

Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association

RESOLUTION

IN SUPPORT OF CIVIL MARRIAGE FOR SAME-SEX COUPLES

March 16, 2004

Background

In 1984, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College became the first Jewish seminary to endorse the ordination of gay and lesbian rabbis when it adopted a policy of non-discrimination in admissions on the basis of sexual orientation.

At its 1990 convention, the RRA recommended that the Reconstructionist movement establish a non-discrimination policy in rabbinic placement. The following year, a movement-wide policy was enacted prohibiting discrimination in the referral of resumes of candidates for positions within congregations.

The Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association has, from its founding in 1974, automatically welcomed all graduates of the College for membership; in 1991, the RRA adopted a formal policy of non-discrimination in membership, thus acknowledging the previously unwritten policy.

The Jewish Reconstructionist Federation (then FRCH) adopted a resolution in 1985 welcoming congregations that primarily serve gay and lesbian Jews.

In 1993 both the RRA and FRCH adopted the findings and recommendations of the Reconstructionist Commission on Homosexuality. Those conclusions called for the welcoming of gay men and lesbians as full members of our communities, and supported rabbis who worked with and officiated at rituals and rites of passage for gay and lesbian Jews and same-sex couples, including wedding ceremonies.

The Reconstructionist movement has been at the forefront of efforts to include and integrate gay and lesbian Jews into all aspects of Jewish communal and religious life. The RRA now wants to go on record as being in support of full and equal civil marriage for gay men and lesbians in the United States.

In Support of Civil Marriage for Same-Sex Couples

WHEREAS today same-sex couples face opposition to the right to civil marriage in the United States, and;

WHEREAS same-sex couples are regularly denied access to the benefits automatically bestowed by civil marriage including, among others, health care coverage and related decision-making, privileges under immigration and naturalization law, inheritance rights, survivor benefits and child custody, and;

WHEREAS legal recognition of gay and lesbian relationships will provide these men and women and their families with these benefits, as well as providing them the respect they are currently denied, and;

WHEREAS we deem it imperative that progressive religious voices be raised in support of the equality that is currently denied to gay men and lesbians, and in opposition to attempts to present religious traditions in general, and Jewish tradition in particular, as being uniformly opposed to equality for gay men and lesbians; and

WHEREAS the Reconstructionist movement has a twenty-year history of advocating the inclusion and equality of gay men and lesbians in Jewish life;

THEREFORE

BE IT RESOLVED that the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association endorses and supports the right of same-sex couples to share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities and commitments of civil marriage.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the RRA supports legislation and legal action that will secure civil marriage for same-sex couples. The RRA asserts that civil marriage for same-sex couples must include all the benefits commonly bestowed upon opposite-sex couples, including, among other rights, healthcare coverage and related decision-making, privileges under immigration and naturalization law, survivor benefits, inheritance rights, and child custody.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the RRA opposes all efforts to ban civil marriage for gay men and lesbian women.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the RRA endorses the Marriage Resolution of the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, * which reads:

"Because marriage is a basic human right and an individual personal choice, resolved, the State should not interfere with same-gender couples who choose to marry and share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities, and commitments of civil marriage."

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the RRA calls upon its members to:

Encourage the congregations, agencies, organizations, and institutions in which they serve to extend benefits to same-sex partners of staff members and employees.

Monitor local and regional developments and consider ways of advocating for same-sex civil marriage in their communities.

Offer *tzedakah* donations to organizations advocating for civil rights for same-sex couples.

Use pre-marital counseling with heterosexual couples as an opportunity to discuss the issue of equal rights for same-sex couples.

Speak about the issue of civil marriage for same-sex couples from the *bimah*, in agencies and organizations and institutions, in institutional newsletter articles, and in other settings, particularly at times when public attention is turned to gay and lesbian inclusivity, for example, on GLBT Pride weekends, Right To Marriage Day, Coming Out Day.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the RRA prepare "talking points" in support of civil marriage for same-sex couples. Such talking points should raise issues of religious liberty as well as economic and political justice, and be distributed to members of the RRA, who are encouraged to contribute letters to the editor, opinion columns and other public statements in support of civil marriage for gay and lesbian people.

[*Lambda Legal Mission Statement: Lambda Legal is a national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, the transgendered, and people with HIV or AIDS through impact litigation, education, and public policy work.]