



PRESS RELEASE



CONGREGATION
KOL AMI

Congregation Kol Ami | 252 Soundview Avenue White Plains, NY 10606
914.949.474 | www.nykolami.org

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Joanne Wallenstein
Scarsdale10583.com
914-980-4803

Congregation Kol Ami of White Plains Wins Prestigious Belin Award For Audacious Hospitality in LGBTQ Inclusion Initiatives

White Plains, NY: Congregation Kol Ami, a Reform Jewish Synagogue, is pleased to announce that they have received the **2017 Belin Award from the Union for Reform Judaism**. As part of the URJ's vision of Audacious Hospitality, out of over 900 Reform Congregations in North America, Kol Ami is 1 of only 8 URJ Congregations to receive this award for 2017.

This award is given to synagogues that display exemplary work in engaging current members and welcoming people in thoughtful and creative ways. In order to win this award, Kol Ami showed how dedicated they are to be providing a greater level of understanding and commitment to the LGBTQ community with such things as an Annual Pride Shabbat, gender neutral bathroom facilities, an LGBTQ Bulletin Board full of resources and outreach, and specific new inclusionary prayers in their Shabbat and High Holy Day Prayer Books.

Kol Ami also hosted numerous events in the last two years which were open to not just their congregants, but to anyone in the local Westchester communities. Some of the featured speakers included, *Zachary Drucker*; Producer and Actress in the Golden Globe winning TV series "Transparent", *Marc Solomon*; National Campaign Director for "Freedom to Marry", *Andrew Solomon*; author of the best-selling book "Far From the Tree", and *Max Antman*; Legislative Assistant at the Religious Action Center and an advocate on Capitol Hill.

As Rabbi Tom Weiner said when he spoke to the Kol Ami congregation in his sermon on Rosh Hashanah "In all prayers, songs, Torah Readings, mediations, responsive readings.... The LGBTQ community was invisible. The way women used to be; the way people with disabilities use to be; the way non-Jews use to be. There we'd be, sitting at our meetings of the Board, or the staff, or the clergy, or the school committee patting ourselves on the back at how accepting we are. But apparently we weren't doing a very good job of saying it out loud, saying it clearly enough or often enough, or directly to the people who need to hear it the most. So now we are making sure we are."

Congregation Kol Ami will be recognized for this milestone accomplishment at the 2017 URJ Biennial in Boston, MA this December. If you have further interest in Congregation Kol Ami please visit:
www.nykolami.org