

PLAN TO ESTABLISH JOINT ISRAEL COMMISSION

Note: this document has been updated to reflect the new organizational name, Reconstructing Judaism.

In the spring of 2015, the Reconstructing Judaism board of governors approved the creation of an Israel Task Force. The task force met over the course of a year. Rabbi Jonathan Kligler, chair of the Task Force, submitted its final report in late July 2016. Separately, the RRA board convened and ultimately dissolved an Israel Working Group in roughly the same time period.

Reconstructing Judaism and RRA leadership agree that a joint initiative will best serve the Reconstructionist movement. Accordingly, the Israel Commission will be a shared project reporting to the board of Reconstructing Judaism and the board of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (RRA).

PROPOSAL

MANDATE FOR ISRAEL COMMISSION

The Joint Israel Commission will identify current Israel-related issues needing consideration, create and/or compile resources and processes for study and reflection on those issues, and make recommendations to the Reconstructing Judaism board of governors, the plenum, and the RRA for treatment and action. The Commission may recommend advocacy and policy statements as well as educational, cultural, or other civic and societal initiatives. To guide its work, the Commission will endeavor to use Reconstructionist approaches to Jewish values and study while also seeking to understand the various perspectives of Reconstructionist Jews on these issues. It will also consider the range of perspectives found among Jewish communities in Israel and around the world.

The Commission will begin its work by examining the five major areas of focus of the Israel Task Force:

- a. Writing and thinking about Israel and Zionism
- b. Leading, teaching, and modeling Civil Discourse and Jewish "Holy Conversation"
- c. Connecting to the "Jewish Renaissance" in Israel
- d. Advocacy and Policy
- e. Educating about Israel and Zionism on the part of Reconstructionist institutional entities (e.g. affiliate support, jewishrecon.org, RRC faculty, etc.)

The Commission may then decide how to use, modify, or set aside elements of the mandate of the recent Reconstructing Judaism Task Force, materials emerging out of the RRA's Israel Working Group, as well as any findings or recommendations of the 2004 JRF Task Force.

A core responsibility of the Commission and one of its primary goals is to model civil discourse, covenantal conversation and sacred listening. When appropriate, the Commission will share successful models and techniques that encourage civil discourse and "sacred argument" with others. In recognition of this value, the Commission will seek to include a wide range of perspectives within the movement, creating opportunities for our various constituencies to share their thoughts and perspectives with each other in a civil and respectful framework. The Commission may recommend ways for Reconstructing Judaism and the RRA to engage in regular communication about Israel with our affiliates, rabbinic association members, and others. Toward this and its other goals, the Commission will work with appropriate staff (affiliate support, communications, and learning networks among others). The Commission will also make or recommend public responses or position statements about emergent events in, around, or related to Israel.

The Commission will meet at least twice per year, in person and by video conference, and will conduct itself according to ground rules modeled on Jewish values and civil discourse.

Recommendations

The Israel Commission of the Reconstructionist movement shall make recommendations for priorities and processes within its area of responsibility to the board of governors of Reconstructing Judaism, the board of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, and the plenum. These recommendations should, as much as possible, be well-researched and presented *l'shem shammayim* (for the sake of heaven). They should also be shaped with an awareness of financial considerations.

As noted above, the Israel Commission is empowered to make recommendations to Reconstructionist institutions (the RRA, Reconstructing Judaism, the RRC faculty, etc.), but it does not have the authority to make decisions on behalf of those institutions. The co-chairs and staff person shall play critical roles in mediating between the Commission and the responsible fiduciary bodies.

Reporting

The Israel Commission should report to the following bodies periodically as appropriate but at least once a year:

- Reconstructing Judaism's board of governors;
- the plenum; and
- the board of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association.

Reports should include such topics as proposed thinking, milestones toward achieving commission priorities, resources and opportunities for engagement on Israel and other substantive matters. The Israel Commission should also take steps to report to or maintain good communication with other constituencies who may be stakeholders in its work.

When the Israel Commission has a concrete proposal that may have budgetary and programmatic implications, it should be presented to the boards of the RRA and the Reconstructing Judaism in advance of Reconstructing Judaism's fall board meeting so that proposals may be factored into budget and planning processes.

