Inauguration of Rabbi Deborah Waxman, Ph.D.,
As president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and
Jewish Reconstructionist Communities

Sunday, October 26, 2014

Processional
Board of Governors
President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
President, Reconstructionist Student Association
The Presidential Party

Invocation
Rabbi David Teutsch, Ph.D., RRC Faculty and former President

Welcome
Ivy L. Barsky, Chief Executive Officer and Gwen Goodman Director, National Museum of American Jewish History

Greetings
David Roberts, Chair, Board of Governors
Rabbi Jason Klein, President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association

Musical Interlude: “Zeh Hayom”
Members of the Camp JRF community

Installation of President
Susan Beckerman, Vice Chair, Board of Governors
Hon. Abraham Clott, Chair, Congregational Services Committee
David Roberts, Chair, Board of Governors
Seth Rosen, Chair, Community Engagement Committee
Judith Spatz, Chair, Jewish Reconstructionist Camping Corporation

Poetic Interlude
Rabbi Jacob Staub, Ph.D., RRC Faculty and former Vice President for Academic Affairs

Inaugural Address
Singing a New Song
Rabbi Deborah Waxman, Ph.D., President

Benediction
David Basior, President, Reconstructionist Student Association

Recessional
THE FIRST WOMAN RABBI to head a Jewish congregational union and lead a Jewish seminary, Rabbi Deborah Waxman, Ph.D., emphasizes Reconstructionist Judaism’s distinctive path toward meaning and connection.

Rabbi Waxman leads through close collaboration with the board of governors of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and Jewish Reconstructionist Communities, and with her extraordinary colleagues in the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association. She has installed a cabinet of exceptional leaders, augmenting the vice presidents for academic affairs and administration with three new positions: vice presidents for community engagement, strategic advancement and student development. She has increased focus on Israel by appointing a director of Israel engagement and liaison to Israeli Jewish renaissance. Additionally, Camp JRF and Jewish Reconstructionist Communities will share a new experiential educator. In her first nine months as president, Rabbi Waxman visited 13 Reconstructionist congregations and met with members and leaders of 20 more.

In addition to her rabbinical and academic credentials, Rabbi Waxman brings significant expertise in strategic planning to her post. Along with a team of Reconstructionist movement leaders, she led the development of the first strategic plan for both the College and the movement as a combined organization. In her previous role as vice president for governance, Rabbi Waxman helped to set mandates and evaluate the impact of the board of governors’ 15 committees—and was key in the successful integration of the rabbinical college and the congregational union in June 2012.

In past positions for the movement, Rabbi Waxman won support from leading funders such as the Kresge Foundation, Wexner Foundation and Cummings Foundation. She also led RRC’s academic accreditation work.

Rabbi Waxman has been on the faculty of RRC since 2002, teaching courses on Reconstructionist Judaism and practical rabbinics. From 2002 to 2012, she served as High Holiday rabbi for Congregation Bet Havarim in Fayetteville, NY.

Her academic published articles include a chapter on bar/bat mitzvah, co-authored with Rabbi Joshua Lesser, in the forthcoming A Guide to Jewish Practice, Volume 3 (RRC Press); “Multiple Conceptualizations of the Divine” in Sh’ma (April 2014); “A Lady Sometimes Blows the Shofar’: Women’s Religious Equality in the Postwar Reconstructionist Movement” in A Jewish Feminine Mystique?: Jewish Women in Postwar America (Rutgers University Press, 2010); “Distinctiveness and Universalism: How to Remain Jewish if Jewish Isn't Better” in Zeek (Fall 2010); “The Challenge of Implementing Reconstructionism: Art, Ideology, and the Society for the Advancement of Judaism’s Sanctuary Mural,” co-authored with Joyce Norden, in American Jewish History (September 2009); and a review of the National Museum of American Jewish History for Pennsylvania History (Winter 2012). She has received a number of academic honors, including the Ruth Fein Prize given by the American Jewish Historical Society. She serves on the society’s academic council.

