure a particular plot within the cemetery subject to religious regulations applicable to that section of the cemetery. At the time of the burial \$500 of the reservation fee will be credited to the applicable member's funeral fees. No transfer of plot or plots reserved may be made to another member of the Congregation without the written consent and approval of the Committee. No transfer can, in any event, be made to any person or persons who are not members of the congregation.

GENERAL

All matters not covered within these regulations shall be referred for decision to the Cemetery Committee, the Rabbi of the Congregation, and, if required, the Board. The authority of Jewish law as interpreted by the Rabbi of the Congregation will remain the determining factor for all matters relating to care of the dead, funeral services, burial procedures, unveilings, and all related issues.

This document and the attached schedule of fees, which are adopted and approved by the Committee and by the Board, are subject to change. Other fees are subject to review and change as recommended by the Committee and approved by the Board.

These rules and regulations were adopted by the Committee at a meeting on _____.

These rules and regulations have been approved by the Board on _____.

Prepared April 2013