

Shir Libeynu:

Proud Since We Began

The following press release was prepared by our past president, Harriet Eisenkraft, in anticipation of World Pride. Read about our congregation's unique past and how our philosophy is now more widely embraced.

Going to *Shul* With Pride - Queer Rights and Religion at a Toronto Synagogue

Historically, members of the LGBTQ community have not found themselves welcome in most faith groups. But, in Toronto, one Jewish congregation has been supporting their rights and practicing inclusive rites for all for more than a decade. Since 1996, Congregation Shir Libeynu, under the leadership of its co-founder Aviva Goldberg, has been in the forefront of a now-burgeoning movement within modern Judaism and other faith communities to accept and embrace its Queer members.

On June 20, 2014, at 7:30 p.m., the congregation will honour Pride at its eighth annual [Shabbat \(Sabbath\) service](#), "celebrating the diversity in Judaism, welcoming all, straight and LGBTQ, including same-sex couples and their children, for all the milestones and life-cycle rituals. And this has always been the case at Shir Libeynu," says Dr. Goldberg, also a scholar in religious studies and an assistant professor at York University, where she specializes in women's rituals and contemporary Jewish theologies.

Says Dr. Goldberg: "We understand Judaism, liberal or otherwise, to be open to diverse opinions and traditions. *Halacha* (Jewish law) encompasses a range of perspectives, from the quite strict to the quite liberal." The *shul* has always used liturgy, particularly in English, that is non-sexist and sought out prayers from a variety of Jewish sources that are LGBTQ- focussed and inclusive.

This year, the congregation has company among other groups in the Jewish community and beyond. As part of World Pride, an interfaith contingent has emerged in the GTA that will hold a day-long event on June 21, downtown on the grounds of the Metropolitan United Church, where Shir Libeynu will join other religious groups in an outdoor fair, a youth service in the church sanctuary and an end-of Sabbath-service (Havdallah) that Dr. Goldberg will co-lead. Shir Libeynu will also march in the June 29 parade with other religious communities.

Please join us for our Going to *Shul* with Pride service on Friday evening, June 20, in the third-floor chapel of the Miles Nadal JCC, where Shir Libeynu holds its regular monthly services and other events. Dr. Goldberg will lead a participatory service that celebrates the community while also affirming the experiences of LGBTQ individuals around the world, some of them in desperate straits. The service will be song-filled, with musical liturgy led by our *chazzan* (cantorial soloist), Daniela Gesundheit (who is also an indie singer-songwriter with her band, Snowblink). We welcome all, LGBTQs and allies alike.