

## VISION AWARDS HONOR GINGER JACOBS AND SCHMITT-YOUNG GROUP, KICK OFF 50TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR

*Larry Nathenson, Editor*

An estimated 260 BCC members and friends gathered virtually on Sunday, May 2, at 11:00 am for a joyous celebration of the achievements and generosity of BCC congregant Ginger Jacobs and of the Schmitt-Young Group at Morgan Stanley, its partners Steven Schmitt and Kyle Young, and their respective spouses Paul Bellaff and Steven Salton. In addition to the presentation of awards to these highly deserving honorees, the event featured star-studded entertainment and kicked off a year-long celebration of the 50th anniversary of BCC's founding in 1972.

The BCC Presidents Award was established in 2003 to recognize outstanding BCC members for their dedicated service and leadership within the congregation and in the community at large. Few recipients have been more deserving of this award than Ginger Jacobs. An honorary member since 1973, Ginger chose BCC as her new Jewish home in 1988. She has served BCC in many roles, including as Board member and Vice President, chair of the Ritual, Social Action, and Education Committees, founding member of the Books and Bagels group, teacher of popular classes including challah baking, and most recently as co-chair of the Rabbinic Search Committee that brought Rabbi Jillian Cameron to BCC last year. She was active in Nechama, a Jewish response to AIDS, which began at BCC in the 1980s. Ginger has participated in Jewish community and social justice work since her youth. She was involved in the anti-Vietnam War movement and later helped resettle refugees in the U.S. She worked to integrate the LA school system and to bring the Olympics to LA in 1984. She has also served on the North American Board of the Union for Reform Judaism and several of its national and regional committees.



Ginger was introduced during the pre-recorded show by members of her family (AKA the "Bubbe bunch" consisting of her four children, their spouses, and eight grandchildren) and by close BCC friends Elizabeth Savage, Ellie Herscher, Michael Main, Marie-Jeanne Lambert and Sandy Rubenstein. Her acceptance speech focused largely on the role of her parents in inculcating in her their Jewish values of social justice, activism, and speaking up for what is right. She concluded by saying that "after my family and my Judaism, BCC is my everything."

Since 1985, the Rabbi Erwin and Agnes Herman Humanitarian Award at BCC has honored individuals and organizations that have made outstanding contributions to the Jewish and LGBTQ+ communities. This year's recipients are honored collectively for their visionary philanthropy to LGBTQ+ communities and as special friends to BCC over the years (*in photo, left to right: Paul Bellaff, Steven Schmitt, Kyle Young, Steven Salton*). Since 2001, the

Schmitt-Young Group has developed a strong and collaborative practice that focuses on serving the specialized needs of LGBTQ+ Americans and their allies. They work with clients and corporations to bring education and clarity to the financial aspects of the ever-changing landscape of LGBTQ+ rights, specifically marriage equality. They understand that communities require care, support, nurturing and attention in order to thrive. Both in their personal lives and in the philanthropy and activism of the Schmitt-Young Group at Morgan Stanley, Steven and Kyle are making a meaningful difference in the world. Having overcome various health and financial adversities in their youth, Steven and Kyle feel an obligation to give back and have donated time, energy, and money to charitable causes.



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es and to making the world a better and more inclusive place for their communities.

The honorees were introduced with testimonials from staff members of the Schmitt-Young Group, representatives of several community partners including One Archive and the Gay Men’s Chorus of LA, BCC’s Rabbi Emerita Lisa Edwards and lezbetzn Tracy Moore, and BCC members Ira Dankberg and Rob Schoenberger, Hannah Theile and Kenna Love. Their acceptance remarks included short vignettes of all four of them with a focus on the community responsibility they feel as part of their core value of “mission over money.”

