

Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig Received Doctor of Divinity at HUC-JIR Graduation Ceremony in New York



Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig received a Doctor of Divinity, *honoris causa*, from the **Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR)**. The degree was granted at HUC-JIR's New York Graduation ceremony on Thursday, April 30, 2009 at Congregation Emanu-El of the City of New York. Rabbi Wenig is Lecturer on Liturgy for the School of Sacred Music and Lecturer on Homiletics for the Rabbinical School at HUC-JIR in New York. She is rabbi emerita of **Beth Am, The People's Temple** in New York.

Rabbi David Ellenson, Ph.D., announced HUC-JIR alumni recipients who were awarded honorary Doctorates of Divinity, Music, Jewish Religious Education, and Jewish Communal Service, as well as the Founders' Medallion, in recognition of their 25 years of distinguished professional service.

Rabbi Ellenson said, "As lecturer on liturgy and homiletics, as well as sermon advisor and faculty advisor, Rabbi Wenig has shared her knowledge and expertise with students and faculty at her alma mater for more than two decades."

During Rabbi Wenig's sixteen years at Beth Am, this once-dwindling congregation infused its Shabbat services with new life, greatly expanded its repertoire of liturgical music, trained members of the congregation to lead worship, attracted unaffiliated Jews, reopened its Hebrew School, welcomed lesbian and gay Jews, built bridges between Jews

and Latinos, produced a Hebrew/English/Russian prayer book and created bonds between members 40 years apart in age.

As an instructor in Homiletics in the Rabbinical School of HUC-JIR, Rabbi Wenig has expanded the teaching of preaching way beyond the "Classic Three-Point Sermon" and the "Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them" models. The unpublished textbook Rabbi Wenig compiled may be the only text book for the teaching of homiletics in use in a modern rabbinical seminary.

Rabbi Wenig was ordained at HUC-JIR/NY in 1984. She earned a bachelor's degree with honors from Brown University in 1978. Her undergraduate honors thesis on Mishnah Bikkurim has been published, in sections, by Scholars Press, KTAV and Yale University Press, in larger works by her teacher, Jacob Neusner and his students, William Scott Green and Richard Sarason.

While a member of the Brown University Women's Minyan, Margaret Wenig and Naomi Janowitz edited Siddur Nashim: A Sabbath Prayer Book for Women. Published in 1976, Siddur Nashim was the first prayer book to use feminine images of God. Rabbi Wenig's sermon, "God is a Woman and She is Growing Older," which won a Harper/Collins' Best Sermons Award in 1991, has been published nine times (twice in German translation). Rabbis and ministers from Puerto Rico to Canada have read it aloud to their congregations. The sermon was aired on Chicago Public Television and on cable television's Odyssey channel. Her sermons and articles have appeared in journals such as Reform Judaism, The Reconstructionist, Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, The Living Pulpit, National Bulletin on Liturgy and in anthologies published by Harper Collins, Jewish Lights, Riverhead Books (Penguin Putnam), UAHC, Chalice, Abingdon, Routledge, Westminster/John Knox, Yale, KTAV, Scholars Press and others.

In 1988 Rabbi Wenig appeared on the T.V. soap opera, "All My Children" as a member of the Pastoral Care Network of the AIDS Resource Center. She began ministering to Jews with AIDS in 1985. In April, 1996 she appeared on the New York Public Television program "Informed Choices" speaking about lesbian and gay marriage.

Rabbi Wenig's guidelines, "Welcoming Lesbian and Gay Jews Into Our Congregations" is used in the Reform, Reconstructionist and Conservative Movements. This year, Beth Am will celebrate its 19th annual Lesbian and Gay Pride Shabbat.

In 1985, Rabbis Wenig and Margaret Holub submitted to the Central Conference of American Rabbis the resolution calling for the ordination of openly lesbian and gay Jews as rabbis. That resolution gave birth to the Ad Hoc Committee on Homosexuality and the Rabbinate (on which Rabbi Wenig served) whose report, accepted by the CCAR in 1990, affirmed that all rabbis, "regardless of sexual orientation" should be able to pursue their sacred vocation.

In May 1995, with Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum and Russell Pearce, Rabbi Wenig submitted to the Reform movement's Commission on Social Action the resolution calling for

support for civil marriage for lesbian and gay couples. That resolution was approved by the CSA and submitted, by Rabbi Wenig, to the CCAR. In March 1996 the CCAR overwhelmingly approved the resolution. Rabbi Wenig's essay "Truly Welcoming Lesbian and Gay Jews" in the Jewish Condition: Essays on Contemporary Judaism Honoring Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, UAHC, 1995, is the first published argument to the Jewish Community on behalf of civil marriage for lesbian and gay couples.

In 1995 Wenig was named one of "45 For Tomorrow: A new generation of young leaders to take the New York Jewish Community into the 21st Century" by the New York Jewish Week. In 1999 she won grants from the Fund For Jewish Education and the Coalition for the Advancement in Jewish Education to expand the innovative curriculum she developed for children and parents at Beth Am.

With her recent writing on "Truth Telling in Eulogies," on spiritual resources for family of the mentally ill (with Miriam Frank PhD), and on the training students of homiletics to "listen to the listeners" as well as with the symposium she organized on religious, legal and policy implications of the Transgendered, Rabbi Wenig continues to "push the envelope," broadening the vision of the Jewish community.

Rabbi Wenig grew up in New York City, where she spent nine years as a student at the United Nations International School, attended high school in Connecticut and returned to New York in 1979, where she expects to remain. With her partner, Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, Rabbi Wenig raised two daughters who are fourth generation New Yorkers.

For more information on the HUC-JIR Graduation, Investiture, and Ordination ceremonies in New York, Los Angeles, and Cincinnati, please visit <http://www.huc.edu/newspubs/pressroom/article.php?pressroomid=271>.

Founded in 1875, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion is the nation's oldest institution of higher Jewish education and the academic, spiritual, and professional leadership development center of Reform Judaism. HUC-JIR educates men and women for service to American and world Jewry as rabbis, cantors, educators, and communal service professionals, and offers graduate and post-graduate programs to scholars of all faiths. With centers of learning in Cincinnati, Jerusalem, Los Angeles, and New York, HUC-JIR's scholarly resources comprise renowned library and museum collections, the American Jewish Archives, biblical archaeology excavations, research institutes and centers, and academic publications. HUC-JIR invites the community to an array of cultural and educational programs which illuminate Jewish history, identity, and contemporary creativity and which foster interfaith and multiethnic understanding. Visit us at www.huc.edu.