

# RECONSTRUCTIONIST RABBINICAL ASSOCIATION

## CODE OF ETHICS

(Adopted at RRA Convention March 13, 2007)  
(Amended at RRA Annual Meeting via Videoconference/Phone April 17, 2016)

### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND FUNCTION

The vocation of the rabbinate requires engagement with Jewish tradition, with the contemporary context, and with professional standards of behavior. The members of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association affirm our commitment to act in an ethical manner consistent with the highest principles of Judaism, particularly in relationships with our congregations, congregants, and colleagues. This Code of Ethics thus serves three fundamental purposes:

- 1. It provides moral guidance reflecting professional standards of behavior.**
- 2. It serves as an educational resource for rabbis, employers and lay people regarding those standards, and their application to appropriate rabbinic conduct.** Statements in the document using “should,” “may,” “obligation” and “urged” deal with categories that are primarily educational. Complaints to the RRA Ethics Committee regarding such categories will normally be responded to with educational information for the rabbi as well as with words of caution. Repeated complaints may result in additional action by the RRA Ethics Committee. The standards described in Section III (“Obligations to Self and Family”) are advisory and not subject to action by the RRA Ethics Committee beyond education.
- 3. It acts as a code of behavior for which RRA members can be held accountable by the RRA Ethics Committee. Violations** of conduct (whether of commission or omission) that are described in this document as “**unethical**,” “**unacceptable**,” “**violation(s)**” or “**breach of ethics**” or are denoted by “**must**” are subject to action by the RRA Ethics Committee in accordance with procedures established by the RRA; these are in bold print.

I. PREAMBLE

- A. By virtue of the authority and responsibility vested in us as rabbis, we accept a sacred trust before God, the Jewish people and humanity. That sacred trust ought to be reflected in all that rabbis do and say. This Code of Ethics frames the moral principles and conduct of Reconstructionist rabbis.
- B. A fundamental principle of Jewish conduct is that human beings are created *b'tselem Elohim* (in the image of God). Treating each person as having infinite value, as a subject and not an object, is central to Jewish ethics.
- C. Rabbis are responsible for their moral conduct. Many aspects of rabbinic moral conduct are addressed in this Code, but no code, no matter how thorough, can anticipate every behavior and regulate it. Sound personal judgment will inevitably play a role in ethical behavior.
- D. Jewish principles, values, and conduct form a complex, interactive web embodying the moral aspect of Jewish civilization. Rabbis are advocates for Jewish moral life as well as its custodians and protectors. These roles, as well as norms of professional behavior, should be reflected in our actions and speech.
- E. Preservation of rabbinic-congregant relationship. The rabbi-congregant relationship depends upon a mutual expectation that the relationship will remain primarily professional and pastoral. Effective rabbinic work of necessity involves conveying empathy, connection, and warmth to congregants, which can sometimes blur rabbi-congregant boundaries. We recognize the humanity of rabbis and congregants, and the existence of unavoidable and difficult dilemmas in negotiating rabbi-congregant relations. Nonetheless, a rabbi is primarily responsible for establishing and preserving appropriate boundaries that ensure the integrity of the rabbi congregant relationship.

(NOTE: In this document, “congregation” may also refer to a havurah, school, Jewish organization or other institution served professionally by a rabbi. “Congregant” may also refer to a student, counselee, lay person, or other person served professionally by a rabbi.)

