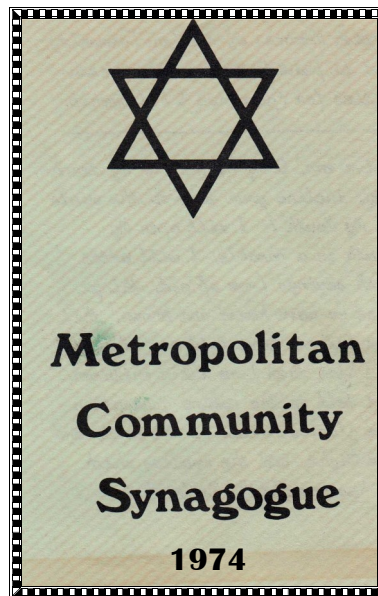


50 YEARS

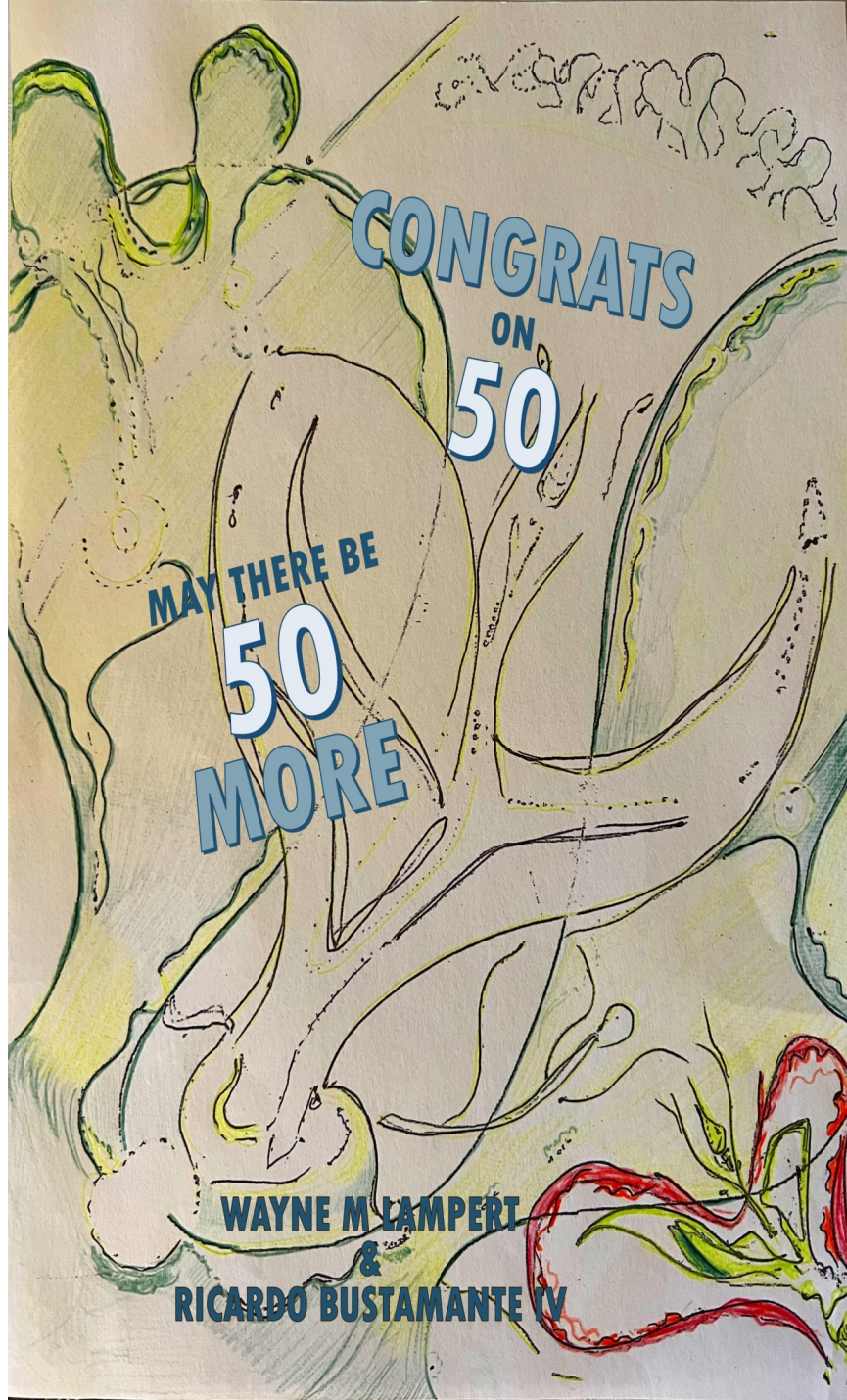
Congregation

Etz
Chai m

1974 - 2024
Souvenir Booklet



THE COVER OF OUR FIRST SOUVENIR BOOKLET, 1974



**THANK YOU
TO THE FOLLOWING
WITHOUT WHOM THIS GALA
WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE**

**Gary Brown
Howard Cheiken
Louis Levin
Jesse Monteagudo
Larry Ousley
Adam Perlman
Sammy Picciotto
Daniel Smits
Don Squire**

AS WELL AS...



**CREATIVE
CUISINE**
creativecuisinecatering.com
Petergay de Souza
(954) 731 - 6344
(954) 829 - 6116



**Yamit Lemoine
Voice/Violin/Producer
Yamit and The Vinyl Blvd
Jazz Ensemble
Tel: 786.554.2999**

**Howie Sorkin
Chair, 50th Anniversary Gala Committee**

Our Mission:

To be a Jewish home for those who seek a safe and nurturing environment to experience the spiritual and educational treasures of our shared history, and to enhance the quality of our members' lives and the community as a whole.

Web Site: www.EtzChaimFlorida.org

Email: info@etzchaimflorida.org

Phone: 954 564 9232



WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE WHO WE
CALL OUR **"JEWELS"** AND HAVE HELPED TO UNDERWRITE THIS
MARVELOUS EVENT.



David Aron
Robin Bodiford
Peter Braunfield
Nina Britton
Gary Brown
Mark Brown
Philip Budashewitz
Ric Bustamonte
Howard Cheiken
Jerry Ganz



Harley Green
Steven Greenfield
Jim Hopkins (d. 2024)
Wayne Lampert
Louis Levin
Ed Lieberman
Bill Nissin
Cesar Montes De Oca
Louisa Oakenell
Tony Perry
Sammy Picciotto
Lior R



Daniel Smits
Howie Sorkin
Don Squire
Bob Waterstone



Louis Levin, President

As President of Congregation Etz Chaim, I am excited to be writing this welcome greeting.

We are here simply because of you.

A vision morphed into a reality.



I am considered one of the newbies, being here under 10 years. I knew I found a home when I first googled “gay synagogue near me.” When I walked, in everyone was so warm and welcoming. After a short time, I joined the Board as VP of membership. I then moved into the position of President and I am loving it.

I look forward to being a part of Congregation Etz Chaim as it grows into the next 50 years. During these difficult times, our Congregation makes sure that you have a safe home to go to every Friday night and major Jewish holiday.

Thank you for your support and being a part of this fabulous community.

Louis Levin,
President

Marcia Weinstein, Spiritual Leader/Shlichat Tzibur

The past two and a half years serving as the Spiritual Leader of Congregation Etz Chaim have been some of the most professionally and spiritually rewarding years of my life. I was inspired to earn my rabbinical smicha so that I can better serve this amazing community, and I am very excited for the future.



