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Temple Sinai has a new senior rabbi

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Temple Sinai in Oakland has a new senior rabbi.

Rabbi Jacqueline Mates-Muchin was elected by 96 percent of the 900 members voting. Votes were cast Jan. 25 at the synagogue and by absentee ballot.



Rabbi Jacqueline
Mates-Muchin

Part of the temple's clergy for 10 years, Mates-Muchin will be the synagogue's ninth senior rabbi and the first woman to hold the post, according to a Temple Sinai official. She will be installed in May.

"I think she understands our congregation very well, and she herself also represents the wider diversity of the Jewish community that's found in America today and in the East Bay in particular," said Paul Geduldig, Temple Sinai's executive director. "That's reflected in the fact that she's our first female senior rabbi, that she has Chinese and Jewish heritage, and I think she has her finger on the pulse of both serving the current congregation and also ideas for how to do outreach to people who are not currently connected."

Temple Sinai is the fourth-largest synagogue in the Bay Area, with 976 member families, according to the Union for Reform Judaism. It has been without a senior rabbi since June 2014, when Rabbi Andrew Straus, by agreement with the temple's board, departed when his three-year contract expired.

The board nominated Mates-Muchin for the senior position after an extensive search process in which 21 applications from across the country were received, according to a letter by temple president Mike Baker.

"I'm not your stereotypical rabbi," Mates-Muchin, 40, told J., adding that she's the first Chinese-American rabbi in the world. Though she did not throw her hat into the ring after Rabbi Steven Chester retired in 2011, when the position became vacant again, the timing was right, she said.

"In terms of where the congregation was and where I was, it felt like a match," said Mates-Muchin, who has children ages 5, 8, 11 and 13.

Mates-Muchin said she will work on strengthening the temple's core values of inclusivity and social justice and will continue to reach out to unaffiliated young adults in the community.

"We are very big, and we are very haimish feeling," Mates-Muchin said of the synagogue. "We have a sense of really wanting to be connected to each other and encouraging relationships with each other."