Making history: Australia's first religious Jewish same-sex wedding

HISTORY WAS MADE at Sydney's Emanuel Synagogue on Wednesday, with the first religious Jewish same-sex marriage held in Australia. The happy couple were Oscar Shub and Ilan Buchman.

Underlining the importance that the ceremony held for them, Oscar told *Plus61J*: "Certainly the reason we chose to get married in a synagogue – and we believe it's an appropriate message to send to the Jewish community – is that times have changed and that if people suddenly discover that they have gay children or gay grandchildren, those children or grandchildren can still lead a regular existence."

WATCH THE VIDEO

Ilan concurred: "For young people and those not out yet, hopefully by us getting married, officially with a rabbi officiating, it sends a good message."

In agreement were the 168 guests attending: family and friends who flew in from the many places where the couple had lived, including South Africa, Israel, England, US, Canada, Perth and Melbourne.

Raucous applause erupted at the ceremony's conclusion, when Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins said: "You have performed the rituals, signed the documents and said the words that make you husband and husband, in accordance with the laws of this Commonwealth of Australia."

As Oscar told Plus61J after the wedding: "When he said, 'I pronounce you husband and husband' and the whole synagogue broke into clapping; it was just amazing – it was fantastic!"

They have been together for 47 years. Oscar and Ilan met in 1971 and are 71 and 70 years old respectively. Ilan grew up in Lvov and went to live in Israel when he was 18; they met at a mutual friend's dinner party in Tel Aviv when Oscar was on his way to Europe from his home in South Africa. "Once the legislation passed, we decided to get married. We could not get married for all those years," Oscar explained.

In addition to some of the wording being tweaked, a couple of traditions were also adapted. Usually the bride walks around the groom seven times. Instead, each groom circled the other three times and the seventh one they did together, like a figure of eight.

And both grooms smashed a glass simultaneously. "As you know, it is the custom that the man breaks the glass," explained Ilan. "So for us it was really fantastic because we feel, not just in terms of our life, we like to expand the traditions because being Jewish is not just sitting in synagogue. There's more to it than that."

Prior to the glasses being broken, Rabbi Kamins not only referenced the Temple's destruction thousands of years ago, but also today's modern reality: "There's lots of brokenness in this world, lots of people who face tragedy and discrimination. ..there's still so much work to do, in our country and around the world, to bring that sense of wholeness and peace.

A couple of traditions were adapted. Usually the bride walks around the groom seven times. Instead, each groom circled the other three times and the seventh one they did together, like a figure of eight. And both grooms smashed a glass simultaneously.

"But these shards of glass are not just to think of what is broken but also of the power of your love to bring healing." With that, the simultaneous smashing was greeted by a loud and joyful "Mazeltov!" by the guests.

Another reason that made this occasion historic was that it took place in the Synagogue's new sanctuary, which officially opens on May 14, and in the 80th year since the congregation was founded. "A double blessing!" exclaimed Ilan.

The atmosphere at the ceremony was palpable, charged with excitement, and this was reflected in the reception which opened with a rousing hora. As well as many friends and relatives, the ceremony was observed with interest by the wider community and media.

Australian Marriage Equality co-chair Alex Greenwich MP told *Plus 61J*: "Many Rabbis and people of the Jewish faith have played a leading role in Australia's movement for marriage equality, so it is no surprise that the first religious same-sex marriage ceremony will occur in a Synagogue.

"Congratulations to the couple, and the wider Jewish community for showing that various faith groups are fully supportive of LGBTI friends, family and parishioners."

THE EMANUEL COMMUNITY is leading the way. "Other [Australian Jewish] communities haven't done it yet so it is quite a historic occasion," Rabbi Kamins said. Of note, earlier this year, the ceremony held for Kerryn Phelps and Jackie Stricker on January 4 at Emanuel Synagogue was a renewal of vows as they were legally married 20 years ago (in New York).

The May 2 ceremony's significance can't be overstated. "It's hugely significant in the sense that we've (Emanuel synagogue particularly, but rabbis from the Progressive and Masorti movement in Australia)

been fighting for marriage equality for years and it's finally arrived. Now that it's here, to be able to celebrate it in our spiritual context, beyond the civil context, is very, very important."

It is believed that no other religious groups or faith organisations are performing same gender ceremonies. Certainly not the Muslims, Catholics nor Anglicans. The Uniting Church is considering it.

Uniting Church elder and Former Moderator [state leader] of the New South Wales Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia, Jim Mein, told *Plus61J* that at present, the Uniting Church does not permit same gender marriages: "Because for us and for most of the Christian denominations, it's deemed to be a matter of doctrine or equivalent".

The July 2018 15th triennial of the Uniting Church in Australia Assembly has a proposal from the Assembly Standing Committee. If a doctrinal proposal is passed there, Mein advised: "It would allow ministers and other celebrants authorised by the church to have freedom of conscience regarding accepting requests to celebrate marriages in the same sex but it will not become a regulation until probably late this year."

Main photo: Ilan Buchman (left) and Oscar Shub under the Chupah at Emanuel Synagogue on Wednesday

All photos: Limor Fayena