The history of this wonderful congregation is rich and full of joy. Its founding was inspirational, and the people who continue to fulfill its mission to create a welcoming and safe place for LGBTQ+ Jews, their families, friends, partners, allies and supporters, are strong and continue to reach beyond our physical and geographical boundaries. We invite all who wish to find a safe, spiritual home in these challenging times, and we offer radical hospitality and welcoming to every member of the community.

Our goal in the coming years is to enhance our kiruv, outreach, to the greater LGBTQ+ and Jewish communities, to shine brightly among the masses and create a unique worship experience within our unique and vibrant community. Thank You so much for sharing this evening with us, and Thank You for your continued support of Congregation Etz Chaim. Here's to the next 50 years!

L'shalom,

Marcia Weinstein, Shlichat Tzibur/Spiritual Leader

Our Board of Directors

Mark Brown

Secretary

Congratulations to the entire Etz Chaim community, past and present. We couldn't have achieved this historic milestone without your devotion and support. Etz Chaim has been my spiritual home for the past 20 years. I'm very grateful to have the opportunity to share my religious beliefs and practice my spirituality within such a caring and supportive community. I hope the next 50 years will be just as rewarding to present and future congregants.

Mark Brown



Larry Ousley

At Large

Congratulations to Etz Chaim for reaching this wonderful 50 year milestone.

I have been a member of Etz Chaim for 15 years and am glad that it was here to fill my spiritual needs.

It is a joy to be a member.
Larry Ousley



Our Board of Directors

Adam Perlman

VP Membership

I was born and raised in the Coral Spring area right here in South Florida and attended conservative synagogues growing up during my childhood. I am an Optometric Physician in the Broward County area with a focus in Clinical Research in Ophthalmology. As a member since 2017, Etz Chaim, has become a perfect fit for me as I can identify with our community of professional, intellectual, LGBTQ individuals and supporters in a warm, comfortable setting. In other words, Etz Chaim is the catalyst that has brought my Jewish life and my sexual identity together. I am currently active in the Broward Jewish Federation, study Kabbalah, and I'm involved in many Jewish South Florida groups. I have been known to deliver a D'var Torah when our service leader is out, and it has been such a great experience! Please come see me and say hello.



Adam Perlman

Sammy Picciotto

Treasurer

Being part of the Etz Chaim Family has sweetened and enriched my life.

These are the moments when we must stand together and be strong and proud Jews. These are the times when we must show our love and support of our eternal homeland, Israel.

We WILL dance and thrive again.
AM ISRAEL CHAI.
Mazal Tov,
Sammy Picciotto



Our Board of Directors

Don Squire

Vice President

As a long-time member of Congregation Etz Chaim, I feel that the shul and I have something in common: A desire to enable the LGBTQ Jewish community to have a dedicated place for "Spiritual Enlightenment", as well as an opportunity for additional educational, social and Biblical knowledge! I like to think that my participation as Executive Vice President of the Board helps facilitate this end.

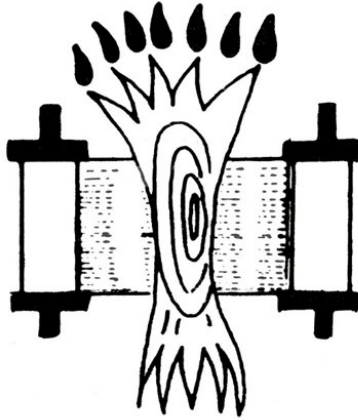


Don Squire



One of the logos we experimented with in 1974

Our Logos Throughout The Years



Our Founding Members

GOING PLACES July 1974 Page 2

JEWISH GAYS by MARK SILBER

PLAN OWN SYNAGOGUE

A small group of Jewish Gays have organized in the Miami area with the hope of establishing Florida's first gay synagogue. Although there are at least three gay-oriented churches in the area serving Christians, this is the first time Jewish Gays have met.

The group first met last Fall with Rev. Keith Davis of the Miami Metropolitan Community Church helping to co-ordinate the meeting. The Miami M.C.C. is giving full support to the new group. The members have adopted the name "Metropolitan Community Synagogue of Greater Miami" to demonstrate the unity of Gay Christians and Jews.


Rev. Davis publicized the group when he was a guest speaker on

WFUN. There was a large response to this announcement from the listening audience.


One member of the new group has already met with a supportive rabbi of a large Miami congregation, who suggested getting in touch with similar groups around the country.

Presently, the group is meeting at members' homes every other week. The growing membership is composed of very sincere individuals, including a few non-Jews who are active members. Therefore, all are welcomed.


Those interested in contacting the Metropolitan Community Synagogue should call the Miami M.C.C. at 758-7190, or get in touch with Rev. Davis.




Howie Sorkin Jay Freier
First President




Sylvia Murphy Rev. Keith Davis



Mark Silber



Phil Gautier



Phil Wallach

May 2, 1974 Location: 2650 S. W. 23rd Ave.
Miami, Florida Hosts: Herb Klein & Phil Gautier

Attending: Herb Klein, Phil Gautier, Jay Freier, Phil Wallach, Howie Sorkin, Rev. Keith Davis, and Sylvia Murphy

Resolved: To meet every two weeks at the homes of various members.

To seek out permanent quarters in which to hold future meetings and functions.

To work with M.C.C. of Miami.

Other Business: Contact Sam at the Hamlet-Co. Grove)-he has indicated a desire to give aid, both financial and participatory.

Contact Rabbi Landeau and Rabbi Altman.

Next meeting- May 14, 1974 8 P.M. at Jay and Phil's

Our First President, Jay Freier

Jay Freier, was born on December 2, 1947 and passed away on March 12, 1991. He was dearly loved by everyone who knew him. He took our Synagogue from non-existent to a thriving organization. He was an inspiration to all of us and played a very important role in every aspect of the Synagogue's success from donating tremendous amounts of time to starring in the famous and very successful "Yentette" shows and parties that the Synagogue used to put on.



Jay was a President of Presidents, for not only was he the first President of Congregation Etz Chaim, but he also was the first President of the Gay Men's Chorus and the President of the Miami Chapter of the ACLU. He touched the lives of so many people

He was a Special Education Teacher and extremely devoted to his students. He was available 24 hours a day - 7 days a week for them. Not only did he give his students his personal phone number, but also made himself available to meet them at any time if they needed him. He was the Chair of the Special Education Department at North Miami Beach Senior High School and won the prestigious Teacher Of The Year Award.

He also worked as a travel agent and took very good care of all his friends when it came to making reservations and trip planning. Unfortunately, Jay died too young from complications of AIDS. Who knows how many more great things he might have accomplished in his life? His funeral was attended by more than 1,000 people including dignitaries from the government, charitable organizations and members of the business community. The funeral procession was so long that traffic was stopped on the Palmetto Expressway in order to accommodate the huge parade of cars. Jay was a "צדיק" Tzddik," a truly wonderful and righteous man.

Our Presidents

1974 Jay Freier	1998 Charles Green
1978 Leslie Rozner	2000 Dr. Steven Leidner
1980 Larry Friedlander*	2000 Doree Benson
1981 Doree Benson	2003 Robin Gross
1983 Bob Waterstone	2004 Brad Kane
1984 Marc Levin	2007 Lyn Saberg
1985 Bob Waterstone	2010 Robin Gross, David Yalen
1986 Michael Greenspan	2011 Lauren Gultz
1988 Jerry Greenstein	2012 Daniela Mitrovic
1989 Jesse Monteagudo	2013 Jesse Monteagudo
1991 Mitch Novack	2016 Jack Karp
1993 Ray Levi	2016 Jeff Landsman-Wohlsifer
1995 Joshua Winters	2020 David Yalen
1996 Lauren Loebel	2020 Robin Gross
1996 Michael Greenspan	2021 Naomi Siegel
2022 - Louis Levin	

*Larry was a survivor Kristallnacht, November 9, 1938 in Berlin, Germany. Steven Spielberg made a video of his remembrance. It can be viewed at the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C.