BCC member Adam Kulbersh wrote and directed the pre-recorded show and also co-produced it with 6W Entertainment, a production company created in early 2020 by Erich Bergen in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and which has produced over 50 television specials and virtual events. As host of the show, Adam began with a hilarious skit in which he arrives at an empty Skirball Center ballroom expecting to host the Vision Awards in person, and then encounters several difficulties over the course of the hour including a flat tire and hiking an overgrown trail to get home, only to find his young son Jack sitting unsupervised at the computer. Adam introduced BCC’s Rabbi Jillian Cameron and President Jay Jacobs as well as several of the entertainers including a cameo appearance on his phone by TV star Bebe Neuwirth. During the live VIP pre-show, Adam interviewed comedian, author, and podcaster Judy Gold and introduced 18-year-old singer-songwriter Mick Simeone performing his original song “Normal.”



The pre-recorded show featured performances by Broadway star and recording artist Shoshana Bean singing “Piece of Sky” from “Yentl,” actress and singer Keala Settle singing “What the World Needs Now (is Love),” and the Gay Men’s Chorus of LA singing Garth Brooks’s “We Shall be Free.” BCC’s Cantor Juval Porat offered a musical prayer for peace with BCC clergy, choir members, and children.

The Vision Awards not only celebrate accomplished humanitarians but are also BCC’s major fundraising effort each year. Mayim Bialik, star of “The Big Bang Theory” and an accomplished director, author, and neuroscientist,

announced a fundraising campaign for technology upgrades needed to enable BCC to reopen its doors for in-person services while maintaining our virtual accessibility as well. Donations to this effort may be made at [www.bcc-la.org/visionawards/donations](http://www.bcc-la.org/visionawards/donations).

Broadway star, vocalist, and noted celebrity impersonator Nicole Parker presented surprise guest celebrities Adele, Ellen De Generes, Celine Dion, Diane Keaton, and Dame Julie Andrews who sang our thanks to this year’s many generous sponsors --Presenting Sponsors (\$50,000+) Steven Schmitt and Paul Bellaff, Kyle Young and Steven Salton, and the Schmitt-Young Group at Morgan Stanley; Sapphire Sponsors (\$10,000) Robin Berkovitz and Laurie Newman, Marsha Epstein and Aviyah Farkas, Jerry Hanson and Les Zendle, and Brett Trueman; Emerald Sponsors (\$7,500) Steve Hochstadt and Steve Sass; Ruby Sponsor (\$5,000) Allison Diamant; and Topaz Sponsors (\$3,000) Ahavah Brooks, Ira Dankberg and Rob Schoenberger, Diane Goodman and Nicolasa Nevarez, Jay Jacobs, Mark Miller, Larry Nathenson, and Eldon Teper. More than 50 other individuals, couples, groups, and organizations purchased premium tickets to view the show and placed tributes in the tribute book.

G’vanim “Hues (of the rainbow)” is the bimonthly newsletter of BETH CHAYIM CHADASHIM 6090 W. Pico Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90035 Temple Office Hours: Monday - Thursday: 10:00 - 5:00 pm Friday: 10:00 - 4:30 pm Phone: (213) 290-6139 E-mail: [bcc@bcc-la.org](mailto:bcc@bcc-la.org) Website: [www.bcc-la.org](http://www.bcc-la.org) Rabbi Jillian Cameron and Cantor Juval are happy to hear from you. Please reach out to schedule an appointment.

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Editor: Larry Nathenson. Graphic Design: Maggie Boyles. Articles should be typed and emailed or attached as Word documents to [Larrynath@aol.com](mailto:Larrynath@aol.com) by the 20th of the month before publication. To subscribe, send name and address and a check or money order for \$18 per year, attention: Newsletter Subscriptions. Free to BCC members.