## II. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- A. Rabbis are often perceived as *kley kodesh* (conduits of holiness). The rabbinic roles we fill—pastors, teachers, counselors, worship leaders and Jewish authorities—convey special responsibility. For many Jews, rabbis are not only symbolic exemplars when in these roles, but at all other times as well. With rabbinic authority to teach Torah and represent the Jewish people comes special responsibility to set a moral example and avoid morally damaging any part of Jewish life or of general society.
- B. The rabbinate is not only a profession. It is a sacred vocation. We have an obligation to protect both the dignity of the Reconstructionist rabbinate and the sacredness of Jewish tradition.
- C. Integrity in speech, conduct and relationships is essential.
- D. As public figures, we should be especially conscious of the importance not only of avoiding impropriety but also of avoiding *marit ayin* (the appearance of impropriety).
- E. Reconstructionist rabbis represent not only the rabbinate and the Jewish people but also the Reconstructionist movement. Our conduct and principles should reflect the commitments of the Reconstructionist movement and bring credit to it. Our conduct and speech should also reflect respect for the organizations of our movement (JRC, RRC, and RRA); criticisms and disagreements with them should be offered *l'khaf zekhut* (with the assumption of honorable intentions).
- F. We have an obligation to offer *tokhekha* (moral feedback and admonition) when we become aware of improprieties, whether those of a colleague, an organization or another individual. *Tokhekha* might involve urging those involved to seek help appropriate to the situation, as well as to change subsequent actions. Only through a covenant of shared responsibility and a joint effort can we uphold Jewish communal standards.
- G. A rabbi who has direct knowledge of a serious violation of the Code has an obligation to report it to the RRA Ethics Committee Chair.
- H. Exploitation of rabbinic status for improper personal, professional or financial gain brings discredit to the rabbi and the rabbinate.
- I. The special role of the rabbi brings fiduciary responsibilities that have both legal and moral implications.
- J. Any action that involves a **violation** of the principles stated above is **unethical**.

### III. OBLIGATIONS TO SELF AND FAMILY

- A. Our obligations to ourselves and to others can be met only if we exercise sufficient self-care. Each person has an obligation to preserve his/her own *b'riyut*—physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.
- B. Physical health depends upon regular exercise, proper diet, sufficient sleep and regular medical checkups. These should be a regular part of a rabbi's schedule.
- C. Emotional health depends upon many factors, including finding sufficient time for maintaining friendships and other nurturing relationships, pursuing interests that provide satisfaction and meaning, and having sufficient opportunity to gain perspective on one's life. Rabbinic careers often place unusual strain on our emotional lives. When a rabbi has concerns regarding his/her own psychological wellbeing, s/he should seek professional counseling, the advice of colleagues, and other forms of support.
- D. As spiritual leaders, we depend upon our spiritual resources, which easily become depleted. Each of us finds spiritual renewal in different ways. These might include prayer, meditation, study, aesthetic and natural experiences as well as other activities that deepen and enrich our spiritual lives. Disciplined and balanced engagement with spirituality is a necessary part of our daily lives.
- E. Rabbis have a primary responsibility to our families. We need to reserve sufficient time, attention and energy to maintain strong relationships with them. The responsibilities of rabbinic work inevitably result in occasional conflicts between work and home commitments. To minimize conflicts between professional and familial obligations, rabbis should strive to arrange our work and home responsibilities and schedules in cooperation with both employer and family.
- F. Addictions are disorders that disrupt effective human functioning. It is imperative for a rabbi to recognize addiction in any form and to seek appropriate treatment immediately. Many addicts remain in recovery for the rest of their lives. Designing a suitable support system if one is a recovering addict is critically important.

### IV. SUBSTANCE ABUSE

- A. Substance abuse damages our physical and emotional health, and it has a negative impact on the family and community as well. Abuse of alcohol and drugs is **unethical** and destructive.
- B. Rabbis engaged in substance abuse should seek treatment.

V. DOMESTIC ABUSE

- A. Domestic abuse is **unacceptable** in all its forms—emotional, physical, financial and sexual. A rabbi engaged in abusive behavior **must** take immediate responsibility for specific harmful actions as well as for the intimidation and control that cycles of abusive behavior inflict on others. A rabbi who engages in domestic abuse, becomes aware of the impulse to do so or receives comments identifying his/her personal behavior as abusive should seek professional help immediately in order to protect the safety of his/her family. Accepting accountability to others is an essential step in changing abusive behavior.
- B. A rabbi who is a victim of domestic abuse should seek help as soon as possible.

