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TEMPLE KOL EMETH ANNOUNCES THE SELECTION OF RABBI LAWRENCE “LARRY” SERNOVITZ

New Spiritual Leader to Succeed Retiring Legend Rabbi Steven Lebow July 1, 2020

MARIETTA, GA (March 9, 2020) – Temple Kol Emeth, the first reform Temple in Cobb County, announced today the appointment of Rabbi Lawrence “Larry” Sernovitz to become the new senior rabbi after Board of Trustees nomination and a confirmation vote by congregants. On July 1, Sernovitz will succeed Rabbi Steven Lebow, Atlanta’s longest-standing rabbi, who first shared his plans for retirement with the Temple community in 2019.

“We’re thrilled to welcome Rabbi Sernovitz to lead the next chapter of Temple Kol Emeth’s rich history,” said Rachel Barich, President of the Board of Trustees for the synagogue. “Only someone with his magnetic energy and innovative spirit can build on the incredible foundation that Rabbi Lebow has built, and as leaders they share many common values.”

A self-described “entrepreneurial rabbi” with an emphasis on social change, Sernovitz was the founding Rabbi of Nafshenu, an egalitarian Jewish Community in Cherry Hill, NJ designed to help non-affiliated Jews looking for meaning and connection to Judaism in an ever-changing modern world. He launched a variety of innovative programs at Nafshenu, including a training program on social justice and Israel advocacy. As Chaplain for the Cherry Hill Police Department, he led training on anti-Semitism, diversity and white supremacy. Among many similarities with Lebow, Sernovitz was recognized with the Camden County MLK Freedom Medal from the Camden County Board of Freeholders for his efforts to help diverse South Jersey communities come together in the wake of the tragic shootings at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018. Serving as a rabbi is a second career for Sernovitz, who was originally an elementary school teacher.

“Temple Kol Emeth is an important part of the East Cobb community,” said Sernovitz. “Rabbi Lebow has built an inclusive Jewish community that truly stands for something, and I’m eager to help existing members and new unaffiliated families find spirituality, connect and help to repair the world.”

Lebow became the first full-time rabbi at Temple Kol Emeth in 1986. In addition to supporting, growing and inspiring his congregation, Lebow established a tradition of embracing diversity and fighting for social change. He marched in 1987 to integrate Forsyth County and he rallied support against an infamous 1993 Cobb County "Anti-Gay Proclamation." For his leadership in Atlanta during the 1990's, the Rabbi was recognized by the Reform Judaism with the "Irving Fain Social Action Award." Between 1996 and 1998, Lebow received the "Award for Courage" from the Cobb Citizens Coalition, the "Social Justice Award" from the Metropolitan Churches of America and "Clergyman of the Year" from Creative Loafing magazine. He was also honored as the "Atlanta Clergyman of the Year" by the National Conference of Christians and Jews and in 2002 as "Humanitarian of the Year" by the State of Georgia Holocaust Commission. Similar to Sernovitz years later, Lebow was honored with the "Martin Luther King Award for Social Courage" from Citizens and Clergy United. In spite of his support for many Republican candidates, Rabbi Lebow was honored by the Democratic Party of Cobb County in 2007 for his role in bringing a progressive approach to politics in the South.

Lebow will become the Rabbi Emeritus of Temple Kol Emeth, conducting occasional sermons at the synagogue. He also plans to continue his career of service, including teaching, writing and lending his rabbinic expertise to smaller regional congregations

Lebow was recently quoted saying, "One of the lessons of the Torah is that success is always multi-generational. Nobody gets it right in their own lifetime; there's always somebody who comes after you that builds on what you did. In the book of Ecclesiastes," Lebow observed, "the Bible says, 'one generation comes and another generation goes.'"

Temple Kol Emeth [www.kolemeth.net] is the first Southern Reform congregation in suburban Atlanta's Cobb County, with a congregation diverse in age and background. Temple Kol Emeth welcomes Jews by choice and interfaith families. The purpose of TKE is to teach, study, and advance Jewish foundations and to provide a religious experience and education in Jewish traditions and teachings for the temple members and their families. Membership at Temple Kol Emeth is synonymous with involvement in synagogue life, including ritual observance, service to the community, education, emotional comfort and personal growth.

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