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Space limitations preclude thanking all of the many additional individuals who worked hard to make this event a success. As chair of the Event Committee, Brett Trueman coordinated all of the efforts and worked tirelessly as a fundraiser and publicist. The Event Committee also included Mark Farber, Erin Katz, Barbara Kroll, Adam Kulbersh, Larry Nathenson, Laurie Newman, Mike Radice, and Lauren Schlau. The tribute book was edited by Larry Nathenson and Barbara Kroll, with Shantal Freedman as graphic designer. Hirsh Fishman served as event website designer, with Maggie Boyles as social media coordinator. Chefs Laurie Newman and Joan Spitzer created the gourmet baskets delivered to sponsors and premium ticketholders on the morning of the event. The hard work of these and many other individuals was well appreciated, as reflected in the Zoom “chats” at the end of the show, proclaiming it “awesome,” “beautifully and professionally done,” and “a wonderful, uplifting show.”

The Vision Awards presentation was also the first of many events being planned to celebrate BCC’s 50th anniversary year, which we hope will be capped by an in-person gala next year. Read more on pages 6 through 8 about what BCC has accomplished in its first 49 years.

## SHAVUOT EVENING SERVICE INCLUDES VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION

*Rabbi Jillian Cameron and Cantor Juval Porat*



Dear Friends,

Throughout BCC’s almost 50 year history, our community has been built and held up by our incredible members, volunteers like you. You have given of your time and your hearts to create an inclusive, celebratory Jewish community that welcomes everyone and

offers diverse and meaningful opportunities to connect.

During this past year, we had to shift what we do in so many ways, and yet our volunteers haven’t missed a beat! You have learned the intricacies of Zoom, adapted alongside our whole community and, in doing so, allowed our members to stay connected and reach people all across the country and even the world. You have added wisdom and poetry to our holiday celebrations, even read Torah in the parking lot! You have protected our sacred space as Zoom gatekeepers and offered friendly faces and helpful information as moderators and hosts. You have called fellow members who feel isolated or are struggling with health, maintained *yahrzeit* and healing lists, and worked tirelessly on our Board of Directors, and you give your time and expertise with your whole hearts.

We couldn’t do what we do without you. Our gratitude for all of our invaluable volunteers is immeasurable. And so, we would like to celebrate you and every volunteer at BCC and offer you a special blessing of gratitude.

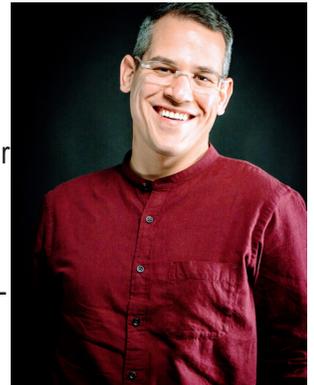
During Shavuot, we rejoice in the revelation of Torah, of the Divine and the sacred within us. On the night of Shavuot, when we hold the collective memories of all of us having gathered at Mount Sinai, we look to you, our volunteers, pillars of our community, who lift us up with your light,

devotion and dedication.

We invite you to join us on Sunday, May 16th at 8:00 pm for a very special ritual in appreciation of you and all of our volunteers during our Shavuot service.

Thank you for all you have done for our beloved community. We can’t wait to honor your many contributions together.

Rabbi Jillian Cameron  
Cantor Juval Porat



—  
Join us as we celebrate the giving of Torah, the offerings of Jewish tradition and the choice we each make to participate actively in Jewish life.

6:00-6:30 pm - Pre-Shavuot celebration with Rabbi Jillian Cameron and Cantor Juval Porat on Instagram live

7:00-7:30 pm - Yizkor service on Zoom

7:30-8:00 pm - Shavuot Study session I on Zoom and Facebook live

8:00-8:40 pm - Shavuot service, featuring a special appreciation of our volunteers and the reading of the Ten Commandments

8:40-9:10 pm - Shavuot study session II on Zoom and Facebook live

For registration links, please check out our website (<https://www.bcc-la.org/erev-shavuot/>)

## PREPARING FOR PRIDE MONTH, CONGREGATIONAL MEETING, AND A NEW NORMAL



Jay Jacobs, President

I'm still basking in the glow of our virtual Vision Awards event and just kvelling. It was a special afternoon for Ginger, Steven & Paul, and Kyle & Steven. This was my first opportunity to introduce our inspiring new Rabbi, Jillian Cameron, to the community. The musical portions did not disappoint either, with Cantor Juval Porat and Cantorialist

Emerita Fran Chalin singing with our choir, a song premiere by the Gay Men's Chorus of LA, and the surprise finale with musical guests. So many volunteers helped out to make this an amazing success. Check out more details of the event in the article on page 1.