VI. ORGANIZATIONAL/CONGREGATIONAL OBLIGATIONS

- A. The relationship between a rabbi and the congregation or organization (hereafter, organization) rests on a *brit* (covenant) that is the basis for mutual trust and respect. We commit ourselves to serving the organization, its purposes and its members (including all its service and program participants) to the best of our ability. The organization, its leaders and its members can be expected to reciprocate by recognizing the rabbi's unique role and by looking out for the rabbi's welfare.
- B. The basic terms of rabbinic employment are usually described in a contract or letter of agreement, often with a job description attached. The rabbi is obliged to honor the terms of this agreement as interpreted by the Reconstructionist Placement guidelines, by RRA policies and by law. Many organizations have employment codes that define the rules for employment. Such a code is binding on a rabbi as well.
- C. The rabbi can be held accountable by an organization and/or by the RRA for actions or inaction that violates the covenantal relationship, the contract, the employment code and/or principles of Jewish ethics.
- D. The rabbi-organization relationship depends on respecting the special role of the rabbi that stems from training and responsibility. This *k'vod harav* is justified by the rabbi's learning, commitment, caring and good judgment. Avoiding *halbanat panim* (embarrassment or shame) to a rabbi or to other professionals or volunteers is a critical aspect of maintaining *kavod* (honor and dignity) in the covenantal relationships that should characterize the organization.
- E. When signing controversial public letters or taking controversial public stands without the official endorsement of the organization, a rabbi may do so on the rabbi's own behalf. If doing so does not violate the stated policy of the organization, a rabbi may use the organization's name "for identification purposes only." Rabbis should be aware that our actions reflect upon our organizations, and should notify our presidents or professional supervisors when we sign public statements. An organization may have legitimate concerns if its leaders believe that a rabbi's public actions are having a substantial adverse effect on it.

## VII. TRUTH AND HONEST REPRESENTATION

- A. Jewish tradition places a strong emphasis on telling the truth. Each rabbi has the responsibility to be a *dover emet* (a truth-teller).
- B. When placing commercial announcements of professional rabbinic services in any medium, the rabbi should ascertain that the services announced do not violate any rule of the professional associations of which the rabbi is a member. Such announcements of services **must** be in good taste and without exaggeration or competitive statements of any kind. Announcements **must** not state a rabbi's fees for services. Any use of commercial advertisement **must** reflect the dignity of the rabbinate.
- C. Rabbis are often asked to provide credentials, biographical statements and curricula vitae, and to describe their education, training, and experience. Any misrepresentation or exaggeration—regardless of whether it is related to employment—is a **breach of ethics**.
- D. Rabbis are called upon to speak, teach and write. In doing so, we often draw upon the work of others. It is important to observe the principle of meticulously citing our sources, quoting *b'shem omro* (in the name of the author). We **must** avoid claiming the work of others as our own. Failure to do so constitutes *g'neyvat da'at* (a form of theft).
- E. *L'shon hara* (gossip) and *rekhilus* (statements that defame or create conflict) should be avoided because they undermine trust, cause humiliation and disrupt community life. Sharing private information about people without their explicit permission is *l'shon hara*. Occasionally sharing private information may be necessary, but in general this ought to be avoided not only in speech and formal writing, but also in all forms of electronic communication, such as email, chatrooms and listservs, as these have the capacity for even greater destructiveness. Rabbis should monitor their own actions as well as act to diminish or remove *l'shon hara* and *rekhilus* from communal life.

## VIII. CONFIDENTIALITY

- A. Rabbis **must** maintain confidentiality of private communication except when that involves a significant threat of substantial harm to the speaker, to another person or to the community or institution. Honoring that obligation is critical to maintaining the trust of individuals and the community.
- B. Exceptions to the obligation of confidentiality include reporting required by law (which may vary somewhat in each state or province), such as incidents of suspected abuse or molestation of children or elders. Rabbis are obligated to become familiar with the reporting required in their locale. Even where there is no legal requirement, such reporting is obligatory in matters of *pikuah nefesh* (saving a life) and *lo ta'amod al dam rey'ekha* (acting to protect others).
- C. Occasionally for personal or professional reasons a rabbi may wish to divulge confidential information where the rabbi is not obliged to do so. A rabbi can resolve this conflict of interest only by obtaining the permission of the people involved.

