

DRAFT REFORM JUDAISM COVENANT (May 2019, Nissan 5779)

INTRODUCTION

The Reform Judaism Covenant represents our mutual commitment as three partners in leadership; congregations, Assembly of Reform Rabbis and Cantors (The Assembly) and the organisation, Reform Judaism UK. We are committed to creating and sustaining positive, trusting partnerships across Reform Judaism which echo the partnership of the Jewish People with God. This Covenant process is based on our passion for Reform Judaism as a distinctive, ambitious and modern Jewish voice across the UK and in the wider world.

Our Covenant is based on our belief that cooperation – developed through positive and aspirational conversations between all three partners in leadership and on the highest ethical standards - will amplify and strengthen our impact, our voices, and our collective wellbeing. We believe that this Covenant process will clarify and strengthen our relationships and help continue to strengthen Reform Judaism nationally.

As members of the Reform Jewish community we all share a responsibility for maintaining standards of public behaviour. We are interconnected as we are all vulnerable to reputational risk when things go wrong within any of the three partners.

OUR VALUES AS THREE PARTNERS IN LEADERSHIP

We are committed to legal, fair and just relationships, underpinned by identifiable and transparent standards of recruitment, employment, care and wellbeing of professional and volunteer staff and explicit intolerance of harassment and misconduct.

We are committed to ensuring high standards of safeguarding where we take responsibility for meeting all legal obligations placed upon us.

We listen to employees, members and volunteers and protect those who raise legitimate concerns from being dismissed or from being subjected to detrimental treatment or victimised.

BACKGROUND

The AGM of the Council of communities of Reform Judaism on 25th June 2017 agreed to draw up a covenant of three partners in leadership: Congregations, the Reform Judaism Board (RJ) and clergy of the Assembly of Reform Rabbis and Cantors UK (The Assembly).

The Covenant articulates the cooperation and relationships of the three partners. This will strengthen our national movement of Reform Judaism, our congregations and our Assembly.

Once approved by the three partners, a Covenant Review Group consisting of representatives of the congregations, the Assembly and the RJ Board will be established. This will deliberate how to respond to breaches and will review the progress of the covenant for future amendments.

CONGREGATIONS

1. **What should constituent congregations expect for themselves and in liaising with all other Reform congregations?**

- a. To work proactively with other congregations within the Reform Movement to help and encourage each other.
- b. Respect the autonomy and minhagim (customs) of each congregation.
- c. Avoid both direct conflict and public disagreements between congregations and instead, bring areas of disagreements to the correct forum within each congregation.
- d. Adhere to the highest standards of ethical behaviour of clergy, other employees, lay leaders, members consistent with Charity Commission requirements for Trustees of the Congregation acting as a Charity.
- e. Confer with the Assembly or the Charity Commission or Reform Judaism where required.
- f. Administer the congregation in a legal and fair manner, underpinned by transparent standards regarding the employment and well-being of professional staff and volunteers. It is expected that congregations would work closely with RJ over clergy recruitment and behave like an employer in terms of the law and avoid discriminatory practice towards or amongst members or office volunteers.
- g. Demonstrate inclusivity in practice reflecting our core value of creating inclusive, egalitarian communities and valuing difference.
- h. Avoid conduct or decisions likely to bring the congregation, other constituent congregations, the Assembly or Reform Judaism into disrepute.

- i. Consult with neighbouring congregations and other Jewish congregations as appropriate when considering expansion and establishing new communities.
 - j. Services: Agree to use prayer books either produced by RJ and the Assembly or which reflect our religious values as Reform Jews.
 - k. Provide ongoing education for children and adults in the development and practice of Reform Judaism including life-cycle events, festivals and the teaching of Hebrew.
 - l. Participate in RJ regional networks where established to share information and best practice with neighbouring communities.
 - m. Representatives participate in RJ Council, Chairs' Meetings, Treasurers' Meetings and Annual General Meetings, either online or in person.
2. **What should congregations expect from RJ?**
- a. Respect the autonomy of each congregation whilst extending support for and encouragement of its regular activities and strategic development.
 - b. Encourage collaboration and co-operation between congregations and where necessary facilitate mediation.
 - c. Work within an annual budget which realistically reflects the levy raised from congregations as well as any income from donations.
 - d. Transparency on collection and usage of levy.
 - e. Provide appropriate and effective resources to congregations within the RJ budget.
 - f. Consult all congregations in a clear, timely and transparent manner through the Council of RJ regarding proposed changes which may impact upon them as well as Reform Judaism nationally.
 - g. Provide the regular opportunity for congregations to comment upon their levels of satisfaction with the work undertaken by RJ.

