

## **JUDAISM'S RECONSTRUCTIONIST MOVEMENT CONDEMNS BANS ON SAME-SEX MARRIAGE**

### ***Denunciation Reflects Longstanding Leadership of Push to Liberalize Jewish Approaches to Homosexuality***

WYNCOTE, PA: NOVEMBER 21, 2008 – The leadership of the **Reconstructionist movement of Judaism**, one of the four main branches of American Judaism, **has issued a statement condemning the passage of California's Proposition 8** and similar discriminatory initiatives recently passed in Arizona, Florida and Arkansas. The statement is a reflection of the movement's longstanding leadership of the effort to liberalize Jewish approaches to homosexuality.

In **1984** the movement's rabbinical school, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, became the **first rabbinical seminary to accept openly gay and lesbian students** and the first to endorse the ordination of gay and lesbian rabbis. The Reform movement followed suit six years later, in 1990, while the Conservative movement approved the ordination of openly gay students and began admitting them in 2006. Orthodox Judaism does not approve of same-sex relationships or the ordination of gay rabbis.

In **1993** the Reconstructionist movement made another **pioneering decision when it sanctioned religious marriages for homosexual couples**. The Reform movement passed a similar resolution seven years later, in 2000. In 2006, the Conservative movement ruled that its rabbis could perform same-sex commitment ceremonies, although not same-sex marriages.

The three arms of the Reconstructionist movement and their leaders, who joined in denouncing Proposition 8 and similar measures, are:

The **Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (RRA)**, the international association of Reconstructionist rabbis. *Rabbi Toba Spitzer*, President (board leader); *Rabbi Richard Hirsh*, Executive Director (organization leader).

The **Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC)**, the movement's academic center and sole rabbinical seminary. *David Roberts*, Chair (board leader); *Rabbi Dan Ehrenkrantz*, President (organization leader).

The **Jewish Reconstructionist Federation (JRF)**, the international association of Reconstructionist synagogues. *Robert Barkin*, President (board leader); *Dr. Carl Sheingold*, Executive Vice-President (organization leader).

The statement approved by the organizations' leadership on November 14, 2008, is as follows:

*"The Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (RRA), the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation (JRF), and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) deplore the passage of Proposition 8 in California and similar discriminatory initiatives recently passed in Arizona, Florida, and Arkansas. We are saddened and deeply disturbed by the denial of fundamental human rights – to marry, to adopt and care for foster children – to thousands of gay and lesbian citizens across the United States. We are particularly dismayed by the passage of initiatives that have reversed previously recognized equality for same-sex unions.*

*Beginning in 1993, in a series of resolutions, the Reconstructionist movement has affirmed the holiness of commitments made by same-sex couples. Religious recognition of marriages does not confer the legal and civil rights and responsibilities bestowed by the state upon married couples. We recognize the right of every religious denomination to affirm its own definition of, and limitations upon, the sacred ritual of marriage. No member of the clergy should be compelled to sanctify any union that is contrary to his or her understanding of sacred text and tradition. But neither should any gay or lesbian citizen of the United States be denied the legal rights confirmed by civil marriage.*

*We call upon leaders of other faith communities who share the commitment to civic equality and to the separation of church and state in the realm of marriage to speak out against bans on same-sex marriage and discrimination against GLBT people in the realm of adoption and foster care. We look forward to the day when all states will grant equal access to the rights and responsibilities of civil marriage."*

## **ABOUT RECONSTRUCTIONIST JUDAISM**

The outgrowth of a philosophy developed in the 1930s, the Reconstructionist movement is one of the four main branches of American Judaism. For Reconstructionist Jews, Judaism is more than a system of religious beliefs and practices. It is the continuously evolving civilization of the Jewish people, encompassing not only religion, but also art, music, language, food, dance and everything else that makes up a civilization. Reconstructionist Jews believe that for Judaism to remain relevant, each generation must reexamine it, "reconstructing" it to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of the day. Egalitarian and inclusive, Reconstructionist congregations are known for embracing intellectual discourse and critique, encouraging innovation in liturgy and ritual, and affirming Judaism's uniqueness without implying "chosen-ness" over others.

## **THE THREE ARMS OF THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST MOVEMENT**

Like the other major Jewish denominations, Reform, Conservative and Orthodox, the Reconstructionist movement has three branches: a **seminary** that trains Reconstructionist rabbis, an association of ordained Reconstructionist **rabbis** (graduates of the seminary), and an association of Reconstructionist **congregations**:

- The **Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC)** is the academic center and sole rabbinical training institution of the Reconstructionist movement, one of the four main branches of American Judaism. The outgrowth of a philosophy developed in the early 20th century, the RRC was founded in 1968 with the explicit objective of training a new kind of rabbi – one uniquely prepared to lead and serve a rapidly changing American Jewish community in myriad settings. RRC’s rigorous curriculum emphasizes the study of Jewish history, thought and practice while also addressing the practical aspects of rabbinic life and rabbis’ moral obligation to be agents of social change. Graduates go on to assume leadership positions in synagogues, nonprofit organizations and philanthropies; to become educators and counselors at colleges and universities; and to serve as chaplains in hospitals and the military. For more information please visit [www.rrc.edu](http://www.rrc.edu).
- The **Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (RRA)**, established in 1974, is the professional association of Reconstructionist rabbis. The RRA provides resources to its 300 members, represents the rabbinic voice within the Reconstructionist movement, and represents the Reconstructionist rabbinate to the larger Jewish and general communities. For more information please visit [www.therra.org](http://www.therra.org).
- The **Jewish Reconstructionist Federation (JRF)**, founded in 1955, is the international congregational organization of the Reconstructionist movement. More than 100 congregations and *havurot* (groups of people who come together without a rabbi to pray, study, celebrate or engage in other activities tied to their Jewish beliefs) with some 70,000 household members, are affiliates of JRF. For more information please visit [www.jrf.org](http://www.jrf.org).

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