- D. The rabbi who seeks the confidential advice of another professional in handling a difficult situation or in professional supervision is not considered to be violating the commitment to confidentiality provided that reasonable precautions, such as withholding names and unnecessary personal information, are followed.
- E. When rabbis are members of a professional care team (e.g. in a hospital or agency setting, or when several rabbis serve the same congregation), they may share confidential information as needed and/or as determined by their organization's regulations. Even in team settings, rabbis should balance confidentiality and rabbinic care, sharing only the minimum amount of confidential information needed in a specific situation.
- F. The development of diverse means of data storage and communication has heightened the likelihood that information will be inadvertently and inappropriately shared. Access to computers containing private data should be carefully controlled, and such confidential data should never be communicated by e-mail.
- G. When a rabbi leaves a congregation, the rabbi should review confidential files and excise those containing records of pastoral counseling sessions and private congregant information. Files that are legitimately the property of the congregation and those that may be important in any future proceeding should be preserved.

## IX. FINANCIAL TRUST

- A. Two basic Jewish principles in financial dealings are to avoid all forms of dishonesty and to disclose all potentially relevant information regarding a transaction with which one is involved.
- B. It is improper to exploit pastoral or professional relationships for undue personal or familial financial gain.
- C. Rabbinic compensation and expense reimbursement should be made clear by contract. In order to avoid potential future difficulties with employers, rabbis should avoid additional non-contractual financial arrangements with them, including borrowing money, co-signing loans and jointly entering into business ventures. Rabbis considering such arrangements are encouraged to consult the RRA staff and legal and financial advisors. When a rabbi has received a loan or mortgage funding from an organization or congregant(s), it **must** be fully repaid in a timely way.
- D. When a rabbi has access to organizational funds, the rabbi is obliged to avoid even the appearance of impropriety. Rabbis **must** follow the organization's procedural rules for expenditures, spending only in support of the purposes of the organization and avoiding any personal or familial benefit from such expenditures.
- E. Rabbis with discretionary funds are obliged to use the funds for legitimate charitable purposes, to keep a proper accounting of the income and expenditure of the funds and to comply meticulously with relevant law and tax regulations. Because these change over time, rabbis **must** regularly check the shifting standards of compliance. Rabbis should ensure that their discretionary funds are audited annually, with the outside auditor providing a statement to the Board regarding the

propriety of accounting and expenditures. Discretionary fund expenditures may not be used for the benefit of the rabbi or the rabbi's family, or for the rabbi's professional expenses.

- F. All citizens have an obligation to pay taxes. The obligations of clergy are complicated by housing allowances, income from emoluments and honoraria, professional expenses and insurance and retirement arrangements. Therefore, rabbis should obtain expert guidance and **must** follow the principle of disclosure regarding their taxes, complying with all applicable laws in reporting tax liabilities and paying them.