Our Rabbis

**Harold Caminker
Rachel Hartzman
Greg Kanter
Noah Kitty
Marcia Weinstein, Spiritual Leader/Shlichat Tzibur**

Our Cantorial Soloists

**Michael Greenspan
Jerry Berkowitz
Harley Green**

Our Many “Homes”

**Biscayne Boulevard Lutheran Church
YWCA, Downtown Miami
Aljaman’s Art Studio, North Miami Beach
19094 West Dixie Highway, Ojus
Levitt-Weinstein Funeral Parlor, Hallandale
Unitarian Universalist Church, Oakland Park
1881 N.E. 26 Street, Wilton Manors
(Former) Sun Trust Bank building – Church,
Wilton Manors
Temple Beth Torah, Tamarac
The Pride Center, Wilton Manors**

A Tribute to Michael Greenspan Past President, Cantorial Soloist

Michael Robert Greenspan, 1949-2017
by Jesse Monteagudo

Michael Greenspan, Congregation Etz Chaim's cantorial soloist and two-term president, was an amazing, multi-faceted human being. He was a well-respected educator and finalist for Broward County Teacher of the Year. He was a talented musician whose greatest passion was for the accordion. Michael was a great singer, a fine composer, and an accomplished arranger. During the 1970s' Michael was one half of the Erev Duo and later one fourth of the American Balalaika Company, which took him around the world and eventually to South Florida.



In February 1985, shortly after he moved to Miami, Michael read an ad in David magazine for a "gay" synagogue, Congregation Etz Chaim. At the time CEC resided in a storefront in Ojus, now part of Aventura, and did not have a rabbi. He immediately became an active member of this Synagogue, and for the next 26 years emerged as one of the most important people in Etz Chaim's 50-year history. Michael was elected to the Board within a year of becoming a member; and served as President of the Congregation from 1986 to 1988 and from 1996 to 1998.

Not surprisingly, Michael's most important contributions to Etz Chaim were musical. He was CEC's unofficial cantor almost from the moment that he became active in our Congregation; and served as our official cantorial soloist from 1999 to 2011. Because of his valuable contributions to Etz Chaim, Michael received several awards and was an honoree at Etz Chaim's 35th Anniversary Gala in 2007. Michael was also honored by the Gay and Lesbian Community Center of South Florida, now the Pride Center at Equality Park, as one of its "Stars of the Rainbow" in 2008. Michael remained a major part of the CEC family until 2011 and died in 2017.

A History of Congregation Etz Chaim

Formally

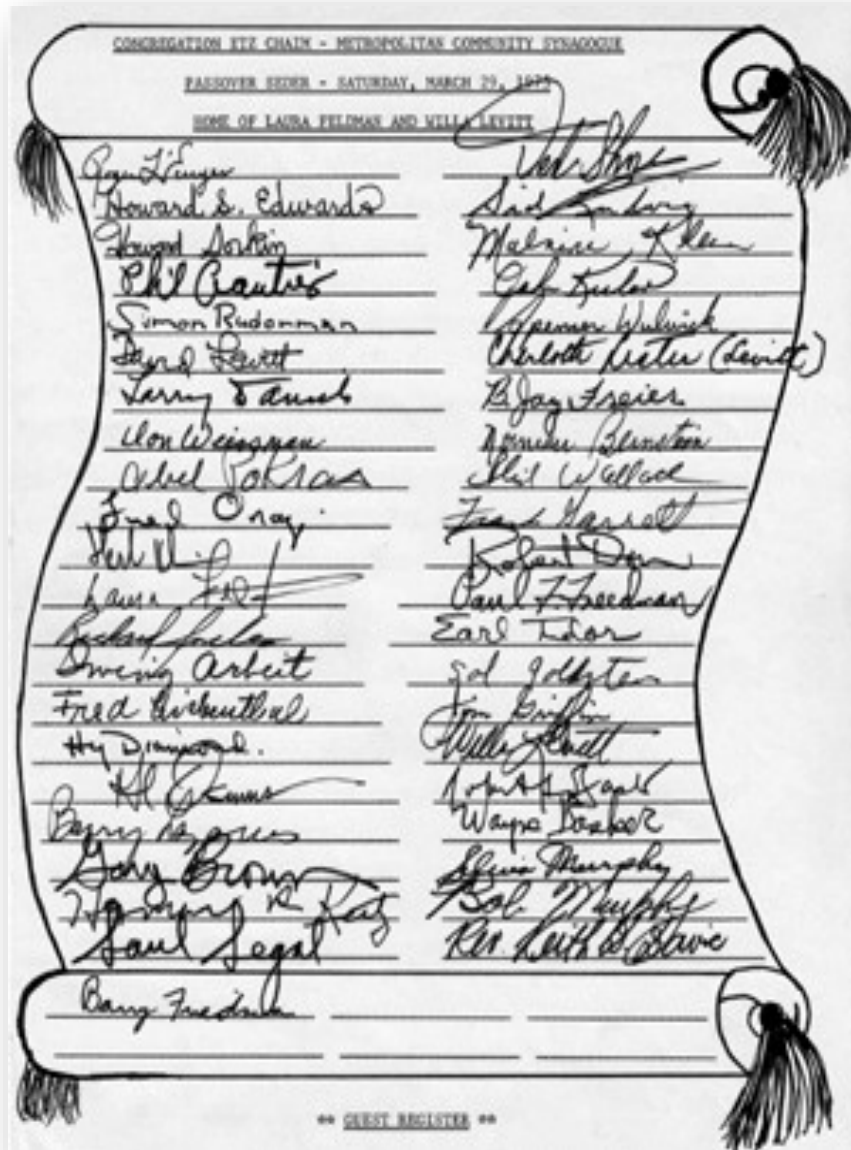
THE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY SYNAGOGUE
OF GREATER MIAMI M.C.S

In the Spring of 1974, six Jewish friends of the Metropolitan Community Church of Miami (MCC) and one non-Jew joined together to conduct a Passover Seder at the church. The success of this Seder laid the ground work and planted the seed for the Metropolitan Community Synagogue of Greater Miami, one year later to become Congregation Etz Chaim. This name was proposed to us by the late Rabbi Sol Landau of Beth David Congregation. Rabbi Landau was our advocate and gave us much support. At the time the MCC was the only place in South Florida where a Gay person could worship openly.

There was a need for anonymity in the 70s and yet word got around about the Synagogue's formation. The group opened their homes for prayer and socializing on a bimonthly basis. We next graduated to the recreation room of a condominium. Since condominium rules prohibited meetings of clubs on a regular basis, we were faced with the question "Where shall we go from here?" We found a warm welcome from the Center for Dialog, which was housed at the Biscayne Boulevard Lutheran Church. They let us use their space in the basement of the church. Our affiliation with the Church lasted almost two years. We were asked to leave when a member of the Church Board discovered we were not just a Synagogue...but a GAY Synagogue! Again, we asked the question "Where shall we go from here?" We were informed that the downtown YWCA had been receptive to "controversial" groups. Thus began a very warm and wonderful affiliation with the Y. We thought we would be there a very long time. Unfortunately, we were wrong. The Y was supported by the United Fund. Among those who ran the Fund were individuals of less than liberal political persuasion. When they became aware of the Y's free thinking philosophy, they threatened to withdraw the Fund's support. The Y did not give in. When the building was sold and destined to be destroyed, we once again had to find a new place to meet.