As we approach our annual congregational meeting on Sunday, July 11, change is in the air. Since Elizabeth Savage stepped back from the Executive Vice President position in the fall, I have recently appointed BCC Board member Jessica Donath to fill that position until the new Executive Committee is seated in September and perhaps beyond. The Board voted to confirm Jessica at our April meeting. Jessica has been very active in our website redesign and communications behind the scenes. Please join me in welcoming Jessica to her new volunteer leadership role at BCC. This is also an opportunity for me to express my heartfelt thanks to Elizabeth for her many, many years of service and dedication to our community.

This is also the June edition of G'vanim, and that means LGBTQ+ pride month is right around the corner. Let's keep going with the social media challenge. For this edition, share with us your rainbow pride and what it means to you on social media using the hashtag #BCCPride.

As the temperatures start rising for summer, this year brings the promise of a new normal. We are not sure what this means for BCC yet exactly, but the clergy and Executive Committee have already started discussing how to proceed. We are committed to making our reopening as safe as possible for congregants and visitors. Personally, I am very much looking forward to tashlich on the beach. Ah, but I'm getting ahead of myself.



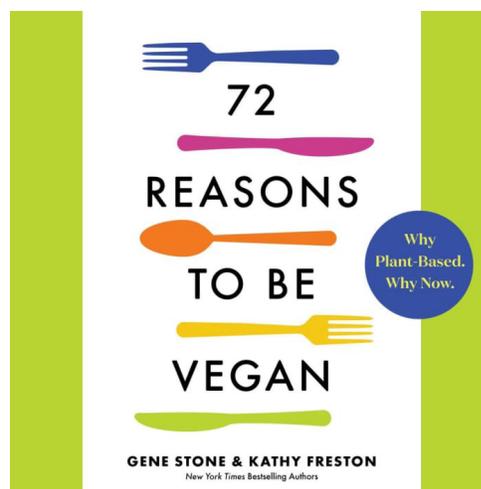
## VEGAN CHALLENGE EVENT WITH AUTHOR GENE STONE

Meet noted author and proponent of plant-based diets, Gene Stone, at 1 p.m. PDT on June 6, live on Zoom.

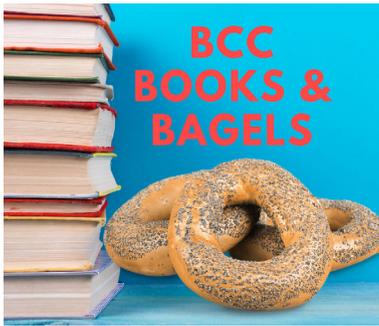


Gene has authored, co-written, or ghostwritten more than 50 books, six of which were #1 national bestsellers, and 15 of which were *New York Times* bestsellers.