## X. PASTORAL OBLIGATIONS

- A. Rabbis have an obligation to meet the pastoral and life-cycle needs of those whom they serve when that is part of the rabbi's job description, unless doing so violates the rabbi's professional standards or personal religious practice. Expectations regarding a rabbi's pastoral obligations should be shaped in part by recognition of the rabbi's obligations, health and other commitments. We have a secondary pastoral responsibility to those with whom we come into contact through fulfilling our professional obligations. Meeting the needs of those for whom we do not have a direct professional responsibility has lower priority than our responsibilities to our organizations and our own families.
- B. Those whom we serve, including congregants, students, clients and others (hereafter, "congregants"), can occasionally misinterpret behavior that is intended to communicate caring as an inappropriate blurring of boundaries. Rabbis should be attentive to the complexities of transference and counter-transference. We are obliged to be especially sensitive to the danger of misperception and to avoid behavior such as forms of touch and closeness that could reasonably be misconstrued.
- C. If rabbinic concern is misconstrued as romantic or sexual interest, the rabbi **must** state unequivocally that such a relationship is not possible. In such a situation, the rabbi is strongly urged to seek advice from colleagues and/or other professionals.
- D. Because pastoral counseling requires privacy, rabbis should strive to avoid situations that might lead to inappropriate behavior or suspicion of such behavior when counseling an individual. Counseling sessions should take place when others are in the building (preferably in a room with a window or where a door can be left ajar) or in public places such as a well-lit coffee shop or public park; use of automobiles for this purpose should be avoided. Rabbis should not meet students or counselees, whether adults or children, alone in their homes or in the rabbi's home, except for pastoral visits to people who are house-bound and those with serious illnesses. Even in these cases, the rabbi should consider bringing someone on the visit or timing it so that someone else is at home if the visit may raise any question of the rabbi's intent or action. In some situations, there are organizational rules, legal rulings or professional codes limiting the use of these approaches that take precedence over these recommendations.
- E. When the counseling needed exceeds our expertise or the time that we can allot, we have an obligation to refer to appropriate professionals.
- F. The relationships between rabbis and congregants involve multiple roles. Rabbis should attempt to prevent any tensions or hostilities from affecting pastoral relationships. To accomplish this, a

rabbi may need to explain to a congregant that despite their conflict over policy, practice or particular conduct, the rabbi will do his/her best to serve the pastoral needs of the congregant and family.

## XI. SEXUAL ETHICS

- A. It is **unethical** for a rabbi to engage in sexual or other harassment. Sexual harassment can involve deliberate or repeated seductive speech, sexual comments, gestures or physical contacts. It may include unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. This applies to verbal, written and electronic communication.
- B. It is **unethical** to engage in, or attempt to engage in, sexual activity with a minor, with an unwilling adult or with an adult who has a limited capacity to give full and informed consent.
- C. Rabbis are expected to honor the sexual and emotional boundaries of all covenanted relationships—both their own and those of other people.
- D. Any emotionally intimate and/or romantic relationship between a rabbi and a congregant is problematic and has the potential to become **unethical** even if no sexual activity is involved. Such a relationship may compromise and consequently might necessitate terminating the rabbi-congregant relationship, with the congregant or the rabbi having to withdraw from the synagogue in order to continue the relationship. Rabbis need to be aware of the risks involved for both parties in such relationships. Rabbis are strongly urged to seek guidance from colleagues or other professionals before beginning such a relationship.
- E. When a rabbi has had a significant pastoral, counseling or teaching relationship with a congregant, a considerable amount of time **must** pass before the relationship can be allowed to become romantic or sexual because of the power imbalances between rabbis and congregants. Until then, such a relationship is **unethical** even if welcomed by the congregant. The rabbi bears responsibility for not exploiting the pastoral relationship. In addition to the time lapse—which in some cases may require waiting a year or more—joint counseling may be advisable. The rabbi should seek advice from a senior colleague recommended by the Ethics Committee in exploring the propriety of the relationship for both parties. The congregant should be encouraged to consider whether the congregant is freely entering a new stage in the relationship. Some states and professional organizations prohibit sexual relationships for longer periods following the termination of a pastoral or counseling relationship; it is the rabbi's responsibility to know the applicable rules.
- F. A rabbi in a non-congregational and non-pastoral professional role may want to begin a romantic and/or sexual relationship with a volunteer in the same agency or organization. Such relationships are not usually unethical, but they do carry risks in regard to conflicts and the appearance of conflicts regarding professional roles and functions. Many organizations and agencies have personnel codes that regulate such relationships. A rabbi involved in such a relationship should disclose it to appropriate staff members and/or lay leaders if there is the possibility of a conflict of interest or the appearance of one. Rabbis are strongly urged to seek the guidance of professional colleagues regarding issues that may arise as a result of such relationships before entering into one.