Our History

Even though we did not have a place, we managed to stay together and held our first Seder in the home of our members Laura Feldman and Willa Levitt. It was held on Saturday, March 29, 1975. The food was cooked by Malvina Klein, the mother of Herbie Klein (d. 2021), one of our founding members.



Our History Our First Seder



Sylvia Murphy
Founding Member

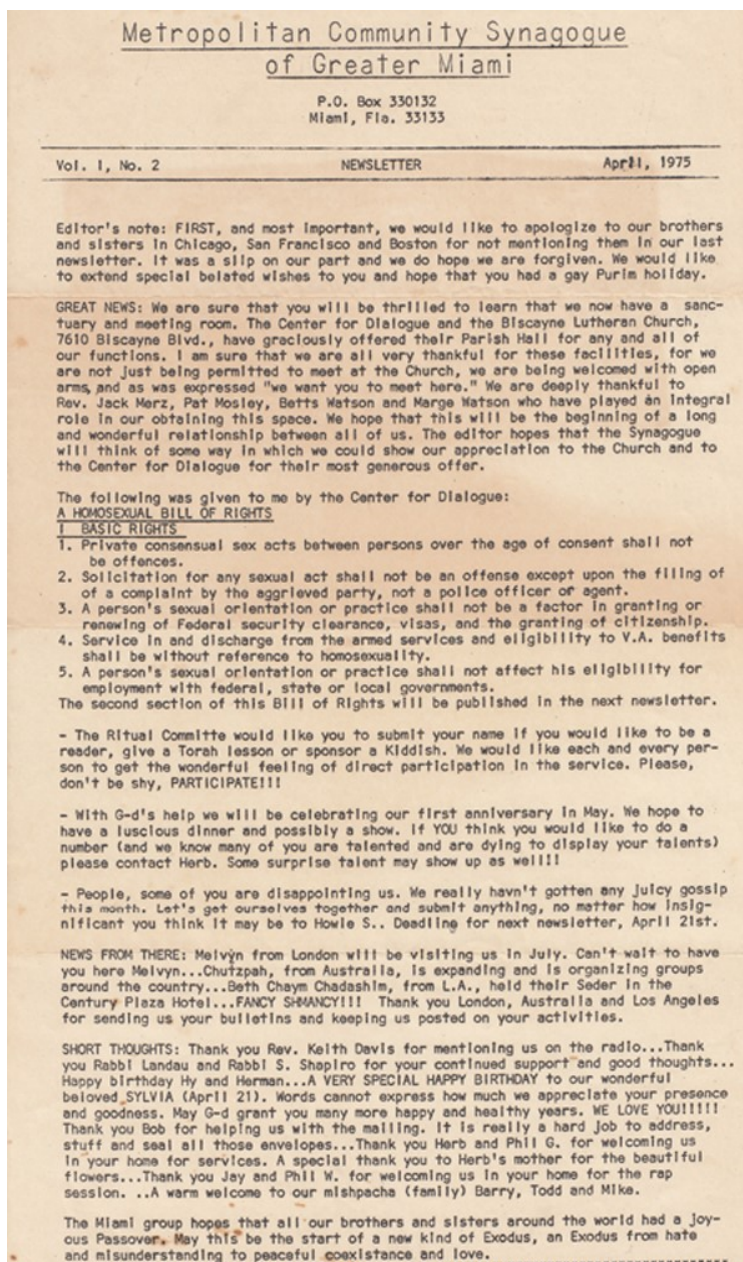


Laura Feldman
Host

Howie Sorkin
Founding Member

Our History

We produced a monthly newsletter which we later called the *Zei Gezundt Gazette*. Below is the Volume 1, Number 2:



Our History

A member of MCC heard of our plight of not having a home. He was so concerned about where we would meet that he offered us his art studio for Friday night services. We took all of our belongings and moved to Aljaman's art studio in North Miami Beach. Every Friday night we got to the studio early and transformed it into "our" place. We set up chairs, tables, cabinets, bought the food for the Oneg, and then stayed later to break down everything and clean up.

**BELOW ARE PICTURES THAT WERE TAKEN AT
ALJAMAN'S ART STUDIO IN NORTH MIAMI BEACH**



Our History

19094 West Dixie Highway was used as a worm farm, but the price and location were right for us at the time. You can imagine what this place looked like when we first rented it, but we had a dream. Our first Shabbat service in this unfinished warehouse with its concrete floors, single lights hanging from roof girders and NO air conditioning or furniture was very special. In a meeting held after our first service, committees and work crews were set up and money was pledged. We took it upon ourselves to demolish the unit's entire guts. We broke down walls and put up new ones. We installed a new ceiling, lighting, plumbing, kitchen, carpeting, step up podium, painted, and did whatever else you can think of. We did all of this work ourselves except for contracting an air-conditioning company. We were mostly in our late 20s and early 30s. We spent weekends and any of our spare time in the construction of this space.

WE WENT FROM THIS:



Our History

TO THIS



TO THIS



TO THIS



TO THIS



Our History

As we grew and became stronger, we noticed a new pride and confidence in what we were doing. 1976 saw the beginning of our High Holiday services. In November of that same year, we tried to take out an ad in the *Jewish Floridian*. We never achieved that goal, but received a front page editorial that was to give us more publicity than we ever expected.

The Jewish Floridian — November 24, 1976

Gay synagogue for miami?—what do you think?

By FRED K. SHOCHET
 Publisher,
 The Jewish Floridian
 Congregation Etz Chaim calls
 itself the Metropolitan Com-
 munity Synagogue of Greater
 Miami. Mainly, Congregation
 Etz Chaim is proud that many of

its members come from religious
 homes here.
 For some time now,
 Congregation Etz Chaim has
 been writing to The Jewish
 Floridian asking for publication
 of its activities notices.
 "IN HELPING us publicize

our group, and groups like ours, a
 mitzvah will be performed,"
 spokesmen for the synagogue
 have written us.
 "You will be instrumental,"
 they assure us, "in helping many
 persons who have no other place
 to turn."

There are hundreds of syna-
 gogues and Jewish organizations
 in South Florida that ask for
 publication of their activities in
 The Jewish Floridian each week.
 ADD TO this the many
 Jewish-affiliate organizations —

organizations whose membership
 is largely, if not entirely, Jewish
 that seek space in our columns,
 and it is clear that we have a
 heavy demand to deal with and a
 heavy editorial responsibility to
 discharge in the matter of serving
 Continued on Page 6-A

THE Jewish Floridian

Combining THE JEWISH UNITY and THE JEWISH WEEKLY

Volume 49 — Number 48

Miami, Florida — Friday, November 26, 1976

By Mail 26 Cents Two sections Price 25 cents

Page 6-A

The Jewish Floridian

Friday, November 26, 1976

Gay synagogue for miami?—what do you think?

Continued from Page 1-A/
 the needs of the total Jewish
 community.
 Throughout the years, we have
 attempted to meet this responsi-
 bility and to render the service
 of a Jewish community family
 newspaper to the best of our
 ability.
 And so it would seem that
 Congregation Etz Chaim, the
 Metropolitan Community Syna-
 gogue of Greater Miami, has

become one more in the latest,
 ever-growing number of religious,
 philanthropic, educational, cul-
 tural and civic organizations
 turning to us for assistance.
 SO IT would seem.
 The point is that Congregation
 Etz Chaim is Gay. It was specifi-
 cally founded for the needs of a
 Gay membership. This raises
 many problems for us.

