

Although we may suffer hostility from the pervasive culture individually, it is by organizing ourselves against this oppression that social progress is achieved. In our PRIDE issue, we focus on five organizations actively working to bridge the disparity between the gay and straight communities...



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Pairing Gay and Religious Pride

A new nonprofit caters to Jewish LGBTs

IT'S NO SECRET THAT SPIRITUALITY AND sexuality often don't mix—there's nothing like being the only gay at religious functions. And many LGBT churchgoers keep these sides of themselves separate.

JQ International, which caters to Jewish LGBTs, aims for something different—integration. “When you're gay and Jewish, you have the gay world and the Jewish world,” explains Asher Gellis, the executive director of JQ International. “We want to combine these two worlds, creating a whole identity.”

The nonprofit, with 1,000 members worldwide but predominately New York and Los

Angeles-based, offers “much-needed LGBT Jewish programming to support the 20s and 30s demographic,” Gellis says. “We have many amazing programs that have been developed,” he adds, “and we want to get the word out.”

The mostly volunteer-run nonprofit was founded in 2004, but this year, received a \$120,000 grant from Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles, which provides funds to a range of organizations in the Jewish community—from orthodox to secular. “It's amazing,” Gellis says, “[the Foundation] recognized how important this project is and wants to take care of its gay and lesbian members.”

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JQ International programs run the gamut from events keeping with tradition, like Ros Hashanah dinner in September, to fundraisers, including the popular “Jew-b-que” on Saturday, June 28 (with funds benefiting the organization), paired with philanthropy. “In the Jewish community, activism is a central part of our identity,” Gellis says, adding that the organization is involved in toy and food drives, as well as providing food to homebound individuals with HIV.

Secular, social events are also on the menu. This year, JQ International is collaborating with Outfest, a nonprofit that showcases and preserves GLBT film and artistry, to offer a screening on Wednesday, July 16, of Israeli gay film *Antarctica*, with an after party at Canter's Deli and Restaurant. “It's a fun, very retro venue,” Gellis adds.

JQ International is also making special efforts to reach out to the lesbian community. The organization recently launched a new lesbian programming taskforce to provide services “to a formerly neglected demographic of the Jewish community,” Gellis says.

JQ International offers women-specific programs ranging from the informal, like wine tasting, to religious and educational events, including relevant guest speakers. And women are now a part of all levels of the organization—even on the board of directors. “That's a first in the organization,” Gellis says, “and we're hoping [women's involvement] will increase.”

While the Jewish community has been supportive of its LGBT members, Gellis says he thinks that building this sect of the community will strengthen the religion at large.

Plus, you might meet a nice Jewish partner to take home to mom. —JAMIE WETHERBE

For more information, visit www.jqinternational.org.