- G. Any sexual or romantic relationship between colleagues or co-workers is fraught with risks for both parties. These risks include ambiguity about roles, effects on relationships with lay leaders and other staff members, and the future of both parties in the congregation. Ethical and professional risks are greatly magnified if one colleague is the supervisor or perceived superior of another. Rabbis are strongly urged to seek guidance from colleagues or other professionals before beginning a relationship with a colleague or co-worker.
- H. Rabbis share holiday and Shabbat celebrations with congregants and socialize with them in both formal and informal settings. Social activities that create situations of potential inappropriate intimacy with coworkers or congregants have dangers against which rabbis **must** guard. It is best to avoid such situations. When that is not possible, vigilance is needed to avoid damage to the relationship as well as potential impropriety.
- I.

## XII. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RABBIS AND OUR COWORKERS

- A. Rabbis frequently have formal responsibility for supervising other staff members. Even when that is not the case, we often mentor others, which is an important aspect of our work. Such mentoring often is a mix of Jewish teaching, coaching about difficult situations, providing personal support and helping with career development. In mentoring, conflicts can arise between organizational obligations and commitment to coworkers (e.g. information learned in mentoring that could negatively affect a mentee's promotion). All conflicts of interest **must** be disclosed to the mentee to avoid unfairness. Both when supervising and when mentoring, a rabbi should balance encouragement with constructive criticism.
- B. Achieving the mission of the organization requires cooperation among all staff members. This is possible only when there is sufficient communication to coordinate programmatic and administrative responsibilities and to provide information that each staff member needs to function effectively and efficiently. Rabbis should establish high expectations regarding cooperation and communication among those whom we supervise. Whether in supervisory roles or not, we should exemplify careful, caring communication and teamwork.
- C. Professional colleagues should support each other in our work whether or not we share an organizational setting. Helping colleagues to be effective in their work and to receive the recognition they deserve for their efforts is a professional expectation. When close cooperation is not possible because of conflicts of interest, every effort should nevertheless be made to avoid undermining colleagues or their institutions.
- D. When a conflict arises between the rabbi and staff members or colleagues, a frank conversation should take place without delay in an effort to resolve the conflict. If that fails, those involved should go to a supervisor or select a mediator to help in resolving the conflict. Unresolved conflicts sow distrust and disharmony, and every effort should be made to heal the damage to the relationship. If the conflict is between supervisor and supervisee, after a frank exchange of views the supervisee should usually accede to the decision of the supervisor. If it is a matter of ethics or of organizational or personal importance, or if the supervisee believes there is a pattern of unfair treatment, the supervisee has the right to appeal to the supervisor's supervisor. This should be undertaken with extreme caution because of the damage to relationships and credibility that is likely to result.

- E. When there are several rabbis working together, it is the responsibility of the senior colleague, or of co-colleagues, to ensure that each rabbi has appropriate duties. These duties should fit each rabbi's job description and provide sufficient opportunity for making a meaningful contribution to the organization, for visibility and for professional growth and satisfaction. When tasks are mutually regarded as onerous, these should be fairly divided. A senior rabbi's colleagues should provide all information that may be relevant to the function of the senior rabbi. The senior rabbi establishes policy for the clergy of the congregation and decides their role in policy making. Acting out of mutual respect, support and concern helps to set the tone needed to maintain a *kehilla kedosha* (a holy community).