On the one hand, there is not
 flinching from a growing fact.
 Gay relationships and Gay or-
 ganizations are an increasing and
 overt, no longer covert, reality in
 America. This includes Jewish
 Gay organizations.
 Some synagogues have
 cropped up across the country
 specifically for their needs. It was
 inevitable that one should emerge
 here in South Florida.

"WE ARE a positive force in
 the community," writes Con-
 gregation Etz Chaim to us in their
 appeal for news coverage. "Possi-
 bly," one of its spokesmen
 declares, "you would like to
 interview one of us or come to our
 services?"

In an apparent attempt to fend
 off objection, Congregation Etz
 Chaim has sent along some litera-
 ture to explain its programs and
 purpose. "I hope you will take
 the time to read our brochure and
 contact me with any question you
 may have."

TO MAKE it all more at-
 tractive, Congregation Etz
 Chaim declares that "We would
 like to put an ad in your paper."

And then, as if it all were an
 accomplished fact, a decision
 already made, a bite on their bait
 (that ad they offer), one of their
 letters wonders: "When can we
 expect to see the enclosed press
 release printed? If you do not
 want to print it, please have the
 courtesy to let me know."

The tone becomes more
 desperate and personal: "I am
 really looking forward to
 receiving a response from you.
 Please do not let me down. Do
 not practice the oppression that
 we as Jews have felt for so many
 thousands of years on our own.
 for we are Jews; if we cannot
 count on our fellow Jews to help
 us, whom can we count on?"

SUDDENLY, Congregation
 Etz Chaim is no longer a thing,
 but a person, a living person, who
 sounds in pain.

On the one hand, the dilemma
 seems "simple" enough. We are
 here to serve. It would be
 medieval of us to go contrary to
 the custom already established
 across the nation with respect to
 Gay organizations and Gay
 synagogues. It would be
 inquisitorial to be deaf to a plea.

On the other, there is the
 biblical prohibition:

• Leviticus 18:22: refers to
 homosexual relations between
 adult males (over the age of 13)
 as criminal. "Thou shalt not lie
 with mankind as with
 womankind; it is abomination."

• Leviticus 20:13: stipulates the
 death penalty imposed for both
 parties to the homosexual
 activity: "If a man lies with a
 male as with a woman, both
 have committed an
 abomination. They shall be put
 to death."

Neither does it seem to us that
 we are hiding behind Scripture to
 offer a foregone negative reply.
 The letters and the literature sent
 to us by Congregation Etz Chaim
 are all signed by someone who
 calls himself, "Chairperson,
 Ritual Committee; Editor, News-
 letter." He adds and signs his
 name. But then he pleads: "I
 would appreciate your not using
 my name in any release you may
 choose to print."

Why not?

IF WE are to serve the total
 community, can we do it anony-
 mously? Is Congregation Etz
 Chaim, (Anonymous) Metro-
 politan Community Synagogue
 of Greater Miami, the organiza-
 tion it says it is, or is it some-
 thing else?

In serving Congregation Etz

Chaim, are we serving the best
 interests of the total community,
 or are we contributing to some
 sort of surreptitious operation?

As we have said, The Jewish
 Floridian has been beset by this
 problem for some time now, and
 it deserves an intelligent
 resolution, if only because of the
 pleading tone of supposedly
 fellow-Jews who declare they
 have "no other place to turn" and
 who beg us not to "practice the
 oppression that we as Jews have
 felt for so many thousands of
 years."

UNFORTUNATELY, it has
 been difficult for us to arrive at
 an intelligent resolution of the
 problem if only because there are
 no simple answers.

And so we wonder what the
 South Florida Jewish community
 thinks about it. We would ap-
 preciate your response.

Perhaps, this kind of feedback
 can help us to arrive at a con-
 sensus of just what the prevailing
 feelings here are and what, if
 anything, we can do to rationalize
 these feelings with our own, as
 well as with our sense of the
 responsibility that any news-
 paper has, not just a Jewish
 newspaper, to serve its reader-
 ship.

The Biblical injunction is
 there. But Jews cry out in their
 isolation and their need. What do
 you think?

Our History

The *Jewish Floridian* refused to accept our ad which resulted in the following letter being sent to the Editor, Fred Schochet:

September 21, 1976

Mr. F. Schochet
C/O The Jewish Floridian
120 N.E. 6th Street
Miami, Florida 33132

Dear Mr. Schochet,

I have tried, several times to get in touch with you, however, you have not responded. I am asking you to please read the enclosed press release and enter it in the *Jewish Floridian*. A group such as ours cannot be ignored any longer by our Jewish brothers and sisters. Many of us come from Orthodox homes (two are children of Rabbis) and we feel it is imperative that the Jewish community, at large, becomes aware that an organization such as ours exists. In helping us publicize our group, and groups like ours, a mitzvah will be performed, for you will be instrumental in helping many persons who have no other place to turn (and I can guarantee you that many of your readers are gay - a thought that may not have occurred to you).

We are a positive force in the community. I hope you will take the time to read our brochure and contact me with any questions you may have. We would like to put an ad in your paper. Possibly you would like to interview one of us or come to our services?

When can we expect to see the enclosed press release printed? If you do not want to print it please have the courtesy to let me know.

I am really looking forward to receiving a response from you. Please do not let me down. Do not practice the oppression that we as Jews have felt for so many thousands of years on your own, for we are Jews; if we cannot count on our fellow Jews to help us, who can we count on?

Thank you so much for your consideration and cooperation,

Howard Sorkin
Howard Sorkin
Chairperson,
Ritual Committee;
Editor, Newsletter

(I would appreciate your not using my name in any release you may choose to print).



We placed this ad in the *Miami Herald* on January 13, 1978



Doree Benson
 President 1981-1983, 2000 - 2003

You are cordially invited
 to attend our
25th Anniversary Dinner Dance
 as we honor
Rabbi Greg Kantor
 and our family of
Congregation Etz Chaim
 Saturday, March 6th, 1999
 Sheraton Fort Lauderdale, 14999
 Sunrise Boulevard
 Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33325
 754 571-1111
 Thank You to All Donors

Bob Waterstone
 President
 1983 - 1984
 1985 - 1986

span and Jesse Monteagudo

Mitch Novack
 President 1991-1993
Harvey Pearson
 (Mitch and Harvey were a couple)

Steve Citrin - This is when
 we moved into our place on
 West Dixie Highway.