Budget and Staff Support

Reconstructing Judaism and the RRA will support the work of the Israel Commission through staffing, technology, intellectual resources and other means and will work with the Commission to disseminate its work. Beginning FY 17 and until further notice, Rabbi Maurice Harris, associate director of affiliate support for Reconstructing Judaism, will staff the Commission.

Responsibility of Israel Commission Co-Chairs

The Israel Commission will be led by co-chairs, one lay and one rabbinic. The lay chair will be an *ex officio* voting member of the Reconstructing Judaism board of governors. The rabbinic chair will have a similar level of responsibility *vis-a-vis* the RRA board. The individuals should serve as a liaison between the Commission and their respective board. Israel Commission co-chairs also shall serve as non-voting *ex officio* members of the plenum. The term of an Israel Commission co-chair is three years.

Along with other key leadership of the Reconstructionist movement, Israel Commission co-chairs will have an especial responsibility for drafting position statements and providing leadership during emergent situations involving the State of Israel.

Procedure for Election of Lay Chair

The board chair of Reconstructing Judaism will propose the lay co-chair of the Israel Commission, with input by and consultation with the chair of the Congregational Services Committee. After the inaugural co-chair, lay co-chairs will be proposed by the board chair to the Nominating and Leadership Development Committee and may be nominated from the floor of the plenum. S/he must meet the qualifications for board service:

- A commitment to the stated mission, vision, values and programs of the Reconstructionist movement;
- Chairs need not directly provide significant financial support to the organization, though they are expected to contribute according to their capacity and to participate in identifying and soliciting support for the Reconstructionist movement;
- A willingness to attend and add meaningfully to deliberations at the board, committee and commission levels; and

- A willingness to act on the organization's behalf in goal-setting, policy-making and fundraising.

At the start of the third year of the term of the Israel Commission co-chair, a description of the position will be circulated to members of the plenum along with an announcement soliciting nominations by December 31 of that year. Plenum members will be encouraged to discuss with their congregational boards the possibility of identifying nominees. Nominations may be submitted by a member of any affiliated community to the plenum chair and the plenum staff person. Nominations will be forwarded to the Nominating and Leadership Development Committee for consideration prior to the spring board meeting, when a slate of officers is ordinarily proposed. Following approval by the Reconstructing Judaism board of governors, the lay co-chair of the Israel Commission will be presented to the plenum for ratification along with other governors in a manner consistent with section III B 3 of the Bylaws of Reconstructing Judaism.

Procedure for Appointment of Rabbinic Chair

The Executive Committee of the RRA will appoint the Rabbinic Chair of the Commission.

Membership

Israel Commission membership should be a combination of lay and rabbinic members, with no fewer than one-third of its members being members in good standing of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association. Rabbinic membership will be proposed by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association. Lay membership will be proposed by the Nominating and Leadership Development Committee of Reconstructing Judaism, which should do vigorous outreach to affiliated congregations in order to identify commission members. Any person who served on the Israel Task Force who so wishes may join the Israel Commission. Ideally, Commission membership should include at least one individual living in Israel and at least one living in Canada as well as a youth representative.

Members of commissions are valued leaders in the Reconstructionist movement. Similar to members of the board of governors and other leaders in the movement, they are not empowered to speak on behalf of the Reconstructionist movement or its central organization. Press or other inquiries should be referred to Israel Commission staff at Reconstructing Judaism for appropriate follow up.

Amendment as ratified by the RRA: At least one member of the Israel Commission will be a member of the RRC student body.

Amendment as offered by the Plenum: Members of the Joint Commission (except for those members to be appointed by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association and the

one member to be appointed by the student body of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College) must be confirmed by a majority of voting members of the Plenum present for a meeting of the Plenum for which a quorum was established at the start of the meeting. The Nominating and Leadership Development Committee will provide the Chair of the Plenum with a proposed slate of members of the Commission including biographical information and a brief statement in support of each proposed candidate. The vote will be held not less than thirty days from the date the names are distributed to the Plenum.