



OUR VISION: 2009-2019

Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel is an historic, visionary synagogue-community with an inspired future. We envision a multi-campus “synagogue center” that will offer the best in contemporary worship, transformational lifelong Jewish learning, meaningful arts and cultural programming, continuing opportunities for deeds of social justice and enhanced connections to Israel and the Jewish world. Deeply committed to our goals and to one another, we will continue to expand our national as well as local reputations and make KI the heart of Reform Judaism in Greater Philadelphia.

OUR CORE VALUES

Kehillah

(Community)

Nurturing and sustaining a strong sense of community and personal belonging in our synagogue.

T'fillot

(Prayer and Spirituality)

Creating diverse, compelling religious services and providing pastoral support for our members and their families.

Limmud

(Sacred Learning)

Providing life-long transformative Jewish learning experiences.

Tikkun Olam

(Social Justice/Repair of the World)

Strengthening social justice through programs both within KI and extending into the larger community.

Ahavat Yisrael

(Jewish Pride/Love of Israel)

Building a strong connection with Israel and the global Jewish community.

Hiddur Mitzvah

(Arts and Culture)

Fostering a deeper appreciation of Jewish living through cultural programming and the arts.

Yahadut Mitkademit

(Reform Judaism)

Maintaining and enriching our historic ties to the Reform Movement.

OUR HISTORY

Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel, widely called KI, was founded in March 1847, the fourth congregation to be established by the expanding Jewish community of Philadelphia. KI adopted Reform in 1855 and thus became the first progressive congregation in Philadelphia. For almost 40 years, KI was the only Reform congregation in Philadelphia.

KI has been led by only eight senior rabbis through its long and distinguished history. Dr. David Einhorn, one of the greatest Jewish intellectuals of his day, a firebrand abolitionist and author of the prayer book which formed the original basis of the Union Prayer Book, was our Rabbi from 1861 to 1866. He was succeeded by Dr. Samuel Hirsch, the former Chief Rabbi of Luxembourg, who was both a scholar and a pioneer in Jewish social services in Philadelphia. Dr. Hirsch was followed by Dr. Joseph Krauskopf, a member of the first graduating class of the Hebrew Union College. Under Dr. Krauskopf, KI briefly became the largest synagogue in the United States. Krauskopf founded the National Farm School (Delaware Valley College) in 1896 and attracted large crowds to his Sunday lectures. In 1924 Dr. William H. Fineshriber was called to the pulpit of Keneseth Israel. He was the first American-born rabbi to serve the congregation and introduced both the Union Prayer Book and the Bar Mitzvah to KI. Dr. Fineshriber was succeeded in 1949 by Dr. Bertram W. Korn, who grew up in KI. Dr. Korn was the first rabbi in American history to have been promoted to “flag” rank as a Rear Admiral in the Navy. Dr. Korn was well-known for his scholarship on Jews in the American Civil War. Rabbi Simeon J. Maslin, elected the sixth Senior Rabbi in 1980, was educated at Harvard University and served as the President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis from 1995-1997. Rabbi Maslin edited *Gates of Mitzvah: Life Cycle* (1979) and *One God, Sixteen Houses* (1990). Previously, Rabbi Maslin served pulpits in Curacao and Chicago. Rabbi Bradley N. Bleefeld followed Rabbi Maslin and served the Congregation from June, 1997 to June, 2000.

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman became Keneseth Israel's eighth Senior Rabbi in July, 2001. He earned his Ph.D. at the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (Cincinnati) and has written several books and numerous articles on American Jewish History. Rabbi Sussman currently serves as national Chair of Publishing for the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR). He is a Trustee of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Advanced Judaic Studies and Delaware Valley College. Rabbi Sussman has taught at SUNY-Binghamton, HUC-JIR (New York) and Princeton. He currently teaches at Temple University. In 1993, the Senior Rabbinic Pulpit at KI was endowed by Dr. and Mrs. Harry Ginsburg, z”l to perpetuate the memory of his mother, Rose K. Ginsburg.

In addition to our Senior Rabbi, KI has an Assistant Rabbi, Kevin M. Kleinman, who was ordained at HUC-JIR (New York) in 2009. Cantor Amy E. Levy came to KI from Tulsa, OK, in 2004. She holds a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of Kansas and graduated from HUC-JIR (New York) in 2000 as a cantor. Brian D. Rissinger joined the Senior Staff as Executive Director in 2006. He previously served at Main Line Reform Temple and Federation Early Learning Services and brought to KI 28 years of non-profit management experience. Our Director of Religious Education is Rabbi Stacy Eskovitz Rigler (HUC-JIR, New York, 2003), who also holds a Master of Arts in Jewish Education. The director of the Richard E. Rudolph, Jr., Preschool, Beth Berman, holds an M.S. in Early Childhood Education from the University of Pennsylvania.

KI is affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ).
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