

Speech of Acceptance – Cantor Kim Harris
Congregation B'nai Chaim, November 21, 2014

Thank you so much, everyone. I would like to begin by expressing my deepest gratitude... to all of you who came to support me and our congregation this evening...to our guests Lin Sunshine and Rabbi Evette Lutman for honoring me with your presence ... to our installation committee, Aliza Sodos, Carol Samberg, Mark Brown, Gayle Mink, Dan Feiveson, Alice Cole, and Ruth Brown for making sure that all the pieces fell into place this evening... to our Board of Directors, to our wonderful choir and all the kids who came out to sing together... to Buddy Schweig, Rabbi Schwartzman, Sandy Solove, Michelle Weinberg, and Sophie Gross who guide me, advise me, and inspire me... and to the Rabbinic Search Committee for having the chutzpah and the courage to hire a cantor as your spiritual leader. You have called me to lead this *k'hillah k'doshah*, this holy community, Congregation B'nai Chaim, and sometimes I just cannot believe that you have chosen me for this extraordinary honor, bestowing me with the holy task of leading you in worship and fulfilling your spiritual needs. Daily I ask myself, "What did I do to deserve this congregation? What did I do to deserve this warmth, this welcome, this support, this caring?" I am grateful far beyond the modest words contained here. And lastly I have to thank my Brian, without whom I would certainly not be standing before you today. It is his encouragement and confidence in me that has illuminated my path for 31 years, especially my spiritual journey, and I am so thankful. I love you.

As I stand here this evening I am reminded of the moment of my ordination, when Rabbi David Ellenson of Hebrew Union College laid his hands upon my shoulders in blessing and said, "You've come a long way from South Carolina, haven't you?" In that moment I felt really small in the overall scheme of things. Who am I, O God, to lead your people Israel? Who am I, O God, to be given this lofty and holy task? Hineini, I am here, but now what?

I left the field of education to become a cantor because I wanted to serve as clergy – to fill young minds with the love of Judaism, to embrace those in need, to welcome new lives into the covenant, and to bring a congregation to know God through prayer and song.

My cantorate brought me to Chicago, to a large and growing congregation in the suburbs, where I honed my craft as a cantor but where I was limited in my role as clergy to only worship leader and b'nei mitzvah instructor.

Here at B'nai Chaim you have afforded me the opportunity to fully grow into the kind of cantor I have longed to be. What is so special about our congregation is that we are laboring together to make Judaism come alive, in every sense, through worship, through song, through learning, and through *tikkun olam*. This synergy, this cooperative energy, feeds my soul every day.

With your dedication and your passion we will stand on the shoulders of our beloved Rabbi Schwartzman, as well as those of Rabbi Sokol, Rabbi Persin, and Rabbi Beiner, and go into the future with hope and with vision.

With your help we will experience worship that speaks to the heart and soul and learning that enriches your life, all the while making the world a better place. We will encounter challenges, but there is no challenge that we cannot meet when we all come together.

In this week's Torah portion we read of the birth of the twins Jacob and Esau, the sons of Isaac and Rebecca, who struggled in the womb and grew up as complete opposites from one another. Esau was rough and rugged, a hunter, hasty, reckless, a man of passion, while Jacob was a home-body, a thinker, quiet and pensive – a man who persevered to achieve. After almost a lifetime of estrangement they finally achieve reconciliation and love after being apart for over twenty years. In every congregation there are all kinds of folks, some Esau's and some Jacob's.

We need the passion of Esau, the throwing out of ideas, and the zest for doing... and we need the temperance of Jacob – contemplation, consideration, and purpose. We need the older and the younger. With all ages involved, with perseverance and enthusiasm B'nai Chaim can do amazing things, and I look forward to being there with you as we envision our journey together.