Among them are *Forks Over Knives: The Plant-Based Way to Health* and *How Not to Die* (with Dr. Michael Greger). Gene will start off by giving a short talk on what he does and how he got to where he



is in his career. He'll also discuss his new book, *72 Reasons to be Vegan*. This will be followed by a Q&A session. The event is hosted by Congregation Beth Chayim Chadashim and is co-sponsored by Shamayim: Jewish Animal Advocacy. [Click here to register.](#)



## BCC BOOKS AND BAGELS

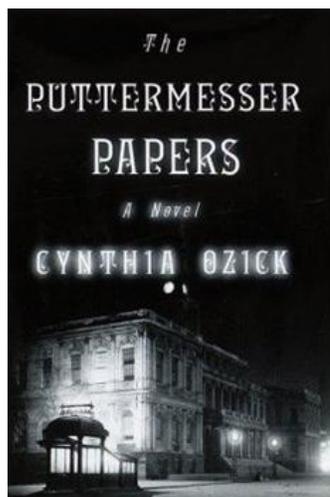
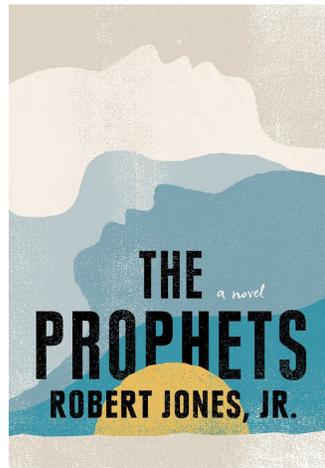
Larry Nathenson

BCC's Book Group (Books and Bagels) has been meeting continuously since January

1995. The group usually meets monthly in members' homes for a bagel brunch and discussion of a book selected by the group (although now we are meeting by Zoom until further notice). We read a variety of books: fiction and non-fiction, American and Israeli, historical and contemporary. The only requirement is some Jewish content (LGBT content is a plus, but not required). Our next two meetings are as follows.

**Sunday, May 30, 10:00 am on Zoom**  
***The Prophets*, by Robert Jones, Jr.**

This is a novel of two male slaves in the antebellum South whose intimate relationship is challenged by other slaves and their masters through the words of the Biblical prophets and the weight of centuries.



**Sunday, June 27, 10:00 am on Zoom**  
***The Puttermesser Papers*, by Cynthia Ozick**

This novel by a noted Jewish feminist author is about a Jewish woman who becomes mayor of New York City.

The group is open to BCC members and non-members, and you are welcome

to join us for a particular book that may interest you. RSVP is required. For more information or to register for the Zoom link, contact Larry Nathenson at [larrynath@aol.com](mailto:larrynath@aol.com).



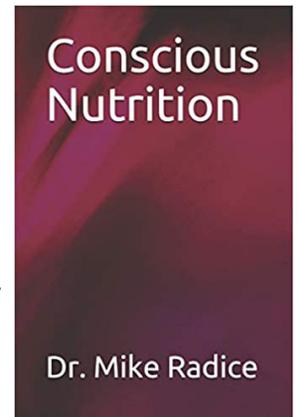
The Life Transitions Group is for those who are dealing with losses, changes in relationships, or career, social, family, or health issues. It helps to build emotional strength by sharing your feelings with others in a supportive and confidential atmosphere.

The group is led by social worker Shirley Hirschberg and now meets on Zoom, the first and third Wednesday evenings of each month. Please contact Shirley to see if this group is right for you and to register for the meeting at [shirschberg1@gmail.com](mailto:shirschberg1@gmail.com).



We wish a hearty "mazel tov" to these BCC members on their recent achievements.

**Dr. Mike Radice** has published a book entitled ***Conscious Nutrition***. Amazon describes it as follows: "This book is about the cross-section of eating, self-care, and spiritual development and how one supports the other. Everyone hungers for something: spiritual growth, health, sex, power, money, connection, communication, love. We often hunger for more than one of those things at a time. Hunger for at least one drives us as a human species. This book focuses on the craving for food and how that can help satisfy the hunger for spiritual connection, the ultimate goal being the hunger for nothing."



BCC members **Barbara Kroll and Ruth Spielman** are marking 42 years together and will have the story of their first date included in a virtual salon show produced by The Braid, formerly Jewish Women's Theatre. Their story, "Love in an Envelope" is one of several narratives that will be presented by a troupe of professional actors as part of the show "*The Rest is History*." **Performances will be on May 15, May 16, May 20, and May 24.**

[Tickets are available here.](#)

If you have good news to share, please forward it to G'veanim editor Larry Nathenson at [larrynath@aol.com](mailto:larrynath@aol.com).

