



For Immediate Release

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ESHEL HOSTS FIRST-EVER WEEKEND RETREAT IN FLORIDA FOR LGBTQ+ ORTHODOX JEWS TO CREATE NEEDED COMMUNITY DUE TO POLITICAL POLARIZATION, NOVEMBER 15-16, 2024, HOLLYWOOD

HOLLYWOOD, FLORIDA – November 7, 2024 - Eshel, which creates LGBTQ+ inclusive Orthodox Jewish communities, is hosting its first weekend retreat for LGBTQ+ Orthodox Jews and parents in South Florida on November 15-16, 2024, in Hollywood, responding to increasing emotional needs and political polarization impacting this community.

Eshel (www.eshelonline.org) regularly hosts national retreats for LGBTQ+ parents and individuals to find strength and joy in community, and is now responding directly to appeals for community building and emotional support among their Florida constituents as the political climate has brought LGBTQ+ issues to the forefront.

One of Eshel's members in Florida, Brian Mandel, [picketed outside his synagogue](#) Kehillas Hollywood Hill, where he had been an active member, after the Rabbi kicked him out last January for being gay.

Daniel Gammerman, a gay Jew living in Miami, [has also struggled to find a synagogue](#) that both fits his religious observance and is welcoming to him as an LGBTQ+ Jew. While Eshel maintains a list of over 270 LGBTQ+-friendly Orthodox synagogues nationwide through its Welcoming Shuls Project, there are fewer welcoming synagogues in Florida than in places like New York.

Eshel has LGBTQ+ and parent members available to be interviewed about their experiences within the Orthodox community.

When issues relating to LGBTQ+ people are on the ballot as they have been in Florida, LGBTQ+ Orthodox Jews often get caught in the crossfire. "When the conversation everyone's having at kiddush is about whether the LGBTQ+ community is

accepted or not, many LGBTQ+ people in the community feel targeted or othered,” says Miryam Kabakov, Eshel’s co-Founder and Executive Director.

The Eshel retreat will bring together observant LGBTQ+ Jews as well as Orthodox parents who have LGBTQ+ children. What unites them all is wanting to see their local community be more welcoming. By providing an opportunity for these individuals and families - often isolated in their own synagogue - to come together for the first time, Eshel hopes to encourage their strength and joy in being together

“In Florida, many of the day schools and yeshivot are inhospitable for LGBTQ+ teens. Eshel supports parents in advocating for their children, but we need the community to build more support. School leaders need to know they have a base of support to feel comfortable responding in this highly charged political environment,” Kabakov says.

That’s why Eshel is also hosting an Allies Training in Boca Raton. Boca’s Jewish community has the highest density of Jews in South Florida, and its Orthodox community has expanded rapidly in the past two years. Eshel hopes this Allies Training will help build momentum for support for LGBTQ+ inclusion in the local Jewish institutions. The training, which is open to any community members, will help attendees build their confidence in supporting LGBTQ+ individuals and identify ways they can advocate within their home communities.

Eshel (eshelonline.org) :

Co-founded in 2010 by Miryam Kabakov and Rabbi Steven Greenberg, Eshel helps LGBTQ+ Orthodox Jewish individuals and their families build LGBTQ+ inclusive Orthodox Jewish communities.

Eshel proactively reaches out to Orthodox leaders through consultations, trainings, and events, and it supports LGBTQ+ Orthodox Jewish individuals and their families through its warmline, support groups, mentoring, and a community network.

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