

Significant Questions on the Rabbi Search Process – February, 2010

The following are responses to questions that have been directed to the Rabbi Search Committee by congregants during the past several months. The Committee felt it appropriate to disseminate responses to the TBE Community at large in case others have similar concerns or questions.

Q: Why are we looking only at Reconstructionist Rabbinic candidates?

A: The Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist movements have all instituted policies requiring affiliated congregations to work through their respective placement offices to identify potential candidates. Each movement's top priority is to place ordained Rabbis from their movement into their affiliated congregations. If a good match is not found, candidates from the other movements are then provided. Our search to date has only received resumes of Rabbis educated in the Reconstructionist movement, including applications from Rabbis who are graduates of the Reconstructionist Rabbinic College but are currently serving congregations affiliated with other movements. If we do not find a good match from the candidates generated through the Reconstructionist placement process, we are free to expand our search to the official Reform and Conservative placement offices. What has been strongly discouraged is the placement of ads in Jewish newspapers or in other public job search sites. Rabbis that are provided by the movements are screened to ensure they have been ordained and are free of ethics violations.

Because of the policies adopted by all three movements, to search for Reform or Conservative candidates before exhausting the pool of Reconstructionist candidates would be outside the official placement activities of each movement. Rabbis affiliated with each movement understand the placement process and requirements and those who observe protocol will not respond to an outside solicitation.

Q: Wasn't Rabbi Kaplan ordained with the Reform movement?

A: Yes, Rabbi Kaplan was ordained in the Reform movement.

When Rabbi Kaplan was hired almost 23 years ago, the process for hiring a Rabbi was very different. After exhausting the very limited Reconstructionist candidates available at the time, Rabbi Kaplan was identified through an ad in a newspaper. Today the Reconstructionist movement has a much more substantial pool of candidates and all the various movements have become much more structured in their placement activities.

We have received an excellent response to our application and are very excited about the pool of candidates with whom we have spoken. It has been challenging to narrow that group to the four or so individuals to whom we have extended invitations to visit Temple Beth El for the weekend. However, if the Congregation does not share our enthusiasm about any of the candidates who visit, we can broaden our search.

Q What if the candidate's beliefs are not consistent with our traditions or culture at Temple Beth El?

A: We held a great many meetings with members of the synagogue to ask about preferences regarding our new spiritual leader. The community was nearly unanimous in desiring the best candidate to inspire us and bring Jewish learning and traditions to our children and ourselves. There were to be no litmus tests.

No single spiritual leader is likely to personally embody each and every one of our traditions, or embrace each and every one of our policy decisions. There are many issues that fall within the ethical purview of an individual spiritual leader. If our congregation in fact shared a single belief, we would not impose our 'ethics' on a candidate nor would it be reasonable to expect a candidate to be comfortable with such terms of employment.

Finding a new spiritual leader is a demanding task. We want to find the candidate who provides the best overall set of preferences and abilities. Different people will place different values on various credentials, beliefs and capabilities. We are working hard to find the best match, based on the input of the community we have received.

Q: How does our selection process help us find the best candidate?

A: We are very fortunate, in that it has been a very long time since we have had to hire a new Rabbi. In that time the process has evolved a lot. We have adopted, and adapted, the process recommended by RRA and followed in principle by the Reform and Conservative movements as well. Following an assessment of the community's needs, we have passed all candidates through a series of screenings which has included one, and in some cases, two phone interviews. In those interviews we structured our questions to try to address all the key issues raised when soliciting input from the community. Based on these interviews we identified the top candidates to invite for a weekend visit. During these visits, we have the opportunity to see the candidate in a number of different environments participating in as many regular weekend events as possible. Everyone in the community is welcome to provide their input on each of the candidates; this feedback will be considered by the Search Committee. Based on assessing all the input received against the needs identified at the beginning of this process, the Committee will make a recommendation to the Board for ultimate ratification by the congregation.

Q: Does our Constitution or Policies require a Rabbi to perform interfaith marriages?

A: No the Temple Beth El Policies do not mandate this. Our policy on interfaith marriage is included below.

12/12/93 Interfaith Marriage Policy. Recognizing that conversion prior to marriage is the preferred approach, Temple Beth El allows its Rabbi, at his/her discretion, to perform interfaith marriages under the following limitations:

Temple Beth El Membership - Members, or children of Temple Beth El members, are the only eligible candidates; three (3) consecutive years of membership in good standing are required unless the interruption in affiliation is due to relocation outside the area.

Children - Prior to marriage, a commitment is required from the couple that all children from the marriage will be raised as Jews. This commitment includes instruction in Jewish customs and tradition, with the expectation of B'nai Mitzvot.

Orientation/Study - A period of orientation and/or study is required prior to the marriage ceremony. This involves completing a basic Judaism course, or a minimum of six private sessions, totaling at least twelve hours of study with the Rabbi.

Co-Officiating - No co-officiating will be allowed during the Jewish marriage ceremony. Participation of other clergy, at other times during the wedding celebration, may be acceptable at the Rabbi's discretion.

Ceremony Location - The marriage ceremony may not be held on Temple Beth El property.

This policy does not require the Rabbi to perform interfaith marriages; it merely confirms that Temple Beth El allows its Rabbi to do so at his/her discretion. This is one of the issues referred to above that is left to the ethical conscience of our spiritual leader.