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Pride Week: Gay Woman Ra

The 38th Annual Pride March steps off on Fifth Avenue this Sunday, and leading the assembled as one of the more accustomed to leading a congregation. New York 1's Shazia Khan filed the following story for NY1's

Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum grew up at a time when women weren't rabbis, let alone openly-gay religious leaders.

Today, she is the senior rabbi at Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, or CBST. Founded in 1973, it's the world's largest synagogue for bisexual and transgender Jews.

"We want people to walk through the doors of our synagogue and not turn a part of themselves off," says Kleinbaum.

Ordained at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in 1990, Kleinbaum assumed the post at CBST two years ago, reconciling her religion with her sexual orientation.

"I didn't want to reject being Jewish because I was gay," says Kleinbaum. "I felt like I had the right to claim it if anybody did."

She challenges anyone who might think otherwise.

"We reject people who have such a narrow definition of the bible, so as to say that that bible rejects us," says Kleinbaum. "The bible also says that we are all created in God's image. There isn't an 'except...' at the end of that."

CBST is not affiliated with any movement of Judaism and its 800 members are not exclusively lesbian, gay, or transgender. It holds its Shabbat services at the Church of the Holy Apostles in Chelsea. Holiday services are typically held at the Church of the Holy Apostles.

"We have a special plaque just for those who have died from AIDS and a special plaque for those who have died from cancer."

“These two events are very significant in the life of our community.”

When she's not at the pulpit, you might find Kleinbaum at a demonstration, speaking out on gay rights and Congress in support of same-sex marriage.

Sunday she'll be a co-Grand Marshal of the Pride March.

“I'm very proud that religion will be leading the march this year and we'll be joining together with those po community to say that gay rights are human rights,” says Kleinbaum.

– *Shazia Khan*

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