# BCC IN ITS 50TH YEAR

*This short history of BCC was prepared by Larry Nathenson and Barbara Kroll for the 2021 Vision Awards tribute book.*

Since 1972, Beth Chayim Chadashim (House of New Life) has been a pioneer in promoting diversity and inclusiveness in Jewish life in Los Angeles and beyond. Founded by gay men and lesbians, BCC is now a thriving congregation that also welcomes bisexual, transgender, and non-binary Jews, Jews by choice and Jews of color, progressive straight Jewish and non-Jewish allies, and all who share our values. BCC offers spiritual, educational, and community service, an innovative family-based religious school, and a variety of cultural activities throughout the year. Ten years ago this spring, we marched with our beloved Torahs to dedicate our new spiritual home at 6090 W. Pico Blvd.



## ***Part One: Our 50th year as a safe and ever growing space to be all of who we are***

When BCC was founded in April 1972, same-sex activity between consenting adults was illegal, homosexuality was still classified as a mental illness, and to be openly lesbian or gay often meant loss of employment, rejection by family, and ostracism from the Jewish community. The idea of a safe Jewish space for gay men and lesbians began with four Jews who showed up for a weekly rap group at Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), the first gay-oriented non-denominational Christian church, which was itself less than four years old. Encouraged by MCC's Reverend Troy Perry, these Jews held Jewish services in MCC's building until it was destroyed in a fire of suspicious origin on January 26, 1973, the same night that BCC's name was selected. BCC then became a wandering shul, meeting at Leo Baeck Temple, a dance studio, and MCC's new LA home before purchasing a storefront at 6000 W. Pico Blvd. in 1977.

During the more than 30 years that 6000 W. Pico remained BCC's home, many of our members dreamed of a larger space but didn't think we could afford it. Spearheaded by then BCC President Brett Trueman, a very successful capital campaign enabled us to purchase a nearby building at 6090 W. Pico in 2009. Dedicated in April 2011 after extensive renovations, BCC's new home had a full kitchen, offices for our clergy, and a library and classroom. The new building was LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) qualified for its "green" features such as solar panels on the roof, recycled materials for insulation and carpeting, and drought-resistant landscaping. It also contained such member-created works of art as our beautiful stained glass windows and the "story lines" project of engraved copper strips on the sanctuary wall (see photo).



## ***Part Two: Our 50th year of Jewish engagement and pioneering liturgy and learning***

In 1974, only two years after its founding, BCC  
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applied for admission to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now Union for Reform Judaism). Despite opposition from some more traditional rabbis, BCC became the first primarily gay and lesbian congregation of any faith to be accepted by a mainstream denomination. During its early years, BCC was a pioneering congregation in egalitarian worship with lay service leaders and the creation of life cycle rituals for lesbian and gay individuals and couples. At a time when most temples (including Reform ones) still used male language for God, BCC member Harriet Perl, z'l, initiated the creation of the first prayerbook with degenderized language in English. In 1986, Jewish feminist scholar Savina Teubal, z'l, created the simchat chochmah (celebration of wisdom) liturgy for her 60th birthday and introduced the now well-known song "Lechi Lach," composed by Savina and Debbie Friedman, z'l, a talented composer and singer who helped revitalize Jewish music in the last two decades of the 20th century. Our tradition of creative liturgy continues today. We use our own Shabbat evening prayerbook compiled by our clergy and members with many unique prayers and readings that speak to our community. Our monthly egalitarian Shabbat morning minyan serves those who prefer a more traditional experience.