### XIII. SUCCESSOR AND EMERITUS RABBIS

- A. It is the obligation of a rabbi who is becoming emeritus or leaving an organization to provide as much orientation and information to the incoming rabbi as possible. This includes (but is not limited to) organizing and passing on formal records, pastoral information, organizational and ritual policies and concrete information about scheduling, calendar and the like. The departing rabbi should support the transfer of religious leadership to the incoming rabbi.
- B. The incoming rabbi has an obligation to treat predecessors and the emeritus rabbi with *kavod* and courtesy. Recognizing the emeritus rabbi on formal occasions, listing the emeritus on stationery and printed materials and preserving the record of earlier rabbis' tenures and accomplishments are required parts of *kavod*.
- C. The new rabbi is the religious leader of the congregation. The emeritus and/or predecessor rabbis should officiate at life-cycle events of their former congregants only with the explicit permission of the new rabbi. Without the prior consent of the new rabbi, the rabbi who is leaving **must** not make commitments prior to the new rabbi's arrival to officiate at events in the congregation or life-cycle events of congregants that will occur after the rabbi's arrival.
- D. The new rabbi may choose to invite the emeritus to speak from the pulpit, teach a class or otherwise participate in the leadership of the congregation. While the emeritus rabbi may only participate if there is such an invitation, the emeritus rabbi has the right to decline any invitation.
- E. Former and emeritus rabbis and their families are obliged to avoid interfering in the organizational and personal relationships of succeeding rabbis. Even when leaders or members of the organization actively seek their opinion, support or intervention, former and emeritus rabbis are obligated to practice circumspection and avoid involvement, particularly in areas of controversy or conflict.
- F. Rabbis naturally have a major role in the hiring and retention of their assistants or co-rabbis. However, their role in the hiring of their successors is very limited. The Reconstructionist Placement Guidelines provide specifics in this regard.

XIV. RELATIONSHIPS AMONG ORGANIZATIONS AND CONGREGATIONS, RABBIS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS

- A. Invitations to speak from the pulpit, address a major gathering or officiate at a life-cycle event at congregation where one is not the rabbi **must** be proffered or confirmed by the rabbi of that congregation or the rabbi's duly authorized representative before such invitations can be accepted. When a congregational rabbi will be away for more than a day, the rabbi should provide the congregation with a list of rabbis who can be asked to officiate during that absence. The rabbi, back-up rabbis and congregation should reach an agreement as to whether an honorarium for a back-up rabbi is expected and if so who is responsible for payment.
- B. If a rabbi is asked to officiate at a life-cycle event involving a member of another congregation or members of other congregations, the officiating rabbi should arrange for timely notification of the other rabbi(s) concerned. When members of multiple congregations are involved, the rabbi should make a reasonable effort to notify all relevant colleagues.
- C. Rabbis and their congregants should avoid inviting members of other congregations to join theirs. This avoids *hasagat g'vul* (improper crossing of political or economic boundaries) and the rancor that it causes.
- D. Rabbis have an obligation to comply with the rules of all professional organizations to which they belong.
- E. In communities where there are multiple Jewish organizations, rabbis should strive to create and sustain positive relationships among professional colleagues and organizations.

XV. RABBINIC SERVICES

- A. Rabbis have an obligation to meet the pastoral needs and officiate at the life-cycle events of the members of the organizations we serve when that is part of our job descriptions, unless those needs conflict with the religious practices or professional standards of the rabbi. When scheduling conflicts (including vacations and days off) force a referral, a rabbi should offer several choices where possible. When religious practices or professional standards prevent officiation, the rabbi should provide several referral possibilities if doing so does not involve a violation of conscience or professional practice.
- B. Full-time congregational rabbis **must** not charge their congregants for counseling or performing life-cycle events for residents of the congregants' household. If, following officiation, a congregant chooses to make a donation to the rabbi's discretionary fund or to another *tzedaka* in the rabbi's honor, it is normal practice to accept such a donation. If a gift is made to the rabbi personally, the rabbi should exercise caution, as accepting such gifts may create the appearance, expectation or actuality of undue influence. Many rabbis choose not to accept such gifts personally; those who do accept gifts should be attentive to tax consequences.
- C. Whether part-time rabbis can accept emoluments from their congregants, and if so whether the amounts are fixed, is subject to the rabbi's contract. Rabbis should ensure that congregants are regularly reminded of these arrangements. When a rabbi is providing service that is in excess of the terms of the contract, it is just for the rabbi to be suitably compensated.

