



Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
בית המדרש לרבנים ליהדות מתחדשת



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Reconstructionists Respond to Conservative Movement's Vote on Homosexuality

Wyncote, PA, Dec. 6 - Leaders of the Reconstructionist movement released the following statement today in response to today's vote by the Conservative movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards on homosexuality:

We applaud the CJLS for taking a step toward advancing the rights of gay and lesbian Jews. We hope that this will lead to a clearer position of welcoming openly gay and lesbian candidates for the Conservative rabbinate, and to the religious celebration of same-sex unions within the Conservative movement. Our own experience in the Reconstructionist movement suggests that our community can only be enriched by the full inclusion of gay and lesbian Jews.

Reconstructionist Jews have been in the forefront of these issues for more than two decades. In 1984, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College became the first rabbinical seminary to accept openly gay and lesbian

students and was the first to endorse the ordination of gay and lesbian rabbis. This was six years earlier than the Reform movement, which is the only other branch of Judaism that has taken an affirmative step on ordination of gays and lesbians.

In subsequent years, the Reconstructionist movement continued to make more explicit its commitment to equal treatment of gay men and lesbians. The three arms of the Reconstructionist movement—including the seminary and the two organizations representing congregations and rabbis—have been remarkably united on the issue. In 1985, the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, which represents 109 Reconstructionist congregations, adopted a resolution welcoming congregations that primarily serve gay and lesbian Jews. In 1990, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association—the professional association for Reconstructionist rabbis—recommended that the movement establish a nondiscrimination policy in rabbinic placement.

In 1993, the Reconstructionist movement issued a compelling position paper on homosexuality and Judaism, which reviewed the traditional religious arguments against acceptance of gay and lesbian Jews and affirmed the movement's previously stated policies on full equality based on new understandings. The language and arguments of the paper, "The Report of the Reconstructionist Commission on Homosexuality," still ring true today.

The 1993 report noted that Jews should embrace the principle, based on their own negative experiences, that discrimination is wrong. It said that Reconstructionist Jews give Jewish values primacy over historically conditioned attitudes that are based on the biblical, rabbinic and medieval texts that condemn homosexuality as an abomination. Among the Jewish values cited were: just, fair and equal treatment of those who need protection; human dignity and integrity; holiness as reflected in acts of caring; and inclusive and democratic treatment of all.

Further, the paper's recommendations on treatment of gays and lesbians were framed in the context of broad Reconstructionist values, not formulated as an isolated response to a specific issue or problem.

Finally, the report made this very strong statement: "We recognize the bias in Jewish and American culture that deems homosexuality as deviant and heterosexuality as normative. Modern science teaches us that homosexuality and heterosexuality are normal expressions of human diversity. ...The sources of our tradition throughout the ages speak of the importance of caring for the 'stranger among us.' In remembering that we as a people have been a persecuted minority, we affirm our commitment to justice in our day. We therefore fully welcome gay and lesbian Jews to our communities, and commit ourselves to addressing their needs."

In 2004, the Reconstructionist movement took another important step by endorsing civil marriage for same-sex couples. The endorsement, noting the logic of preceding policy statements, said action was needed to ensure that same-sex couples are not continually denied access to the benefits automatically bestowed by civil marriage, including health care coverage, privileges under immigration and naturalization law, inheritance rights, survivor benefits and child custody.

We continue to hope that by our speaking out on out such issues, we can encourage all religions of the world to put behind them discriminatory behavior and hateful words, and instead follow the road of peace and compassion.

The previous statement is signed by leaders of the three arms of the Reconstructionist movement:

Rabbi Dan Ehrenkrantz, president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College

Rabbi Richard Hirsh, executive director of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association

Carl Sheingold, Ph.D., executive vice president of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation

RRC is the rabbinical training institution of Reconstructionist Judaism. Founded in 1968, RRC is a fully accredited academic institution that offers a five- to six-year curriculum leading to a master's degree in Hebrew letters and the title of rabbi. The rabbinical school prepares men and women for leadership and service in synagogues, universities, campus Hillel programs, social service agencies, homes for the elderly and chaplaincy.

The JRF is the congregational arm of the Reconstructionist movement, serving 70,000 American Jews affiliated with Reconstructionist synagogues.

The RRA, established in 1974, is the professional association of Reconstructionist rabbis. Its membership includes 285 rabbis.

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