4. Commend the CCAR for its sensitive and thorough efforts to raise the consciousness of the rabbinate regarding homosexuality. We urge the CCAR to pursue its own mandate with vigor and complete its tasks as soon as possible in order to respond to the communal and spiritual aspirations of gay and lesbian Jews.


Composition of the Committee

Origin of the Committee
The committee was formed in response to a resolution proposed by Margaret Holub (then student rabbi) and Margaret Wenig for the June, 1986, convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in Snowmass, Colorado. The proposed resolution dealt with the admissions policies of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and with the placement policy of the Rabbinical Placement Commission. The matter was referred for further study.

Given the seriousness of the issues and the broad implications for the Reform rabbinate and for the entire Movement, President Jack Stern appointed a broadly representative ad hoc committee and named Selig Salkowitz as its chair. The committee's first meeting took place in the Fall of 1986. Following that meeting, in order to insure adequate institutional participation, the committee invited the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and the Rabbinical Placement Commission to appoint official representatives. The committee has met regularly during the past four years. Through extensive study and discussion, the committee has sought to arrive at a unified position on homosexuality and the rabbinate. From the outset, the committee was keenly aware of both the controversial nature and the complexity of the issues. The committee's deliberations have been characterized by vigorous debate carried on in a
Concern for Gay and Lesbian Colleagues

The committee is acutely aware that the inability of most gay and lesbian rabbis to live openly as homosexuals is deeply painful. Therefore, the committee wishes to avoid any action which will cause greater distress to our colleagues. As a result, the committee has determined that a comprehensive report is in the best interest of our Conference and the Reform Movement as a whole.

Civil Rights For Gays and Lesbians

All human beings are created beitselem elohim ("in the divine image"). Their personhood must therefore be accorded full dignity. Sexual orientation is irrelevant to the human worth of a person. Therefore, the Reform Movement has supported vigorously all efforts to eliminate discrimination in housing and employment.2 The Committee unequivocally condemns verbal and physical abuse against gay men and lesbian women or those perceived to be gay or lesbian. We reject any implication that AIDS can be understood as God's punishment of homosexuals. We applaud the fine work of the gay and lesbian outreach synagogues, and we, along with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, call upon rabbis and congregations to treat with respect and to integrate fully all Jews into the life of the community regardless of sexual orientation.

Origin and Nature of Sexual Identity

The committee's task was made particularly difficult because the specific origin of sexual identity and its etiology are still imperfectly understood.

Scholars are not likely to come to an agreement anytime soon about the causes of sexual orientation, or its nature. Various disciplines look at sexuality in different ways and rarely confront each other's ideas. . . . Short of definitive evidence, which no theory has thus far received, the disagreement is likely to continue. Cognitive and normative pluralism will persist for the indefinite future.4

The lack of unanimity in the scientific community and the unanimous condemnation of homosexual behavior by Jewish tradition added to the complexity. It is clear, however, that for many people sexual orientation is not a matter of conscious choice but constitutional and

1. Homosexuality, the Rabbi nate, and Liberal Judaism: Papers Prepared for the Ad Hoc Committee on Homosexuality and the Rabbinate. Selig Salkinowitz, Chait. Holholoh and Homosexuality: A Reappraisal by Robert Kirshner. On Homosexuality and the Rabbinate, a Covenantal Response by Eugene B. Boorowitz, Judaism and Homosexuality by Yoel H. Kahn. Homosexuality: A Liberal Jewish Theological and Ethical Reflection by Peter S. Knoebel. Copies of these were distributed to the entire Central Conference of American Rabbis prior to the June, 1989 convention in Cincinnati. These papers should be consulted for a description of the range of positions considered by the Committee.
2. Homosexuality and the Rabbinate. Yoel H. Kahn, The Ethics of Homosexual Relationships and Leonard S. Kravitz, Address. These papers were distributed to the members of the Conference through the regional presidents as material for discussion at the regional kallot. They should be consulted for an understanding of the two different approaches to the subject of the religious status of homosexual relationships.

Sexual Morality and the Rabbi

The general subject of sexual morality is important. The committee, in various stages of its deliberations, sought to discuss homosexuality within that larger framework. However, it concluded that while a comprehensive statement on sexuality and sexual morality was a desideratum, it was beyond the mandate of the committee.

Nevertheless, rabbis are both role models and exemplars. Therefore, the Committee calls upon all rabbis—without regard to sexual orientation—to conduct their private lives with discretion and with full regard for the moves and sensibilities of their communities, and in consonance with the preamble to the Central Conference of American Rabbis’ Code of Ethics:

As teachers of Judaism, rabbis are expected to abide by the highest moral values of our religion: the virtues of family life, integrity and honorable social relationships. In their personal lives they are called upon to set an example of the ideals they proclaim.

Our Relationship to Kelal Yisrael and the Non-Jewish Community

The committee devoted considerable discussion to the effect of any statement on our relationship to Kelal Yisrael. The committee expressed deep concern about the reactions of the other Jewish movements and strongly urges that the dialogue continue with them on this issue. Nevertheless, it concluded that our decision should be governed by the principles and practices of Reform Judaism. Similarly the committee considered and discussed with the members of MaRaM the possible effects of a statement on Reform Judaism in Israel. Again, it concluded that while sensitivity was in order, the committee could only address the North American situation. In addition, the committee attempted to assess how various stands would affect our relationship with non-Jewish groups. Again, the committee was concerned but felt that it had to make its decision independent of that consideration.

Congregational Issues

The acceptance by our congregations of gay and lesbian Jews as rabbis was a topic of discussion. We know that the majority of Reform Jews strongly support civil rights for gays and lesbians, but the unique position of the rabbi as spiritual leader and Judaic role model make the acceptance of gay or lesbian rabbis an intensely emotional and potentially divisive issue. While we acknowledge that there are gay and lesbian rabbis who are serving their communities effectively, with dignity, compassion and integrity, we believe that there is a great need for education and dialogue in our congregations.

Admissions Policy of the College-Institute

One of the original issues which brought the committee into existence was a concern about the admissions policy of the College-Institute. President Alfred Gottschalk has recently set forth the admissions policy of HUC-JIR. The written guidelines state that the College-Institute considers sexual orientation of an applicant only within the context of a candidate’s overall suitability for the rabbinate, his or her qualifications to serve the Jewish community effectively, and his or her capacity to find personal fulfillment within the rabbinate. The Committee agrees with this admissions policy of the College-Institute.

Membership in the Central Conference of American Rabbis

The Central Conference of American Rabbis has always accepted into membership upon application all rabbinic graduates of the College-Institute.

The committee re-affirms this policy to admit upon application rabbinic graduates of the College-Institute.

Placement

Since its inception, the Rabbinical Placement Commission has provided placement services to all members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in good standing, in accordance with its rules.

The committee agrees with this policy of the Rabbinical Placement Commission which provides placement services to all members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in good standing, in accordance with the Commission’s established rules.
Respectfully submitted,

Committee Endorsement
The committee expresses its sincere appreciation to the many members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis who communicated with it in writing and orally. We urge all rabbis to study and reflect on these critical issues in order to lead their congregations and other members of the Jewish community toward greater awareness and sensitivity through education and dialogue. The committee unanimously endorses this report as a fair reflection of four years of deliberation and urges its adoption.