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Historic Trip Will Honor the Life and Memory of Regina Jonas, the World's First Female Rabbi Whose Life and Legacy was Nearly Lost to History

The four American women who were the first ordinees of their denominations will travel to Berlin, Terezin and Prague to pay tribute to Rabbi Jonas who was murdered in Auschwitz in 1944

CINCINNATI, OH:---The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (AJA) (located on the Cincinnati, Ohio campus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion) and the Jewish Women's Archive (JWA) (headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts) will co-sponsor a historic journey to Berlin, Terezin and Prague to honor the life and memory of Rabbi Regina Jonas, widely acknowledged as the first woman rabbi in modern times.

Travelers on the trip—which will take place from July 22-27—include the three American women rabbis who were the first ordinees of their denominations; and the first Orthodox woman to be ordained “Rabba”:

- **Rabbi Sally Priesand (Reform)**—Hebrew Union College, 1972
- **Rabbi Sandy Sasso (Reconstructionist)**— Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, 1974
- **Rabbi Amy Eilberg (Conservative)**— Jewish Theological Seminary, 1985
- **Rabba Sara Hurwitz (Orthodox)**— Ordained by Rabbi Avi Weiss, 2009

On July 24, the **United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad** will hold a dedication ceremony to install a plaque in Rabbi Jonas' memory. The Commission and its Chairwoman, Lesley Weiss, have invited members of the trip to attend the event in Terezin, at the former Columbarium of the Ghetto. Ms. Weiss will deliver the keynote address at the ceremony, and the American women Rabbis and Rabba, along with Dr. Gail Reimer, Executive Director of the JWA and Dr. Gary P. Zola, Executive Director of the AJA and the member of the Commission who conceived of the memorial event in Terezin, will participate in the ceremony.



Rabbi Regina Jonas

“I came to my profession thinking of complete mental, spiritual and moral equality between both sexes, created by a just and merciful God.”

The Commission was established in 1985 by President Reagan. It was created to help preserve and protect cemeteries, monuments, and historic buildings in Central and Eastern Europe associated with the foreign heritage of United States citizens.

“This trip is an occasion to celebrate how far we have come in regard to women’s participation in Jewish life,” noted Rabbi Sasso. “Rabbi Jonas could have been the first and the last woman rabbi, but she wasn’t. She was the first in a long chain that continues. She may not have known it at the time, but she started what would become a revolution. We, who are her successors, owe her our gratitude and our voice.”



Terezin Memorial

Regina Jonas was born in Berlin, Germany in 1902, studied there at the Liberal Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (Higher Institute for Jewish Studies) and was ordained by Rabbi Max Dienemann in 1935. Yet for nearly 50 years after her murder in Auschwitz in 1944, she remained largely forgotten. It was not until many of her papers were discovered in 1991 that her history—and her legacy—began to be revealed.

As a rabbi, Rabbi Jonas quickly gained a reputation as a “gifted public speaker” who was “born for the pulpit”. When she was deported to Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1942, she continued her ministry there by working for the camp’s ‘Department of Psychological Hygiene’. Her job was to provide mental-health care to those first arriving at the camp. She tried to help them cope with the shock of the horrific experiences that the prisoners experienced there daily.

“Here is a clear instance of a determined woman, who set an important historical precedent, but was forgotten— or intentionally covered over—by other rabbis who survived the Holocaust and who knew of her work,” said Dr. Reimer. “Knowledge of her story would have meant a great deal to the pioneering women who struggled to gain ordination and then be accepted as Rabbis.”

During the trip, the group will visit unique sites in Berlin including the Old Jewish Quarter, the Brandenburg gate and the Berlin Wall. While in Prague, they will tour cultural sites such as the Hebrew Clock, the Old Jewish Cemetery and the Jewish Museum.

"Rabbi Jonas's legacy represents the rabbinical profession at its very best," Dr. Gary P. Zola observed. "Women and men around the world revere her professional achievements and draw inspiration from the remarkable contributions she made during the darkest of times. Rabbi Jonas' life epitomizes the values that American citizens cherish most, and therefore the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad was determined to honor her memory."

For more information or to arrange for interviews, please contact Joyce Kamen at 513.543.8109; or email joyce@kamencreative.com.

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ABOUT THE AJA

The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, founded in 1947 by its namesake on the historic campus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, is committed to preserving a documentary heritage of the religious, organizational, economic, cultural, personal, social and family life of American Jewry. The Marcus Center contains over 15,000 linear feet of archives, manuscripts, nearprint materials, photographs, audio and videotapes, microfilm, and genealogical materials.

ABOUT JWA

JWA is the first and only organization dedicated to uncovering, chronicling, and transmitting the rich history of North American Jewish women. Through its digital repository, the organization contains the most extensive collection of material about North American Jewish women anywhere in the world. In addition to its digital content, JWA trains educators and partners with institutions to teach a more inclusive narrative of Jewish history using a range of resources—historical documents, posters, creative lesson plans, oral history guides, and archival photographs—that trace the lives and contributions of Jewish women over time.