



Mazal Tov! Four Rabbis Ordained and One Cantor Invested in Bielefeld, Germany

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On August 31, 2015, Bielefeld hosted its first ordination of Reform rabbis as well as the investiture of a cantor, at a ceremony in the Beit Tikva Synagogue.

Irith Michelsohn, President of Beit Tikva, noted, “This is the most important day since we dedicated our synagogue in 2008.”

Two state governors were among the notables who attended the ordination. Hannelore Kraft, the Premier of North Rhine Westphalia, greeted 350 invited guests, including members of parliament, the board of the Union of Progressive Jews in Germany (UpJ), representatives of the General Rabbinical Conference of Germany, senior clergy, and Jewish communal leaders from across Europe, including Poland and Russia.

“This is a day of great joy and gratitude,” Kraft said, welcoming the first female rabbi of Westphalia, Kiev born Natalia Verzhbovska. In his speech on behalf of the Leo Baeck Foundation, Bodo Ramelow, Premier of the Free State of Thuringia, assured the five graduates that they would continue to “belong to us”.

While Natalia Vershebovska will serve three Progressive congregations in Westphalia, her colleague Alexander Grodensky, who hails from Dushanbe, Tajikistan, will take a pulpit in Esch-sur-Alzette, the second-biggest city in Luxembourg.

The two other rabbis who were ordained will pursue academic careers. Rabbi Sonja Keren Pilz, who was just awarded her Ph.D., is in New York City now for post-doc studies. Eli Reich, who was born in Sweden and educated in Israel, will join the faculty of Potsdam’s School of Jewish Theology.

The ordination was conducted by Rabbi Walter Jacob, President of Abraham Geiger College (AGC). He also invested Munich born cantor Amnon Seelig, who grew up in Israel.

“Fifteen years ago, hardly anyone could have imagined that rabbis trained in Germany, of all places, would be working in neighboring countries in Europe and beyond,” said Abraham Lehrer, Vice President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

Abraham Geiger College was founded in 1999 and ordained its first class in 2006. Since then, its students and more than 30 graduates have enriched the lives of Jewish communities throughout Europe, Israel, South Africa, and the United States.

Source: [World Union for Progressive Judaism](#).