Antolin Carbonell and Gary Brown



Doree Benson and Phil Wallach



Sylvia Murphy and David Levitt doing "Do You Love Me" from Fiddler On The Roof



James Montenegro



Joel Biawitz



Founding member Herb Klein doing his Judy Garland

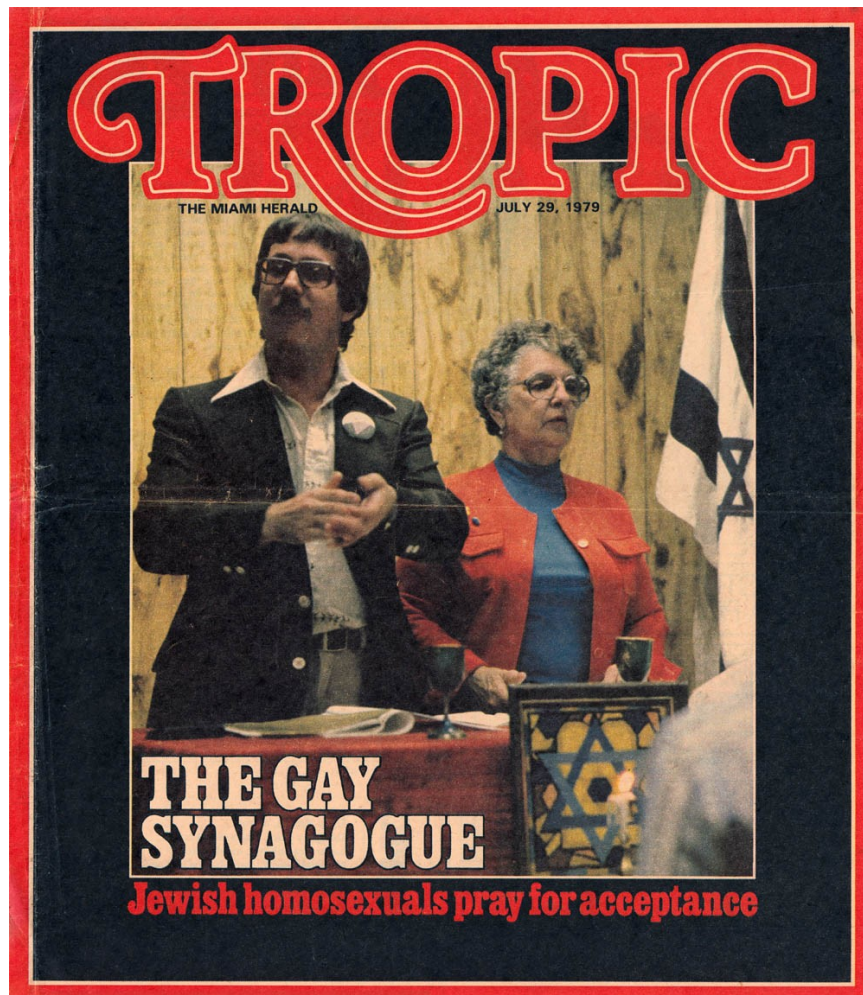


Gloria Stein, Harley Green and Dan Friedman

Our History

As the news of our existence spread across the country, another milestone was achieved. We were to become the first successful congregation in the gay and lesbian community outside of the major centers of Los Angeles and New York. We soon became the catalyst for future Congregations in other cities. This eventually led to the 1977 formation of the World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations, of which we were a Charter member.

In July 1979, our Synagogue was featured as the cover story of *The Miami Herald Tropic Magazine*.



Our History

This new willingness to step forward and be recognized drew the attention of many liberal Jews in the South Florida area. With their support, we eventually made an application to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC). On June 7, 1980, Etz Chaim was officially inducted into the UAHC as their second congregation with an outreach to the Gay and Lesbian community.

'The liberal movement must be accomodating to varying Jewish lifestyle needs in the present.'

— Rabbi Lewis Bogage, regional director,
Union of American Hebrew Congregations

N. Dade gay synagogue to join national Reform Jewish group

By JONATHAN D. SALANT
Herald Staff Writer

Like other Reform Jewish congregations, members of the Metropolitan Community Synagogue in North Dade pray for peace, give thanks to God and read from the Bible.

But unlike the other synagogues, most of the members of Metropolitan Community are gay. And the services include a prayer for the day that they can emerge from hiding and openly admit their homosexuality.

"We use that in our services quite frequently," said the synagogue's president, a 55-year-old businessman who asked not to be identified. "It's from hiding that the gays will be able to come out of the closet."

Saturday the 80-member congregation will take a large step towards acceptance as it formally joins 750 other congregations in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the national association of Reform Judaism.

The ceremony, beginning at 8 p.m., will be part of services marking the end of the Jewish Sabbath.

The congregation, which meets in a converted warehouse at 19094 W. Dixie Highway, will be the sec-

ond gay Jewish group to join the UAHC, which represents 1.2 million Reform Jews nationwide. The first, in Los Angeles, has been a member for several years, according to Rabbi Lewis Bogage, UAHC southeast regional director.

There are no gay synagogues in the Orthodox and Conservative Judaism national organizations, Bogage said.

"The Reform movement is more tolerant," Bogage said. "They are the defined liberal movement. The challenge is that the liberal movement must be accomodating to varying Jewish lifestyle needs in the present."

The Metropolitan Community congregation was formed five years ago. The group moved into their present headquarters last August.

"Some rabbis have said that we would be more than welcome to join their congregations," said the synagogue president. "The people who belong to our group just feel more comfortable [as a separate entity]."

"To many of them [Metropolitan members], we're not just their fellow congregants but we're their family. I have found this group to be closer than any congregation I have belonged to."

Our History

Rabbi Lewis Bogage presenting UAHC Charter to Etz Chaim.
To the right, Leslie Rozner, former President



Below, President Larry Friedlander addressing crowd, The ceremony was held outside to accommodate the overflow crowd.



Our History

In 1987, the two units adjacent to ours became vacant and we took them over. We turned one third of the property into a sanctuary and the other two-thirds into our reception room where we had great Onegs and parties. Once again, we did all of this work ourselves. We were thankfully, so successful that our room could not accommodate all the people we had for our parties and so we had to rent the Biscayne Gardens Civic Center for our large functions. Our parties drew over 200 people. We once again did all the setting up, provided all the food, broke down and also put on our own spectacular drag shows featuring the "World Famous *Yentettes*." We had no help. We were all volunteers. We invested many hours rehearsing. We made our own costumes and scenery, produced all the music and did our own choreography. We always sold out all of our shows.



Our History — The YENTETTES



Our History — The YENTETTES

**A Few More Pictures
of Other Yentette Productions**



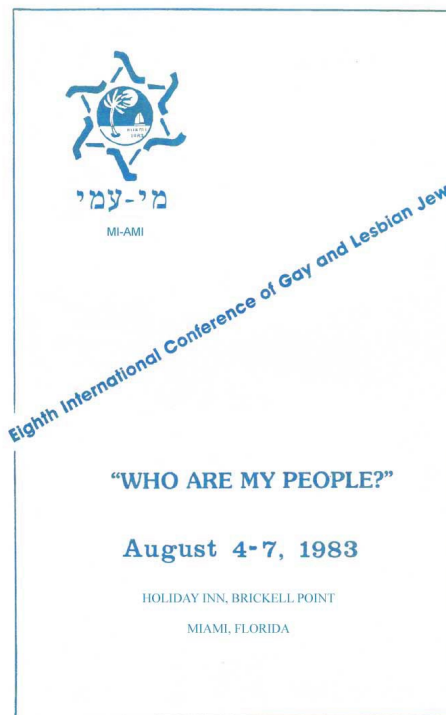
Our History—Continued

In the autumn of 1981, we conducted our first workshop on being Gay/Lesbian Jews at the UAHC Southeast Region biennial in Mobile, Alabama. In 1982, it was brought to our attention that the UAHC's new Torah Commentary was quite negative when dealing with homosexuality. In response, we presented a second workshop at the next regional biennial in Jacksonville, Florida. This was followed with a presentation to the Southeastern Regional UAHC Board. February 1983, saw a unanimous resolution from the Southeast region for the changing of this section. This resolution finally came in to fruition with the 1985 announcement of a new revised Torah Commentary.

Our History

During the 1980's, Congregation Etz Chaim grew by leaps and bounds. Its membership rose from sixty members at the beginning of the decade to over three hundred members in 1990. In 1983, the Synagogue acquired its own Torah from a Synagogue in Philadelphia that had closed down. One of our members flew up to Philadelphia to get it. Both the Torah and member flew back to Miami sitting on an adjacent seats in the plane.

From August 4-7 1983, we were proud to host the 8th International Conference of Gay and Lesbian Jews. Our theme, "מי - עמי" "MI-AMI," "Who Are My People," was carried on throughout the conference which included participants from all around the world as well as their the families and friends.



