

## Gay and Lesbian Inclusion at Temple Beth El of Great Neck

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Two openly gay men have been members of Temple Beth El of Great Neck since 1978; the Temple accepted them for "family membership" in 1980—a first for the Congregation. This family became quite active in many areas of Temple life. In 1987, they became prominent in the national UAHC debate on the issue of gay and lesbian inclusion. That same year, Rabbi Davidson acknowledged that couple's 20th anniversary of their commitment to one another during a regularly scheduled Anniversary Shabbat. All of this was handled in a matter-of-fact way with as little notoriety as possible. The commitment of the Rabbi and the leadership to the inclusion of gays and lesbians into congregational life made it—and the transition to an inclusive community—possible.

Temple Beth El's Board ratified the UAHC resolutions of 1987 and 1989 with no controversy and very little discussion. The Rabbis and the Temple Leadership began using the words "gay" and "lesbian" in sermons and speeches and included the category when speaking either about oppressed groups or about the kinds of families to be included in Temple life. A workshop about gay and lesbian issues was held as part of a larger "Social Action" Beth-El Day program.

In 1989 the Board agreed to the formation of the Gay and Lesbian Inclusion Committee (GLIC) with a combined mandate for both inreach and outreach. The original committee was formed by a gay couple plus three heterosexual couples (parents of gay men or lesbians). Input from other gays (members and non-members) has always been welcomed.

The committee began hosting holiday-associated affairs for the Jewish gay men and lesbians of the larger community. The committee has always been careful to include "families and friends" as well as an invitation to the rest of the congregation. These affairs have included annual Sukkot Pot Luck Suppers, Chanukah parties and Passover Suppers. Members of the clerical staff have been invited and

always say a few welcoming remarks. The Cantor has frequently entertained with appropriate-to-the-holiday's music. These affairs are noted in the regular Temple Bulletin as well as in the local press.

In addition, the committee has brought the issue of AIDS to the larger congregation. Members have presented AIDS workshops for the religious school. The committee also presented an AIDS Havdalah Service for the Congregation and the larger Jewish Community as well as a special AIDS Shabbat Service for the Congregation. Several years ago GLIC began a Chanukah-time toy drive to provide an area hospital's pediatric AIDS unit with gifts for the children. Now, this toy drive for children with AIDS is Temple-wide and supplies toys to nearly twenty Metropolitan New York AIDS facilities. GLIC continues to expand its programming and its integration of social, religious and social action functions within the larger Temple family. In October 1995 the Temple's Brotherhood sponsored a contingent in the local Long Island Walk-a-thon to raise money for AIDS care.

Temple Beth El's journey toward full inclusion reached several milestones. GLIC hosted its first dance for gays and lesbians of the community in the early Spring of 1995. The Gay & Lesbian Inclusion Committee was honored with a Gay Pride Shabbat Service during the Gay Pride Month of June, and finally, before the year ended, at another Shabbat Service, a lesbian couple's upcoming Brit Ahavah (ceremony-of-commitment) was not merely mentioned, but the couple was blessed in front of the Torah by Rabbi Davidson. Finally, along with the Sisterhood, the Brotherhood and the Young Marrieds Club, GLIC was one of the sponsors of a country-western dinner dance for the entire Temple.

A packet of flyers for various GLIC activities follows this page.

With the Temple's Outreach Committee, GLIC has sponsored an Introduction to Judaism course for interfaith gay and lesbian couples and singles.