

Jamie Flagal (President: 2014-2016)

“I have served on the board since 2011 in various capacities including secretary, vice-president, and as president for the past three years. For the past two decades, I have worked as an environmental lawyer with the Province, the focus of my practice being on the development and implementation of legislation and policies that protect Ontario’s water resources. I am like so many others in this community – years ago I too was a shul-less Jew in search of a shul where I felt like I belonged and where I didn’t have to hide any part of myself.

I grew up attending Conservative shuls. In 1992 I came out to my family, which happened to be right around the High Holy Days. That Yom Kippur, the rabbi at our shul decided to give a sermon on why Conservative Judaism can embrace the fight for women’s rights, but would never in a million years recognize the struggle for same-sex couple recognition which was just beginning around that time. Basically he was saying to me – Jamie, you will never be a full member of this community.

The experience alienated me from Judaism for several years. I refused to return to that shul and for years didn’t attend shul even on High Holy Days. I wasn’t sure I’d be able to find a congregation where I could integrate my Jewish and gay identities seamlessly. I started attending Shir Libeynu around 2000. At first, I came to High Holy Day services alone, my family still returning to the same Conservative synagogue out of habit. However, after I told them how much I enjoyed the services, by the third year they started to attend with me – and they, like me, felt immediately at home. My parents in particular fell in love in with the congregation and joined as members.”

During Jamie’s tenure as president, among other feats, he was our High Holy Days coordinator, our representative for World Pride participation in 2014 and at all Pride-related events since 2011. He led the children’s Yom Kippur services, chanted Torah and prayers at many services, facilitated a community-wide conversation about our future, was our liaison to groups that help queer people escape repressive and dangerous regimes, and even pitched in to wash dishes after kiddishes! Jamie is presently on the chevra kadish team as a shiva prayer leader.