

PRESS RELEASE

16th November 2009

New rabbi inducted at South London Liberal Synagogue's 80th birthday

Rabbi Janet Darley was inducted as minister of the South London Liberal Synagogue on Saturday, 14th November, in a day of sharing warm memories and commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Streatham congregation, the UK's second oldest synagogue in the Liberal Jewish movement. Led by Rabbi Julia Neuberger, baroness, president of Liberal Judaism, a former student rabbi and first woman rabbi of SLLS, and Rabbi Danny Rich, chief executive of Liberal Judaism and the son of the late John Rich, president of SLLS, more than 130 guests celebrated a happy day of induction for the synagogue's 11th minister.

Janet, an American economist by training, who moved to Britain 20 years ago, embraced her new role with an emotional address, deep thanks and a strong call to the congregation "to leap to action ... to volunteer your services to our community, to consider running for council and playing an active role in sustaining our community."

Trained at Leo Baeck College, Janet welcomed Rabbi Professor Marc Saperstein, the college principal, and Julia Neuberger to a service whose Torah reading focused on the roles of Rebecca and Ruth as biblical mothers in the early stages of Jewish history.

Guests from local Islamic, Catholic and Church of England congregations, the honorable Christopher Wellbelove, Mayor of Lambeth, Lambeth Inter-Faith Group, police and the new leadership of the Liberal Judaism Executive Council swelled the attendance to more than 130 people. Joan Rich, the senior vice president and oldest member of the congregation present who came to her first service at SLLS when she was nine years old, smiled from a chair and held in her hand a special service programme arranged and edited by Janet Darley and adorned with a photo of Samuel Rich, her uncle and past president of SLLS, on a cover designed by Fae Clark, the granddaughter of Jeromé and Louise Freedman, current president and vice president of the synagogue.

The new choir, led by Michele Freedman, and organist Richard Pilliner filled the sanctuary with music and prayer. SLLS Chairman Philip Walker welcomed the guests to a community Kiddush and a table laden with delicious cakes and sandwiches in the Lily Montagu Hall, named after the first president of South London Liberal Synagogue.

The following day, the celebrations continued in the best tradition -- community activities as part of a national Mitzvah Day event of volunteer help. For the last month members have been bringing in toiletries and items of warm clothing to donate to the Separated Child Foundation, and on Mitzvah Sunday, with help from the Religion school, the items were labelled and parcelled up for distribution. Religion school children also made cards expressing their good wishes to go with the packs. Later in the day 15 Nightingale home residents joined SLLS for afternoon tea in the Lily Montagu hall. With communal singing, smoked salmon sandwiches, cream scones and more we all -- including the helpers -- had a great time. This was truly 'tikkun olam' (perfecting the world) in action!

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