- D. If nothing in a rabbi's job description or contract precludes it, rabbis may officiate at the lifecycle events of people other than their congregants or provide other rabbinic service for them. In such cases, it is customary for rabbis to receive an appropriate honorarium. To avoid misunderstandings, fees to be charged should be stated clearly and in writing at the outset. Given the possibility of unseemly misunderstandings, it is best that there be a letter of agreement that specifies the terms of the rabbi's participation, including timing and location, cancellation arrangements, the terms regarding fees and expenses and other specifics.
- E. In the rare instance that a rabbi cannot honor a commitment to officiate, the rabbi **must** notify those involved at the earliest possible moment and **must** provide the names of suitable colleagues who are available to step in and officiate.
- F. The mitzva of *hakhnasat hager* (welcoming potential converts) is a rabbinic responsibility. Fulltime congregational rabbis should not accept fees for tutoring a potential *ger* (convert) or serving on a *bet din* for *giyyur*. Rabbis **must** not accept a fee (but can suggest an act of *tzedaka*) from a convert for leading a *bet din* for conversion or serving on one. This does not preclude a community from compensating members of its *bet din*. The direct expenses involved, such as the *mikva* fee, can be borne by the convert, but nothing should be allowed that would even hint of any motive for the conversion other than its being done *l'shem shamayim* (for the sake of divine service).

## XVI. SECULAR LAW AND GOVERNANCE

- A. Rabbinic tradition has long proclaimed that *dina d'malkhuta dina* (that secular law is binding upon Jews). Rabbis should support an orderly, just society that can pursue the goal of everyone living harmoniously and safely in their diversity.
- B. As citizens, we have an obligation to set an example by becoming familiar with policy issues and candidates, voting and participating broadly in the process of government. As rabbis and public figures, we have a responsibility to add our voices to public debate on issues of concern when we deem it appropriate to do so. When addressing political issues or participating in political campaigns, rabbis should be careful to avoid endangering the tax-exempt status of their organizations by adhering to the regulations regarding such participation by individuals, organizations and their leaders.
- C. An exception to our obligation to follow secular law is instances of conscientious objection and civil disobedience. Often a valid test of whether an act of law-breaking involves civil disobedience or conscientious objection is whether a rabbi involved is prepared to publicize the act and be arrested for it.

## XVII. VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

- A. Rabbis are religious leaders with obligations to the Jewish community and beyond it. Like all members of the Jewish community, we have an obligation to work for the broader welfare. Even when our professional and familial obligations are substantial, we are still called *l'taken olam b'malkhut Shaday* (to improve the world through expanding God's presence in it).

- B. Rabbis are often voluntary leaders in communal organizations. When in this role, we **must** exercise our fiduciary responsibilities with care, both for the sake of the organization and its mission, and for the preservation of the honor of the rabbinate.

#### XVIII. TESHUVA

- A. Jewish tradition recognizes the reality of *yetzer hara*. It is unrealistic to expect perfection of ourselves. But we ought to strive toward exemplary conduct.
- B. When we fail to measure up to our own standards, it is critical to recognize this. Acknowledging moral failings, errors in judgment, accidental errors and any other kind of misconduct is the classical starting point of *teshuva*.
- C. Sincere apologies should be made as soon as possible to those who have been wronged and/or hurt. In offering apologies, we should seek input about how to make up for the damage caused to all concerned. Where appropriate, public apologies are indispensable parts of the *teshuva* process.

#### XIX. INTEGRITY OF THE RABBINATE

- A. It is incumbent upon rabbis to avoid harm to the people they serve by staff members and volunteers. To that end, rabbis should advocate for congregational or organizational policies that build communal safeguards such as background checks and reference checks. Rabbis who have hiring authority in the organizations in which they work should ensure that the backgrounds of potential employees are checked to protect the safety of both minors and adult congregants.
- B. In the case of hiring a colleague, rabbis **MUST** inquire of the relevant rabbinic and professional organization(s) to determine if there have been any ethics actions relevant to the kind of employment under consideration.
- C. Rabbis **MUST** not hire employees when their previous records suggest the potential for harm in the situation for which the employee is being hired. Particular caution is urged in the case of rabbis who are not members of an association that requires its members to be bound by a comprehensive code of ethics. Similarly, caution is urged in the case of rabbis currently suspended or expelled by rabbinic organizations, or who have resigned when such actions were under consideration.