

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**HISTORIC LGBT JEWISH COMMUNITY
BETH CHAYIM CHADASHIM (BCC)
MOVES TO EXPANDED SYNAGOGUE HOME**



*The only LEED-certified “green” synagogue in Los Angeles
is also wired for the 21st century, accessible from virtually anywhere in the world.*

**PUBLIC CELEBRATION AT 6090 W. PICO BLVD, LOS ANGELES
SET FOR SUNDAY, APRIL 10, 2011, 2:00–4:00 P.M.**

Los Angeles, CA—Beth Chayim Chadashim synagogue (BCC), whose Hebrew name translates as “House of New Life,” takes its mission into a new dimension, bringing new life to a deserted building two blocks west of the modest storefront space that has been the congregation’s home since 1977.

Originally built in 1929, the building at 6090 W. Pico—one-time home to a church led by singer and actress Della Reese, and later to an auto parts dealer—had fallen on hard times, standing empty for years. Though badly in need of repair, its windows covered over by grillwork and grime, “you could see that underneath its unassuming façade was a building with good bones and appealing remnants of the 1920s architectural style that once flourished in this Los Angeles neighborhood,” recalls architect and longtime BCC member Ira Dankberg.

Dankberg served as in-house Project Manager for the building's gut renovation and oversaw an extensive, collaborative architectural design process.

That process culminates Sunday, April 10, 2011 with the opening of the new building. Kicking off a public celebration, at 2:00 p.m. BCC members and friends will parade from 6000 West Pico Blvd. to 6090 West Pico Blvd. two blocks away, carrying their sacred Torah scrolls to the synagogue's new home accompanied by *klezmer* music and dancing children. A brief dedication ceremony will be followed by a party that includes tours of the building, Israeli dancing, kids' activities and light refreshments.

Several years in the making—the result of extensive fundraising, planning and renovations—the aesthetically striking, solar-powered synagogue was designed by Culver City architects Marc Schoeplein and Toni Lewis.

The renovated building will be the only LEED-certified synagogue in Los Angeles. “But we hope not for long,” says BCC Executive Director, Felicia Park-Rogers. “We want to be a role model to other synagogues. If a synagogue of only 220 households can accomplish this, every synagogue can.” Reclaimed wood, salvaged doors, insulation made from ground-up blue jeans, carpeting made from recycled tires, a bicycle rack and electric car charging station, and a roof covered in solar panels including one to power the *ner tamid* (the eternal light) that illuminates the sacred scrolls around the clock are just a few of the building's eco-conscious elements.

In designing the new space, Lewis and Schoeplein diplomatically moved among the different congregational constituencies—from sanctuary design and educational needs to the all-important kitchen—listening carefully and deftly incorporating the ideas of those who served on the various committees. In designing the sanctuary, Schoeplein and Lewis incorporated into the sacred space ten contemporary stained glass windows originally designed and built for BCC's former building by four members of the congregation. BCC artists are again helping design and create sacred objects in the new sanctuary, including the doors and wall surrounding the Holy Ark, integrated with the “Story Lines Project,” a permanent installation of woven copper strips handwritten by BCC members, containing excerpts from their personal stories and connections to BCC.

The result of all of this creative collaboration? “An inspired design by Lewis/Schoeplein and BCC members that offers us everything a synagogue is meant to be—a house of prayer, a house of learning, a house of connection and community,” says Rabbi Lisa Edwards, BCC's spiritual leader since 1994. “We'll have room to grow and a beautiful new space in which to pursue the shared goals of our congregants—to partner with God and each other to create an open-minded, open-hearted community where people can be all of who they are as we work together to make the world a more embracing place.”

BCC was founded in 1972 as the world's first "gay synagogue" by a handful of gay and lesbian Jews who were encouraged by the Reverend Troy Perry, founder of the then-fledgling, first gay and lesbian Christian congregation, Metropolitan Community Church (MCC). Today, BCC is an inclusive Jewish community of progressive individuals representing a wide spectrum of ages, sexual identities, and professional, cultural and economic backgrounds. At BCC, social justice and spiritual nurturance go hand-in-hand.

