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## MAY 7 BACCALAUREATE SERVICE AT THE CITADEL WILL BE “HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT” FOR AMERICAN JEWRY

CINCINNATI, OH:— May is *Jewish American History month*—and history is about to be made at the Citadel in South Carolina.

On Wednesday (May 7, 2014), Cadet Sarah Katchen—who served as the first Jewish Regimental Religious Officer at the Citadel in South Carolina for the past year—will take her seat at the Baccalaureate Service for the Class of 2014. Then, early in the ceremony, Rabbi Stephanie Alexander of Charleston’s Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim (the the birthplace of American Reform Judaism), will become the first female and the first Jewish member of clergy to offer the prayer at the historic service.

As the College’s Regimental Religious Officer, the choice of clergy to lead the gathering in prayer at the service was Sarah’s. Ten years ago, when Rabbi Alexander was pursuing her rabbinical studies at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Ohio, she held a student pulpit at Temple Shalom in Galesburg, Illinois—where Sarah and her family were congregants. When Sarah arrived at the Citadel as a freshman four years ago, she came to Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, where her path crossed once more with Rabbi Alexander, who had just become the congregation’s new rabbi.

“I was so humbled to have received Sarah’s invitation,” said Rabbi Alexander. “Her achievement at being named the Regimental Religious Officer at the Citadel enabled her to extend the invitation to the clergy of her choice. I am looking forward to focusing on the significance of the moment for these young people and to bless all of their endeavors.”

Thinking back on her senior year as the Regimental Religious Officer, Sarah says she is grateful for the experience and for all she learned along the way. “My job was to oversee all religious activities for 2,000 cadets and to advocate for people of all faiths. I worked with the five battalion religion officers, each of whom oversaw four companies. Together, we helped students to go off-campus for services, coordinate activities, and we made sure that people were able to easily practice their faith with no repercussions.”



(L-R): Dr. Gary P. Zola with Cadets Sarah Katchen, Jonathan Rosen, Benjamin Young, Lawrence Scarano at the Citadel



Rabbi  
Stephanie  
Alexander

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Sarah says that being a woman in a school with very few women made it somewhat more difficult to be in a high leadership position. She wanted to do the best job possible as a Jewish person in a predominantly Christian school. "I went to different faith group services as much as possible," she says. "You do not have to compromise your own faith in order to respect someone else's. I had to show my faith and I think that meant a lot to people that as a Jew, I could go to someone else's service without infringing on their beliefs."

Along the way, Sarah also learned to ask for honest criticism. "As a leader, you are going to fail and make mistakes, so I asked for feedback from each officer. What can I do better? How can I fulfill the needs of each battalion? What worked? Be able to take criticism. Even if it is unpopular, do the right thing. Morally, it rests with you. You know what your job is and what you are supposed to do. Enforce standards. Do not be afraid to step up. You have to do that as a leader."

Following graduation, Sarah hopes to attend medical school. "In the future, I will use this experience to help me to be an active listener. I spent so much time with people who needed to talk. I had to listen and sometimes had to figure out what they were really trying to say. Learning how to appreciate other peoples' faiths and knowing what motivates them on a personal level has been a wonder."

Dr. Gary P. Zola, Executive Director of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, who was a guest lecturer at the Citadel this spring while serving as the Norman and Gerry Sue Distinguished Visiting Professor of Judaic Studies at the College of Charleston, says that there is great historical significance to the upcoming Baccalaureate service, and that Sarah's achievement made it possible. "In serving this past year as the Regimental Religious Officer for the cadets at the Citadel, Sarah Katchen has epitomized our nation's commitment to religious freedom," said Zola. "She has proven that in America differing religious traditions respect one another and all are entitled to equal access under the law."

"It is particularly fitting that this 'first' in the religious history of the Citadel takes place when we commemorate *Jewish American Heritage Month*. From the very beginning of the Republic and up to our present day, American Jews have played a unique role in challenging the nation to live up to the lofty ideals enshrined in the country's founding documents. Sarah Katchen and Rabbi Stephanie Alexander will become the most recent examples of this historic and heroic impulse."

For questions and additional information, please contact Joyce Kamen at 513.543.8109.

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*The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, founded in 1947 by its namesake on the historic Cincinnati campus of the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, is committed to preserving a documentary heritage of the religious, organizational, economic, cultural, personal, social and family life of American Jewry. The Marcus Center contains over 15,000 linear feet of archives, manuscripts, nearprint materials, photographs, audio and videotapes, microfilm, and genealogical materials.*

*Dr. Gary Zola is the author of the volume, **We Called Him Rabbi Abraham: Lincoln and American Jewry, a Documentary History**. It is the first volume of primary source documents — most little known — to focus on the history of Lincoln's image, influence, and reputation among American Jews. [www.siuup.com](http://www.siuup.com)*