Our History

At first we had problems finding a hotel to hold this conference. We were turned down by many basically because we were a Gay organization. We were warmly welcomed by the Holiday Inn Brickell.



Hunt

Continued from page 26

Doral Executive Director Joel Gray said he understood the coordinator's request to be for a large sign, and says, "We don't permit signs for any group in the lobby. We would put them (the group's name) up on the bulletin board."

Gray says the group's name "wasn't a determining factor" in rejecting the convention. "We don't do any kosher catering," Gray said. "We never have and we never will."

The coordinator says he didn't have a problem finding a hotel for the past two conferences of the group. Last year's convention was held at the Sheraton-Universal in Los Angeles. The 1981 convention was held at the Holiday Inn-Independence Square in Philadelphia.

The coordinator says his budget for the three-day convention is \$115 per person, excluding hotel rooms. "I don't know many hotels over there (on the Beach) that are doing so well (that) they wouldn't take us," he

says. "I say they're using it as an excuse."

He says marketing research shows that gay men and women do more travelling and have more money for entertainment than other consumers.

He alleges, however, that hotels are saying, "We want your money, but we don't want you."

The coordinator, who is a part-time travel agent, adds, "I know 100 gay travel agents who will think twice about booking here."

He wonders if hotels might be guilty of discrimination, but says he won't pursue the matter. "I have better things to do with my life."

For now, finding a hotel is his main concern. "This is an opportunity (for gay and lesbian Jews) to pray with people who are like themselves. They're dealing with their Judaism, and dealing with their gayness. This (the convention) is one of the major things they look forward to each year."

Our History

Eighth International Conference of Gay and Lesbian Jews



מי-אמי

MI-AMI

Metropolitan Community Synagogue of Greater Miami
Congregation Etz Chaim

19094 West Dixie Highway, North Miami Beach, Florida 33180
(305) 931-9318
(305) 756-6600

"WHO ARE MY PEOPLE?"

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / April 15, 1983

The 8th International Conference of Gay and Lesbian Jews will be held in Miami, Florida, August 4th through 7th.

The word "Miami," when transliterated into Hebrew, becomes "Mi-Ami" and means "Who are my people?" This fortunate coincidence provides a theme for the conference which asks "Who are my people?" -- as Jews, as Gays and Lesbians, and as responsible adults.

This year's conference participants will be afforded the opportunity to participate in new, creative workshops, lead by authorities from both South Florida and The World. "The Future of the Gay/Lesbian Jew in the Brave New World," "Tradition-the Glue that Keeps Us Together", and "Do Your Parents Know Where You Are?", are just some of the topics to be covered.

A full schedule of religious services is planned, including: Friday night Shabbat dinner and services at Temple Israel of Greater Miami and Havadallah, under the stars. Additional special services have also been scheduled for Saturday morning.

The South Florida Gay and Lesbian Community is going all out to show you that, "We are glad you're here". Special events at the conference site, discounts and parties throughout town, and post conference tours, make this the perfect starting point for your summer vacation.

With Miami's easy accessibility to Europe and Latin America, and special summer rates, more international participation is expected than ever before.

So come to Miami in August and:

- walk miles of our beautiful sandy beaches
- stretch your mind
- be seduced by balmy breezes and moonlit nights
- stand proudly with your Gay brothers and Lesbian sisters
- disgrace yourself completely at some of the best bars and discos in the world
- fatten your puny international address book
- love and respect your Jewishness, your sexuality and your humanity
- extend your vacation with our special tours
- be there

Sign up early, as registration is limited. For registration information, contact: The 8th International Conference Committee, Metropolitan Community Synagogue of Greater Miami, 19094 West Dixie Highway, North Miami Beach, Florida 33180

Authorized By: THE WORLD CONGRESS OF GAY AND LESBIAN JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS

Later that same year, we hired our first professional staff person, Cantor Mindy Fliegelman. Cantor Fliegelman, an ordained cantor, conducted our High Holyday services for three consecutive years. We were also blessed to have Michael Greenspan as our occasional cantorial soloist beginning in 1985 and our full-time cantorial soloist beginning in 1998, just after his serving as our President. Michael delighted us with his accordion and knowledge of Jewish music from classical to Klezmer.

Our History

On August 23, 1991, we once again made history by installing our first Rabbi, Rachel Hertzman. At the time, she was 33 years old, had two children and was married to Rabbi Rex Perlmeter of Temple Israel of Greater Miami. She was an instant hit. She served us until 1995, when Rabbi Perlmeter accepted a position as Rabbi of the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation.

Notice that now the Jewish Journal treats us with dignity...

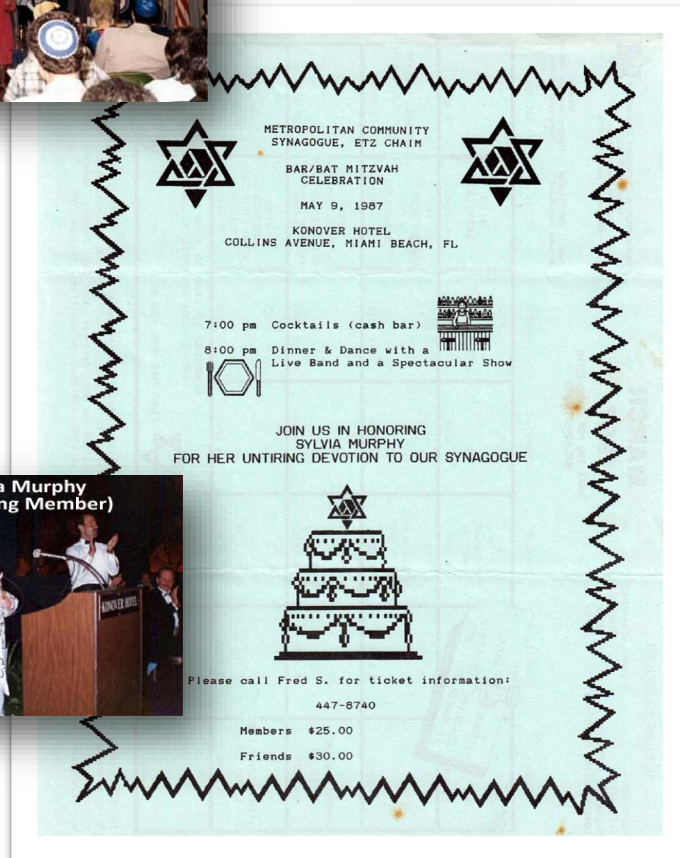


Our History - Our Bar/Bat Mitzvah



In May, 1987 we celebrated our Bar/Bat Mitzvah. We had a full house at the ceremony with Rabbi Rachel Hertzman officiating.

We also had a fabulous party at the Konover Hotel on Miami Beach.



Sylvia Murphy
(Founding Member)

Our History

In 1995 our landlord decided to raise our rent to something we could not afford. After investing so much time and money at 19094 West Dixie Highway we once again had to pack all of our belongings and put them into a warehouse. No one did this for us. We did all the work by ourselves, but where do we go? Fortunately, one of our members was a funeral director at Levitt-Weinstein and we arranged to temporarily use their chapel for our Friday night services. We could not do this forever, as it was a favor, and some of our members felt a little uncomfortable having services in a funeral parlor.

In spite of us having to leave our 17-year home we did come out ahead that year. On July 21, 1995, our Shabbat service was conducted by our new and openly-gay rabbi, Greg Kanter. Rabbi Kanter led us for 7 years as we held services at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Oakland Park. We also rented a separate office in Wilton Manors. Anticipating the arrival of his adopted children and the urge to move on to cooler pastures, in 2002, Rabbi Kanter and his husband Mike moved to Charleston, South Carolina, where he became rabbi at temple Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim. He is now the Rabbi at Temple B'rith Shalom in Springfield, Ill.