- h. Represent Reform Judaism in the wider world in a positive and dynamic manner, so as to promote and develop the membership of individual congregations.
- i. Liaison with burials societies for the appropriate provision of facilities for Jewish funerals.
- j. Participation in European Union for Progressive Judaism, World Union for Progressive Judaism and Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism activities and events to support Reform Judaism in Israel and elsewhere.
- k. Support those congregations that are by choice, circumstance or temporarily without a specific Rabbinic or Cantorial presence.
- l. To fundraise for Reform Judaism nationally being respectful of specific community fundraising needs.
- m. To fund and support a Beit Din
- n. (consequences for non-culpability needed here)

3. **What should congregations expect from the Assembly?**

- a. Only to admit Rabbis and Cantors to the Assembly who fulfil its membership eligibility criteria, whether currently employed by a constituent congregation or not.
- b. To share and update congregations on the Assembly's membership eligibility criteria; maintain a central register of UK rabbis and cantors eligible for appointment in the UK.
- c. Give guidance and interpretation on the handling of life cycle events.
- d. Develop and articulate clear expectations of clergy behaviour and to develop and enforce discipline in partnership with the employer if required. Concerns around clergy ethical misconduct, either during or after employment, should be directed towards the ethics committee of The Assembly.
- e. Awareness of the responsibility to communities without clergy in matters of policy consultation.
- f. Encourage or provide additional training and continuing professional development (CPD) of rabbis and cantors in the principles and practice of Reform Judaism.

- g. Consult all congregations regarding proposed changes in siddurim and machzorim so as to ensure that they meet their needs.
- h. To be consulted, educated and listened to regarding changes to halachic decisions.
- i. (consequences for non-culpability needed here)

RJ BOARD

4. What should the RJ Board expect from congregations?

- a. Congregations should be committed to the RJ Mission Statement (see appendix) and should promote its contents to its members.
- b. Ensure that all appointed clergy are eligible for admission to the Assembly, and are not currently disqualified or suspended from membership. To enable and encourage clergy attendance at Assembly meetings, the Assembly Kallah (annual retreat) and educational or social gatherings.
- c. Seek to avoid conduct or decisions which are likely to bring the congregations and/or RJ into disrepute.
- d. Meet their financial obligations ('the levy') towards RJ in a timely fashion and as determined in accordance with RJ budget requirements; and provide accurate information reasonably requested from RJ (eg membership figures).
- e. Encourage members to volunteer to represent their congregations in RJ decision-making (eg Board, regional networks) which might affect them and to provide accountability back to their members.
- f. Engage pro-actively with RJ, where appropriate seeking professional advice derived from its wide experience; and engage and publicise positively those activities which are proposed and/or organised by RJ for their benefit including RSY-Netzer.
- g. Representatives participate in RJ Council, Chairs' Meetings, Treasurers' Meetings and Annual General Meetings, either online or in person.

5. **What should RJ expect from the Assembly?**

- a. Give guidance to the RJ Board and staff on spiritual and halachic issues and assist Rabbinic and cantorial leadership of congregations professionally and spiritually.
- b. Promote RJ to constituent congregations and to the wider public, having regard both to the Mission Statement of RJ and the varying minhagim and spiritual expressions of its constituent synagogues.
- c. Ensure members of the Assembly conduct themselves in such a way as to avoid bringing RJ or its constituent congregations into disrepute and to develop appropriate training or remedial measures for enforcing this through the The Assembly Ethics Committee.
- d. Be consulted/updated/educated on any discussions concerning changes to halachah (Jewish law) early on in discussions pertaining to a key decision being made.

THE ASSEMBLY

6. **What should the Assembly expect from congregations?**

- a. Ensure that all appointed clergy are eligible for admission to the Assembly and are not currently disqualified or suspended from membership.
- b. To take positive steps to understand the rationale behind Assembly guidance, and the reasons that congregations should comply with Assembly decisions.
- c. To accept the Assembly's rulings and definitions of Jewish status, and the decisions of its Beit Din and standing committee.
- d. Publicise to the congregations' members both the existence and the role of the Assembly.
- e. To enable and encourage clergy attendance at Assembly meetings, the Beit Din, the Kallah, educational and social gatherings. To enable and support the continuing professional development (CPD) of their clergy.

- f. Where appropriate, liaise with the Assembly in matters relating to Clergy.
- g. Maintain adequate but not excessive reserves, in order to ensure financial sustainability.

7. **What should the Assembly expect from RJ?**

- a. Pro-actively engage with the Assembly such as to seek, receive and apply its spiritual and halachic guidance as appropriate.
- b. Take positive steps (by discussion, research, etc) to endeavour to understand the rationale behind spiritual or halachic guidance and duly ensure such guidance is publicised to constituent congregations.
- c. Offer relevant and timely professional advice and support to congregations, eg to assist constituent congregations with the recruitment and continued employment of rabbis and cantors.
- d. Involve members of the Assembly in the education and teaching programmes of RJ and in local and national RJ events to be consulted regarding proposals which are likely, directly or indirectly, to affect rabbis and cantors.
- e. To provide appropriate finance, meeting and office space for its activities including its Beit Din. (where financially feasible)

Further issues to be included in the covenant:

- Israel
- Process for change, review
- Many also were not clear about the relationship between the Assembly and the Beit Din (which is not mentioned at all in the Covenant) and we thought it important that this be set out in the Covenant, together with the responsibilities and powers of the Beit Din and the Assembly.