

RESOLUTION FOR 2004 RRA CONVENTION

In Support of Civil Marriage for Gay and Lesbian Couples

Background

In 1984, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College became the the first Jewish seminary to endorse the ordination of gay and lesbian clergy when it adopted a policy of non-discrimination in admissions on the basis of sexual orientation.

At its 1990 convention, the RRA recommended that the Reconstructionist movement establish a non-discrimination policy in rabbinic placement. The following year, a movement-wide policy was enacted prohibiting discrimination in the referral of resumes of candidates for positions within congregations.

The Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association has, from it's founding in 1974, automatically welcomed all graduates of the College for membership; in 1991, the RRA adopted a formal policy of non-discrimination in membership, thus acknowledging the previously unwritten policy.

The Jewish Reconstructionist Federation (then FRCH) adopted a resolution in 1985 welcoming congregations that primarily serve gay and lesbian Jews.

In 1993 both the RRA and FRCH adopted the findings and recommendations of the Reconstructionist Commission on Homosexuality. Those conclusions called for the welcoming of gays and lesbians as full members of our communities, and supported rabbis who worked with and officiated at rituals and rites of passage for gay and lesbian Jews and same-sex couples, including wedding ceremonies.

The Reconstructionist movement has been in the forefront of efforts to include and integrate gay and lesbian Jews into all aspects of Jewish communal and religious life. The RRA now wants to go on record as being in support of full and equal civil marriage for gays and lesbians in the United States and Canada.

In Support of Civil Marriage for Gay and Lesbian Couples

WHEREAS today gay and lesbian couples face opposition to the right to civil marriage in the United States, and;

WHEREAS gays and lesbians do not have access to the benefits of civil marriage including, among others, health care coverage and related decision-making, inheritance rights, survivor benefits and child custody, and;

WHEREAS legal recognition of gay and lesbian relationships will provide these men and women and their families with these benefits as well as with the dignity and respect they are currently denied, and;

WHEREAS we deem it imperative that progressive religious voices be raised in support of the equality that is currently denied to gays and lesbians, and in opposition to attempts to present religious traditions in general, and Jewish tradition in particular, as being uniformly opposed to equality for gays and lesbians; and

WHEREAS the Reconstructionist movement has a twenty-year history of advocating the inclusion and equality of gays and lesbians in Jewish life;

THEREFORE

BE IT RESOLVED that the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association endorses and supports the right of gay and lesbian couples to share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities and commitments of civil marriage.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the RRA supports efforts to promote legislation and legal action that would provide, through civil marriage, equal opportunity, access and rights for same-sex couples, and the benefits of marriage provided by civil society, including, among other rights, health care coverage and related decision-making, inheritance rights, survivor benefits and child custody.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the RRA opposes all efforts to bar the legal recognition of gay and lesbian marriage.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the RRA endorses the Marriage Resolution of the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, * which reads:

"Because marriage is a basic human right and an individual personal choice, resolved, the State should not interfere with same-gender couples who choose to marry and share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities, and commitments of civil marriage."

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the RRA calls upon its members to:

Encourage the congregations, agencies, organizations and institutions in which they serve to extend benefits to same-sex partners of staff members and employees.

Monitor local and regional developments and consider ways of advocating for same-sex civil marriages in their communities.

Consider *tzedakah* donations to organizations advocating for civil rights for same-sex couples.

Consider the opportunity of pre-marital counseling with heterosexual couples as an opportunity to discuss the issue of equal rights for gay and lesbian couples.

Consider speaking about the issue from the *bimah*, in agencies and organizations and institutions, in institutional newsletter articles, etc., particularly at times when public attention is turned to gay and lesbian inclusivity, for example, on GLBT Pride weekends, Right To Marriage Day, Coming Out Day.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the RRA prepare "talking points" in support of gay and lesbian civil marriage. Such talking points should raise issues of religious liberty as well as economic and political justice, and be distributed to members of the RRA, who are encouraged to contribute letters to the editor, opinion columns and other public statements in support of civil marriage for gay and lesbian people.

*[*Lambda Legal Mission Statement: Lambda Legal is a national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, the transgendered, and people with HIV or AIDS through impact litigation, education, and public policy work.]*