

LIFESTYLE

Say hello to Solel Congregation's new rabbi

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When Rabbi Lawrence Englander announced he would be retiring in the summer of 2014, Solel Congregation of Mississauga began its search for a new spiritual leader.

Englander, a founding member of Solel, had served as the congregation's rabbi for more than four decades. An interim rabbi stepped in after Englander stepped down and a committee was struck to find his replacement.

Enter Audrey Pollack. A Chicago-area native who had been serving a Jewish congregation in Indiana, Pollack was looking for a new challenge and an opportunity to grow and develop a congregation in a larger community.

She was invited up to Mississauga for an interview and she said it was soon clear to her Solel was the right fit.

She began serving as the 260-family strong congregation's rabbi in July and was officially installed on Nov. 21 during a ceremony that included Englander.

"It was a wonderful celebration and a great weekend," said Pollack. "My family and I (husband Phil Subeck and children, Seth, Gil and Rachel) felt very welcomed.

"(Englander) gave a really beautiful speech at my installation that made me cry," continued Pollack.

Pollack has embraced her new congregation and is busy these days with Hanukkah celebrations. During an inter-

view with *The News* last Friday, just hours before the start of the sixth of eight nights of Hanukkah, she spoke about her love of the Jewish festival of lights even though it's a relatively minor holiday on her faith's calendar.

Pollack said it's one of her favourite holidays because of its uplifting message of religious freedom.

The new rabbi has also been busy over the past few months getting to know the people she now serves, meeting with inter-faith leaders and other responsibilities.

As Solel's rabbi, Pollack is the spiritual leader of the congregation who leads worship services but also teaches both youth and adults and also plays an important role during special milestones such as births, deaths, weddings and bar mitzvahs, amongst other duties.

Queried as to whether it was a rarity to have a woman serving as a rabbi, Pollack said it's not all that uncommon in the Union for Reform Judaism movement, which she belongs to, to have female rabbis.

The first female rabbi in the reform movement was ordained in 1972 and there were about 150 women rabbis when she was coming out of seminary school in the early 1990s.

These days, there are about 600 women rabbis in her movement.

"I think the community realized women have a lot to offer in terms of religious leadership and, by not hearing female voices in the movement, they were missing out," said Pollack.

While the congregation includes Mississauga families, it also draws people from Milton, Caledon, Georgetown, Oakville and parts of Toronto.

In the past, the organization has worked on affordable housing initiatives, breakfast programs, support of The Mississauga Food Bank and other community-minded endeavors. That community spirit was one of the many aspects of becoming Solel's rabbi that appealed to her.

"We have a great volunteer core of people who really get involved and that's one of the things that was really attractive to me about this congregation," said Pollack.



Lawrence Englander



Rabbi Audrey Pollack of Solel Congregation in Mississauga. Staff photo by Bryon Johnson