

JPrude Cincinnati Kicks Off First Meeting

By: Andrea Nadel
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Last month, *Equinox Cincinnati's* gay pride parade rolled through downtown, drawing many positive reviews. Later in the same month, perhaps with slightly less fanfare, JPrude held it's inaugural meeting downtown.



Who is your gay hero?

Rabbi Steve Greenberg, a renowned educator most famous for his pioneering and controversial work as an openly gay Orthodox rabbi, opened the first meeting of JPrude, Cincinnati's newest Jewish LGBTQ group, with this question. As one might expect, the question was met with surprise, amusement and even confusion by some who had perhaps expected a more run-of-the-mill meeting kick-off.

After giving it some thought, participants offered a wide array of responses that ranged from pop culture icons Ellen DeGeneres and

the musical duo Indigo Girls to openly gay political figures like Harvey Milk and former Cincinnati Democratic Mayor Roxanne Qualls. Some participants offered more personal anecdotes, naming openly gay family members and relatives as their heroes. As each person went around the crowded table and shared their heroes, it quickly became apparent that while individual views on what makes a gay hero may be diverse, they are all motivated and inspired by these heroes to advocate for a deeply personal and important cause.

After getting to know each other via their gay heroes, the discussion immediately turned to the challenges and opportunities facing the gay Jewish community in Cincinnati. Rabbi Greenberg shared his experiences with bringing awareness of LGBTQ issues to the Cincinnati Jewish community, pointing out that while there may be those who are uncomfortable with JPrude's mission, there is a wider audience in Cincinnati that is willing to support and empower Jews of all sexual orientations in our community.

Indeed, JPrude in its current form is the result of collaboration between a number of Cincinnati's Jewish communal organizations, including the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati, the Jewish Community Relations Council, Jewish Family Service, and the Greater Cincinnati Board of Rabbis. Rabbis from Isaac M. Wise Temple, Adath Israel Synagogue and Temple Sholom currently serve on JPrude Cincinnati's Steering Committee. Initial funders also include the Mayerson Foundation and the Saul Schottenstein Foundation B.

As with any gathering of Jews consisting of two or more people, group members were quick to add to Rabbi Greenberg's comments with their own views on being gay and Jewish in a city known more for its conservative values rather than its progressivism. Many expressed frustration at the current situation in Cincinnati, not known in most circles as a bastion of liberalism regarding the rights of the LGBTQ community. The frustration was especially acute for those who had returned to Cincinnati after having advocated for gay rights in more liberal Jewish communities, but underneath this frustration, if you listened closely, there was also the passion to bring that enthusiasm to the Queen City. And there were also those in the group who echoed Rabbi Greenberg's sentiments about the potential for acceptance and progress in Cincinnati's Jewish community.

Truly, if the LGBTQ Jewish community wants to find its voice in Cincinnati, it is important to, in the words of one participant, "work with what we already have" instead of focusing exclusively on the challenges ahead. One of the most important catalysts behind the JPrude meeting was the common sense of purpose and general sense of enthusiasm that this inaugural group brought with them. Aaron Hoffman, a Cincinnati native who currently works for LPK Trends, felt that "it's great to finally have something like this in Cincinnati. I think it's a great idea and I'm happy that it's finally happening." Aaron Weiner, also a native Cincinnati, expressed support for JPrude's work, saying that "in the past, I felt that people outside the gay community didn't really get who I was, and when I was involved with gay groups in the general community they didn't really get who I was either [as a Jew]. I'm happy that there is now a group where people will understand me more completely."

When the meeting concluded, many participants stayed behind to mingle and chat with one another, continuing the enthusiasm the meeting had espoused. For this writer, an ally humbled by the unabashed strength of spirit that fuels JPrude and its constituents, it was evident that something new, unique and transformative is on the rise in a city that is more than ready for it. Whether your gay hero is Freddie Mercury, Massachusetts Senator Barney Frank (who's also a Member of the Tribe, by the way), your sister or your best friend, this group offers a place where anyone can come to be themselves and support each other.

For more information about JPrude or to get more involved, email jprudecincinnati@gmail.com.



Andrea Nadel is a native of Cincinnati who has returned to the Queen City after a four-year hiatus. An alumna of The Ohio State University, Andrea confesses that she has absolutely



*no enthusiasm for football despite the Buckeyes' best efforts, but she **does** enjoy travelling, learning foreign languages, following Israeli politics and music, and growing vegetables in her backyard.*

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