Rabbi Waxman graduated cum laude from Columbia College, Columbia University, where she was elected to the Phi Beta Kappa Society. She received rabbinical ordination and a Master of Arts in Hebrew letters from RRC in 1999. She studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem as both an undergraduate and graduate student, and received a Horace W. Goldsmith Fellowship to support her graduate work. She earned a Ph.D. in American Jewish history from Temple University in May 2010; her dissertation was titled “Faith and Ethnicity in American Judaism: Reconstructionism as Ideology and Institution, 1935–1959.”
Vision

WHY RECONSTRUCTIONISM NOW? Since Mordecai Kaplan's time, Reconstructionists and those we have influenced have understood that Judaism is about more than religion and that Jewishness is about more than biology: Being Jewish involves not only belief and status but also behavior and attitude. The primary goals of Reconstructionists, be we classical or contemporary, are to gather in Jews who are disengaged or disenfranchised and celebrate multiple paths toward Jewish engagement.

We seek ways to renew our communities so that the next generation joins us even after they have experienced rich alternatives. A Reconstructionist approach aspires to draw Jews to meaningful and values-driven Jewish living, diversely experienced, generated by Jews and their families in partnership with rabbis and other leaders. Fueled by a sense of ownership and responsibility, informed by optimism, we inquire, we learn, we experiment. We, the Jewish people, continue to reconstruct the Jewish civilization.

Foremost in my vision for the future is to realize the full potential of the movement restructuring that yielded the combined Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) and Jewish Reconstructionist Communities (JRC), and, in so doing, to enhance the influence and impact of Reconstructionist Judaism. A first step is to leverage RRC/JRC as a vital educational center for the Reconstructionist movement and beyond, and to demonstrate that, in our educational mandate, we are contributing in meaningful ways to the well-being and prominence of the Reconstructionist movement.

This vision features a rabbinical program that is relevant to the current environment and attractive to potential candidates. It imagines new degree and certificate programs that are oriented toward our congregants and stakeholders (e.g., a mid-career certificate in mindful leadership) or professionals with spiritual inclinations (e.g., a certificate in spiritual care giving). In realizing this vision, we recognize that we will need to redeploy faculty toward service to the movement and educational programs beyond the rabbinical program.

A second priority is strengthening the Reconstructionist movement. A primary strategy is to provide congregational support to help communities succeed in their own communal work, which itself strengthens the Reconstructionist movement. The affiliate support team is already developing materials and services to aid congregations’ efforts to bolster their viability. We will expand regional and virtual events, the capacity to share best practices across congregations, and visits from faculty members and leaders. Beyond congregations, I seek to establish RRC/JRC as an incubator or innovation lab to cultivate new models of Jewish life.

Another critical movement-building strategy is to reaffirm or establish energized and engaging relationships with Reconstructionist rabbis, to support them in efforts to establish entrepreneurial rabbinates, and to activate them as agents of, thinkers for, and representatives of the larger movement. The final priority is attaining financial and programmatic viability for the Reconstructionist movement. Through multiple strategies, we must engage more effectively with internal and external audiences and, we hope, translate our efforts effectively into greater support toward our mission.

In all of these activities, I am honored to partner with lay leaders and rabbis to build a vital future for the Reconstructionist movement, and excited to collaborate powerfully with leaders within and beyond the Jewish community.
Celebratory Psalms

Psalm 118:24
Melody by Rabbi Miriam Margles

This very day, THE MIGHTY ONE has acted.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Zeh hayom asah adonay nagilah venismekha vo

Psalm 96:1–2
Melody by Rabbi Gary Ellison

Sing out to THE REDEEMER a new song!
Sing to THE ETERNAL all the earth!
Sing to THE SUBLIME ONE—bless God’s name,
Bring news, day after day, of divine help.

Shiru ladonay shir hadash shiru ladonay kol ha’aretz
Shiru ladonay barekhu shemo baseru miyom leyom yeshu’atoo

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