With its predominantly adult membership, BCC has long had an active adult education program with weekly Torah study, prominent guest speakers on feminist and LGBTQ+ Jewish topics, and group adult b'nai mitzvah ceremonies. BCC helped create the Queer Jewish Think Tank for queer Talmud study and has helped nurture a new generation of queer clergy now serving in congregations throughout the country. As more BCC members have created families with children, BCC also inaugurated an innovative program of intergenerational learning with its Ohr Chayim religious school.

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### **Part Three: Our 50th year of fighting for equality and justice**

Beyond providing a safe space for our members, BCC has always promoted its values of equality and justice in the larger society of which we are a part. BCC was a founding member of the World Congress of GLBT Jews, now a worldwide organization of synagogues and other Jewish groups. Closer to home, our first ordained rabbi, Janet Marder, inaugurated a speakers bureau to promote acceptance of lesbian and gay Jews in the LA Jewish community in the 1980s. BCC members also engaged in community outreach programs such as Project Caring, leading monthly Shabbat services in convalescent homes (see photo). Over the years, our Tzedakah Council has pooled BCC members' donations to contribute to a myriad of worthy charities in LA and around the world.



In the 1980s BCC and the larger gay community were devastated by the new disease of HIV/AIDS. While mourning the loss of numerous members at relatively young ages, BCC's clergy and congregation rose to the occasion to comfort each other and the broader public. We sponsored dinners at BCC for Persons with AIDS (PWAs) and their partners, brunches for hospitalized PWAs, and inaugurated a new speakers bureau to

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educate the Jewish community. Rabbi Marder and BCC president Les Zendle, along with BCC member Dr. Mark Katz, created Nechama: A Jewish Response to AIDS. Later a part of Jewish Family Service, this organization continues as Project Chicken Soup, providing nutritious kosher meals for PWAs and others throughout the LA area.

Rabbi Lisa Edwards, who served BCC for 25 years from 1994 to 2019, played a leading role in the opposition to the infamous Proposition 8 that threatened to revoke marriage equality for same-sex couples in 2008. She performed more than 40 weddings during the summer and fall of that year and also married her own partner, lezbtzn Tracy Moore, in a ceremony performed by Representative Karen Bass (see photo). Rabbi Edwards also joined with clergy of other faiths in the LA area to promote social justice for the homeless population and other marginalized groups through such organizations as One LA. Our current clergy, Rabbi Jillian Cameron and Cantor Juval Porat, continue the BCC tradition of advocating for equality and justice within our community and in the larger society of which we are a part.



#### **Part Four: Our 50th year of celebration and music**

At BCC, we know how to party! From our outrageous Purim spiels and Hanukkah parties to our annual awards brunches, we have always celebrated with a uniquely gay flair! And we have often shared our passion with the wider community, as we did with our reunion of Holocaust survivor Torah scrolls housed by congregations throughout Southern California in 2005 (see photo).



BCC was known as a singing congregation even before we had professional cantorial leadership. Our tradition of participatory services from our first years with lay leadership continued with Cantor Don Croll and later Cantorialist Fran Chalin. All helped shape our love of both sacred music and folk music while creating and nurturing a choir and our Gay Gezunt klezmer band (see photo). Our innovative monthly Ruach Chayim musical Shabbat services began about 15 years ago, adding to our tradition of musical spirituality.



Since his arrival at BCC in 2009, Cantor Juval Porat, the first cantor invested in Germany since World War II, has deepened BCC's appreciation for music as an integral part of our liturgy and our congregational life. His annual December concerts have attracted musical talent from around Southern California, and his CDs and original compositions have rejuvenated BCC's musical legacy.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Rabbi Cameron and Cantor Porat have found numerous innovative ways to comfort those who feel isolated and to continue celebrating our community and our Jewish heritage. (see photo below of our clergy flying through space and time from our virtual 2021 Purim spiel). And in this new digital age, with geographic distance no longer an obstacle to participation in BCC services and programs, congregants outside the LA area have become more connected than ever before.

