



Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and Jewish Reconstructionist Communities

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Deborah Waxman Inaugurated as First Woman Rabbi to Lead Jewish Reconstructionist Movement and Seminary

Rabbi Deborah Waxman, the newly inaugurated president of the Reconstructionist movement, says that being Jewish grounds her in tradition, orients her with a sense of wonder, and fortifies her to be unafraid of the unknown. "Or if I'm afraid, to venture forth anyway," she said. "Living a Jewish life gives me the companionship of others on a similar journey."

Sunday afternoon represented a milestone on that journey as Waxman was inaugurated as the first woman president of both a seminary, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC), and a major Jewish movement, Jewish Reconstructionist Communities. The ceremony took place at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia.

As part of the day-long festivities, Waxman and the RRC Board of Governors welcomed Reconstructionist leaders, rabbis, community members and fellow Reconstructionists from across the country to Philadelphia to witness this unique moment in history. David Roberts of St. Louis, MO, chair of the RRC Board of Governors, called Waxman a visionary leader who is uniquely suited to her new role. "Deborah's passion and keen intellect combine into a leadership style that empowers, educates and energizes those around her," Robert said. "I can't imagine a better standard bearer than Deborah to serve as the first female *rosh yeshiva* (head of a seminary) and head of a movement."

Waxman, who received rabbinical ordination from RRC in 1999, thanked her friends and family, and spoke on the theme of redemption, both individual and collective. She contrasted miraculous redemption, such as the Exodus from slavery in ancient Egypt, with human intention and scientific thought. She explored how modern Jews can both embrace modernity and still maintain a religious perspective.

Reconstructionist Jews don't seek to resolve that tension between the miraculous and modern, Waxman said. "We revel in it. We ask ourselves: how can we stay in conversation with our traditions and with our ancestors in ways that are meaningful and full of integrity for us, and that will also be compelling for our children? And then we ask again, because the answers are always changing."

RRC/Waxman

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She noted that it's not an easy task to question and believe in both a sense of the divine and a vision of the Jewish people – but belief fuels optimism and that belief affirms a beneficent universe. "Progressive religious people walk a fine line between rationalism and belief," she said. "In this secular age, we need to make the case for being religious. Being religious, for me, is an invitation to ask the ultimate questions. Why am I here? What am I supposed to do? How can I make the world better?"

One of these ultimate questions is the concept of redemption and Waxman contrasted redemption on a collective level, with the life of the individual. "Even as we promote communalism, there must be space for the individual, and redemption must mean different things to different people." She concluded by embracing a central tenet of Reconstructionism - through embracing diversity, the whole is strengthened. "We must make space for differing beliefs, learn across differences, live together in varying degrees of comfort, and embrace all of this as part of Jewish civilization. It takes work and courage – individual and collective – to create a redeemed world."

The invocation was given by Rabbi David Teutsch, Ph.D., Chair of the Department of Contemporary Jewish Civilization at RRC and Director of the Levin-Lieber Program in Jewish Ethics. Rabbi Jason Klein, President of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, Rabbi Jacob Staub, Ph.D. Chair of the Department of Medieval Jewish Civilization at RRC and Director of the Jewish Spiritual Direction Program, and rabbinical student David Basior, President of the Reconstructionist Student Association also spoke.

Reconstructionist Judaism teaches that Judaism is the continuously evolving civilization of the Jewish people, encompassing culture, art, music, food, and everything else that makes up a civilization. The fourth largest movement of American Judaism is headquartered outside Philadelphia and has 107 affiliated congregations throughout the United States and Canada.

Together, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) and Jewish Reconstructionist Communities constitute the Reconstructionist movement. RRC teaches, trains and guides the next generation of rabbis, and JRC provides services and support to Reconstructionist synagogues and communities.

More information can be found on on-line at RRC.edu/Inauguration.