Fortunately, we were not too long without a rabbi as Rabbi Catherine Nemiroff conducted her first Shabbat service on November 22nd. Sadly, Rabbi Nemiroff had to leave her post after only a few months of service. We were once again dependent upon lay leadership until March 2005, when Rabbi Harold Caminker became our spiritual and ritual leader. Rabbi Caminker served us for five years. During this time, we were able to take over the units adjacent to our Wilton Manors' office and create an



Our History

absolutely beautiful sanctuary. It was named in memory of our first president Jay Freier. We were able to put up our memorial boards once again and even have a lending library. We had a full time office administrator, Sherry Davidson.



In 2010, we welcomed Rabbi Noah Kitty into the fold. Rabbi Kitty joined our congregation in 2005. When Rabbi Caminker went on to become the rabbinical leader of Temple Beth El in Sarasota FL, Rabbi Kitty stepped in to take his place until 2022 when she decided to follow other paths and life's ambitions. She was with us for over 10 years.



In 2010 we once again became the wandering Jews as our landlord raised our rent to a price beyond which we could afford. It was a very sad time since we put so much time and money into making 1881 N.E. 26th Street into such a beautiful place. Fortunately, Rabbi Kitty had a good working relationship with Rabbi Michael Gold of Temple Beth Torah (later to become Temple Beth Torah Sha'aray Tzedek) in Tamarac, and for two years Rabbi Gold and the Temple were kind enough to let us hold our services in their Chapel. We found that Tamarac was too far for those congregants who lived near Wilton Manors. Sun Trust bank owned a building in Wilton Manors close to 1881 N.E. 26th Street they were not using since they erected a new building next door. They were renting the old building to a church; we sublet it from the church 2013 - 2015. In 2015, we moved to the Pride Center, our current home.

In 2012, our beloved cantorial soloist, Michael Greenspan, who had been with us for 19 years, began to show signs of dementia and was not able to perform in his usual manner. Michael entered an assisted living facility and passed away five years later in 2017. When Michael could no longer serve us, we began our search for another cantorial soloist. One of our members who had dual memberships in both our Synagogue and Temple Beth Torah was friendly with one of Beth Torah's members who not only was a musician, composer, and guitarist,

Our History

but also was educated at prominent Jewish schools in New York. Jerry Berkowitz agreed to be our cantorial soloist and was with us until July 2022. We all loved him.



In August of 2022, Etz Chaim hired Marcia Weinstein as our spiritual leader. She is a Cantorial Soloist and Jewish Educator, as well as a current Rabbinical Student at the Pluralistic Rabbinical Seminary. We are thrilled to have her here!!

Throughout the years, Etz Chaim has been a beacon and home for LGBTQI+ Jews, their families and their friends. We are a place where all people can feel comfortable worshiping G-d and preserving their Jewish culture and heritage. We have been a strong influence as well as integral participant in our community. Our Congregation opens up its heart to all people who believe in living in peace and accepting one another as they are without judgement.



MAZEL TOV

Etz Chaim

On your 50th Anniversary

This is truly a time to rejoice!

**This is the future we envisioned,
when we are free to love whom
we love.**

**May it continue without fear and
without prejudice.**

Thank you for allowing us
To share in this moment.

Love to you all,

Ray Levi and

Scott Halderman

(Ray Levi was our President from 1993 — 1995)

**Congratulations on providing 50 years of loving
memories, spirituality and friendships.**

Gary Brown

**In Honor of Howie Sorkin
and Dr. Murray Lichtenstein and all they have
done for Etz Chaim.**

Todah Rabah

Lyn Saberg & Sharon Cohen

(Lyn Saberg was our President from 2007—2010)

**To Louis, Don and Board of Directors.
Thanks for the memories and the many more to
come in the future.**

Frank Goldsmith

**Congregation Etz Chaim at 50!!!! We celebrate
a wonderful achievement.**

Leah Trachten and Regina Linder



Daniel Smits & Howard Cheiken are happy and honored to be with you to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Congregation Etz Chaim. We have been part of the Congregation for over 40 years.

Etz Chaim is our spiritual center of gravity, a stable source of connection with the community and the strength, joy, comfort and friendships that come with it. We applaud the Rabbis, Cantors, Service Leaders, Governing Boards and Congregation members who have been with us in the past and are with us today, May Etz Chaim continue to flourish and grow.

Congratulations to all members and
friends of Congregation Etz Chaim on
this glorious occasion.

Bill and I look forward to continued
friendship and camaraderie for an-
other fifty years.

Ed Lieberman and Bill Nissen

*In honor of my
lifelong best friend*

Harley Greene

With lots of love,

Noodles

Happy 50th Anniversary Congregation Etz Chaim

In Memory of two founding members

Charles Charens and Sidney Honig

Love from _____

Timothy Kuehne

Thank you for providing a safe home

for my Shabbats

Sylvia, Victor and Paul Rodriguez

Love from _____

Sylvia Kadoch

Congratulations to the committee

For arranging such a beautiful GALA

Thank ou for making Congregation Etz Chaim

my "second home,"

one of warmth, friendship and learning.

Thanks a million from the bottom of my heart

Love from _____

Nina Britton

MAZEL
TOV

50 YEARS
Congregation
Etz
Chaim

ל
ב
נ
ד
י
ג

Proud to be a part...
Right from the start...

It wasn't in our wildest imagination
that we would reach this milestone when we began.



Howie Sarkin

Founding Member



Howie at Etz Chaim's
First Anniversary

David Yalen (member 2,001 to 2,020) sends warm
wishes to Congregation Etz Chaim!
Happy 50th Etz Chaim.

Loving thanks to Howie S and fellow founders for
creating a welcoming home for 50 yrs. MARNA H.

Congratulations to Etz Chaim on achieving a half
century of service to the LGBTQ Jewish Community.
Bob Waterstone. President

Etz Chaim has guided me and my Jewish identity to manifest itself
over the last 8 years. There is a comfort level, never felt before,
where others show an interest in me for who I am.
Adam Perlman

Mazel Tov on our Golden Anniversary
Philip Budashewitz

**The Levin and Oakenell family
would like to give a big**

MAZEL TOV

**to Congregation Etz Chaim on its
Fabulous 50 Year Anniversary.**

**We are so happy to be a part of
this community.**

E Excitement

T Together

Z Zealous

C Charming

H Happy

A Anniversary

I Intriguing

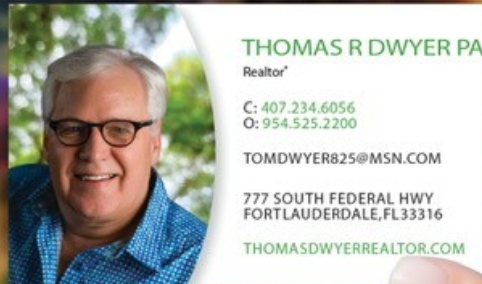
M Motivated

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CONGRATULATIONS AND
BEST WISHES ON YOUR
50TH ANNIVERSARY.



LOVE,
HARLEY GREEN

Mazel Tov on 50 years.
Thank you for being the shul that we met
at
40 years ago.
Sandy Glazer and Mindy Zimmerman

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954 - 564-9232

www.EtzChaimFlorida.org

info@etzchaim.org

PO Box 23399

Oakland Park, FL 33307

Services are held on the Pride Center Campus:

2038 N. Dixie Highway

Wilton Manors, FL 33305