

# The Miami Herald

August 10, 2013

RELIGION

## NO MORE SECRETS

A PLANTATION MAN CHOSEN TO HEAD A NATIONAL CANTORS' GROUP SAYS IT'S A SIGN OF HOW WELCOMING REFORM JUDAISM HAS BECOME TO LGBT JEWS

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The first time Cantor Mark Goldman attended an American Conference of Cantors convention about 20 years ago, he went to a secret meeting of gay colleagues.

"It was in somebody's hotel room. There were maybe a dozen people," said Goldman, longtime cantor at Temple Kol Ami Emanu-El in Plantation.

At the next year's convention, a few more gay cantors showed up at another word-of-mouth meeting, he said.

Now, secret meetings are out and so is Goldman, who in July was elected national president of the 505-member Reform Jewish cantors conference.

"I see being gay as being a part of me, part of my personality. It's not everything that defines me," said Goldman, 46, who grew up an Orthodox Jew in suburban London.

"I always wanted to be a cantor from a very young age. I enjoyed going to synagogue with my father, and the music in the synagogue spoke to me," he said.

At 18, Goldman studied at an Israeli yeshiva, "a very orthodox learning institution where you delve into the intricacies of Jewish tradition."

The following year, he pursued cantorial studies and an honors bachelor of arts degree in Judaic

• TURN TO CANTOR, 6E



**LEADER:**  
Cantor Mark Goldman at a Friday night service at Temple Kol Ami Emanu-El in Plantation.

ANDREW ULOZA/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD



RELIGION

# Serving openly and joyfully

• CANTOR, FROM 1E

studies at the London School of Jewish Studies. He became the youngest recipient of certification by the United Kingdom's chief rabbi.

Goldman recalls that when the subject of homosexuality came up at an Orthodox high school, "we were told this is something terrible and abhorrent."

"It was very much an inner conflict," he said. "We prayed daily and I remember asking God to take this affliction away from me. That was something I battled with personally for many, many years, up until the time I emigrated into the United States to Rochester, N.Y., where I was a cantor in a Conservative congregation."

Goldman thinks that, subconsciously, being gay led him to America.

"It probably did, but at the time I was looking at coming to the United States as a wonderful opportunity," he said. "I was 24 years old and I looked at Rochester on the map. I saw New York City and I thought, 'Wow, they look really close together. Maybe I could go to New York City for the weekend.'"

At 27, he came out to his parents. "They were extremely surprised, shocked. There were lots of tears, but they were very supportive."

In 1995, Goldman was offered a cantorial position at reform Temple Kol Ami, which merged in 2004 with Temple Emanu-El of Fort Lauderdale.

"I never really had a formal coming out as such. When I came to Temple Kol Ami 18 years ago, it was never a question that was asked. It wasn't something that I put on my resume," Goldman said. "After a short period of time, people knew I was gay."

Goldman's partner of 17 years, Aaron Taber, is a Fort Lauderdale



interior designer.

"I actually met my partner within the first year of me being at Kol Ami," Goldman said. "He started coming to services and I started to slowly introduce him as my boyfriend at the time, as my partner. He is regarded certainly as my spouse in every way. He's given honors in front of the congregation. It's never, ever been an issue."

Said Taber: "At Temple Kol Ami, I'm treated equally to any other spouse of clergy staff. They've always welcomed me as part of the family."

As a cantor, Goldman dedicates himself to progressive, contemporary Judaism.

"He was very influential on both my sons' bar mitzvahs as teacher and mentor," said Kol Ami Emanu-El President Calvin Heltzer.

"There is no one who I could imagine working with who is more professional, caring and innovative. My greatest wish is that Cantor Goldman will remain with our congregation until he's ready to call an end to his career."

Goldman said he sees Reform Judaism "as the antithesis to many traditional kinds of religions that gay people shy away from. If you said the word 'religious' it's a dirty word almost in the gay

community."

Reform Judaism has welcomed gay congregants for many years, and many Conservative congregations have begun embracing LGBT people.

"Hebrew Union College, which is the training school for rabbis and cantors, has graduated *transsexual* rabbis," Goldman said. "The movement is definitely cutting edge, forward thinking and it's something I'm very, very proud to be a part of, especially in terms of religious movements and organizations. They don't always get very good press in terms of the gay community."

Goldman said he has had many important life discussions with congregation members, including youngsters just coming out.

"I felt very happy that I could be a good role model for the kids," he said. "There are a number of kids who have come out, that I've taught or spoken to over the years."

"I suddenly think that my relationship, my openness about who I am to the congregation, to them and their families, has been a very positive influence to them. Also the way in which I've been completely accepted by the congregation, to the point where my partner is recognized as my spouse and sits next to the rabbi's wife."



PHOTOS BY ANDREW ULOZA/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

**PLANTATION:** Mark Goldman of Temple Kol Ami Emanu-El is the first openly gay president of the American Conference of Cantors.