



# Advocacy Update

Sent December 22, 2010

## **World's First Woman Rabbi, Regina Jonas, Ordained in 1935**

December 27, 2010 is the seventy-fifth anniversary of the ordination of the world's first woman rabbi, Regina Jonas of Berlin, who perished in Auschwitz in 1944. Commemorating the anniversary of Rabbi Jonas' ordination, Berlin's Centrum Judaicum is holding an exhibit that pays tribute to this remarkable woman rabbi, her struggle, and her achievements. Rabbi Walter Homolka, chairman of the Abraham Geiger College at Potsdam University, and a former WRJ scholarship recipient, was one of the speakers at the opening of the exhibit on December 4, 2010. Abraham Geiger College, founded in 1999, is the first liberal rabbinical seminary in continental Europe since the Holocaust.

## **WRJ Advocacy on Behalf of Women's Equality in Judaism**

Following-up on the news of the seventy fifth anniversary of Rabbi Jonas' ordination, we thought you would find WRJ Immediate Past President Rosanne Selfon's statement on WRJ's longstanding role in seeking women's equality in Jewish life very meaningful.

“Women of Reform Judaism advocacy on behalf of women has been a key element in our social justice platform since our founding in 1913. Our voices continue to blend together, strong and resilient, to speak out for women's rights and equality.

In many of our Torah portions, we read that women are unnamed or unrecognized. Women's roles in the development of our people were not easily understood or identified. What then did WRJ do to ensure that women would have voice and presence in our Reform Movement?

We joined together in 1913 to speak with one united voice for women in all Reform congregations. We came together to accomplish what neither an individual woman nor a local sisterhood could do. We came together to partner with God to heal our broken world. We came together to ensure that women's voices would make a difference. Like the women's rights movement, our organization and Reform Judaism evolved. WRJ (formerly NFTS, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods) worked to guarantee that women would have the same religious leadership opportunities offered to men, including the rabbinate.

In 1935 in Germany, Regina Jonas became the first woman worldwide to receive her s'michah – rabbinic ordination. Before Regina and her mother perished in Auschwitz, Regina preached and counselled, even in the camps. Most recently in 2010 at Abraham Geiger Kolleg, Rabbi Alina Treiger, a WRJ scholarship recipient, became the first woman to be ordained in Germany since Regina. How proud WRJ is to have supported Rabbi Treiger in her journey to become a rabbi.

In America, we witnessed the rabbinic ordination of Rabbi Sally Priesand in 1972 at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. It is important to recognize the early support given by NFTS through its assembly resolutions in 1961 and 1963 calling for the consideration of ordination of women as rabbis.

As early as 1923 at its 5th biennial assembly, NFTS resolved that ‘the Executive Board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations [today the Union for Reform Judaism] grant the same privilege and consideration to representatives of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, as shown by other organizations.’ In 1967 at the 26th biennial assembly, the women resolved that the movement must initiate seating NFTS representatives on committees and commissions. Having WRJ's voice at the tables of the Reform movement remains critical. Indeed, our organization has always advocated for women to

*For more information on WRJ and Social Justice, visit [www.wrj.org/social-justice-home](http://www.wrj.org/social-justice-home)*

stand shoulder to shoulder with men whether on the bimah or at the board table.

What does this mean for us today? We must ensure that WRJ's advocacy history is acknowledged. We must continue to speak out if there is an inequity in our congregations between women and men. We must offer NFTY and camp scholarships to girls and to boys. We must stand ready to speak on issues when inconsistency or inequality abounds.

To quote Regina Jonas: 'God does not oppress any human being.' We do Rabbi Jonas and all those who strengthened our paths honor by remaining vigilant that we treat all our fellow human beings with equality."