"BCC in its old space was bursting at the seams," says BCC president Bruce Maxwell. "With our growing membership and unique, intergenerational religious school, a new synagogue home will allow BCC to enter an era of greater spiritual, educational, cultural and communal growth and achievement."

BCC's new home will accommodate religious services for up to 160 people and the ingenious design will maximize community-gathering and multi-use spaces while expressing BCC's traditions, history and values. A four-year capital campaign that raised \$3.4M in gifts from \$100 to \$1M allowed BCC to make this historic move. "The move into our new home is yet another indication of the vibrancy and growth of our synagogue community," says campaign chair and former president Brett Trueman.

Stephen Sass, president of the Jewish Historical Society of Southern California and a member of the Los Angeles County Historical Landmarks and Records Commission, commented: "As the first LGBT congregation of any faith to be accepted by a mainstream religious movement, the first to provide same-sex Jewish wedding ceremonies, amongst the earliest synagogues and churches to use gender-sensitive references in liturgy, a founder of the World Congress of GLBT Jews which now embraces more than 50 groups worldwide, and the first provider anywhere of Jewish community-sponsored social services for people with HIV and AIDS—BCC has been in the vanguard of building a more fully inclusive Jewish community and a more just society that values every person as *b'tzelem elohim*, created in God's image."

BCC made news in 2010 when it hired Juval Porat, the first Jewish cantor to be ordained in Germany since before World War II. Since then, Rabbi Edwards and Cantor Porat have shared clergy leadership of BCC. "As with any move, BCC's transition to a new home will allow us to see who we are from a fresh perspective," says Cantor Porat, a singer and songwriter who trained as an architect before going to cantorial school. "To me, it means a fantastic opportunity to rediscover and reinterpret music, rituals, liturgy and community." The sanctuary design features a sound system that will showcase the cantor's talents as well as those of the popular 18-voice BCC choir that he leads.

A new program called BCC Live, supported by a grant from the Union of Reform Judaism (URJ), will provide live streaming and audio of services and programs to those who

can't be there in person. "With BCC Live," says Bracha Yael, the program's coordinator, "services, classes and cultural events will be accessible from anywhere via computer, mobile devices and Skype, greatly expanding BCC's global outreach to the LGBT Jewish community, and allowing some of our homebound members to fully participate in our programs and prayer services."

A dynamic series of public programs scheduled over the next several months will take advantage of all aspects of the building's design, from a cantors' concert and cabaret to a poetry slam, Jewish cooking workshops, and guest lecturers on topics including Islam, Jewish humor, and the dismantling of the military's "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy.

Rabbi Lisa Edwards, Cantor Juval Porat, President Bruce Maxwell and Building Manager Ira Dankberg are available for interviews. Please contact Felicia Park-Rogers, Executive Director of Beth Chayim Chadashim, at (323) 931-7023, ext. 203 or templedirector@bcc-la.org.

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ABOUT BCC

Beth Chayim Chadashim is a progressive and diverse community of people who come together to celebrate Jewish faith and culture. Started in 1972, we are the world's first synagogue founded by, and with an outreach to, lesbians and gay men. Today our community is an established and essential part of the religious life of Los Angeles.

Our name means "House of New Life," and our services, social gatherings and broader activism work in concert to make our community unique and live up to its name. LA is a vibrant but often disjointed big city; BCC is an intimate, welcoming synagogue that brings warmth and perspective to its members and friends.

In addition to providing its members the means to worship in a Jewish religious context and to serving others so that all come to realize their own value and dignity, BCC's mission is to sustain a Jewish community for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Jews while welcoming all who wish to make community with us. BCC strives to promote greater communication and understanding between the wider Jewish community and LGBT communities.

Photos will be posted on our website: <http://www.bcc-la.org/>