

SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER SPEAK TRUTH  
TO POWER SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER  
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# SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER

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## A Guide for Congregations Taking Public Policy Positions

**GOD SAYS, "CRY WITH A FULL THROAT,  
DO NOT HOLD BACK; LET YOUR VOICE  
RESOUND LIKE A SHOFAR!"**

**ISAIAH 58:1**

TO POWER SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER  
SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER SPEAK TRUTH



UNION FOR  
REFORM JUDAISM

האיחוד ליהדות רפורמית

SERVING REFORM CONGREGATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA



## ■ INTRODUCTION

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*Speak Truth to Power: A Guide for Congregations Taking Public Policy Positions* is a project of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism and the Ida and Howard Wilkoff Department of Synagogue Management of the Union for Reform Judaism (Union).

The Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism is a joint body of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) and the Union for Reform Judaism and its affiliates. The Commission assists congregations in establishing Social Action Committees that will help them apply ethical Judaic principles to contemporary issues such as civil liberties, religious freedom, poverty, human rights, and world peace. To help synagogue members become aware of social issues and stimulate them to appropriate action, the Commission provides a large selection of books, pamphlets, and other programmatic materials relevant to the whole range of contemporary social problems. The Commission on Social Action oversees the work of Reform Judaism's Religious Action Center (RAC) in Washington, DC. The RAC pursues social justice and religious liberty by mobilizing the American Jewish community and serving as its advocate in the capital of the United States.

The Ida and Howard Wilkoff Department of Synagogue Management of the Union for Reform Judaism provides assistance to Union member congregations in all areas of synagogue management and administration. The department and the Joint Commission on Synagogue Management, in cooperation with the National Association of Temple Administrators, develop materials for and provide consultations to congregations throughout North America. The department strives to help congregations build, develop, and maintain well-run, spiritually fulfilling congregations, in which the sacred informs the practical and the practical creates the sacred.

## ■ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## ■ WHY ADVOCACY IS CENTRAL TO REFORM JUDAISM

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“Reform Jews are committed to social justice. Even as Reform Jews embrace ritual, prayer, and ceremony more than ever, we continue to see social justice as the jewel in the Reform Jewish crown. Like the prophets, we never forget that God is concerned about the everyday and that the blights of society take precedence over the mysteries of heaven. A Reform synagogue that does not alleviate the anguish of the suffering is a contradiction in terms.”

--Rabbi Eric Yoffie, speech to the UAHC Executive Committee, February 1998

It has become axiomatic that to be a Jew is to care about the world around us. To be a Reform Jew is to hear the voice of the prophets in our head; to be engaged in the ongoing work of *tikkun olam*; to strive to improve the world in which we live.

The passion for social justice is reflected in the ancient words of our prophets and sages and in the declarations of our Movement’s leaders throughout its history. The ancient command “*Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof!* Justice, justice shall you seek!” constantly reverberates in our ears. It has become deeply embedded in the Reform Jewish psyche. This charge has led to a long and proud tradition of political activism by the Reform Movement.

The idea that people of faith have a mandate to bring their values into the public arena is not unique to the Reform Movement. There is a long tradition of faith groups “speaking truth to power” and advocating for social change, and every major religious organization in American life participates in this civic exercise. Religious voices have been central in the major social justice movements throughout our nation’s history, from the abolitionist movement to those involved with desegregation and civil rights. In the international arena as well, faith groups have led the way in advocating for nuclear disarmament, international aid and human rights around the world.

This is not an easy time to stand up to be counted. We are challenged by an overwhelming number of issues, each one central to our understanding of the prophetic message of our faith and critical to creating the kind of society we wish to bequeath to those who follow us. And not only are we overwhelmed by the sheer scope of the issues that are before us, but we are confronted by those who claim to speak in the name of faith, but who offer a different version of what God expects of us; those who proclaim themselves the upholders of family values yet who do not value individual rights or personal autonomy, and who have little respect for the Constitutional principles that have allowed religion to thrive in this country unfettered by government coercion or corruption.

Ours is a different message. We proclaim that maintaining a strong safety net for those who are most vulnerable is the modern manifestation of our obligation to “leave the corners of our fields for the poor and needy.” We believe that supporting public schools so that every child in America has access to a free and appropriate education and that paying workers enough to support themselves without having to choose between shelter and food, medication or heat, are family values. If we don’t bring these progressive religious values into the public arena with us, we will abandon the public square to those offering a different view of religion and values.

Reform Judaism stands for certain principles, and those who join our congregations take pride in our long history of “speaking truth to power.” Just as most members know that a hallmark of Reform Judaism is an openness to the “other” – whether lesbian or gay, interfaith families, or those with special needs -- they should also know that there will be a strong social action component – mitzvah days, collection drives, social justice sermons, and education about current issues of concern. And it should be expected that through our congregations we will make a collective effort to bring our progressive, Reform Jewish values to bear in the community at large. We will be engaged on issues of local, national and global concern; we will participate in interfaith coalitions and activities; we will speak out on behalf of the vulnerable; and we will seek justice for all. This is who we are.

Such activities ameliorate the crushing pain and brutal despair of poverty and illness for the individuals we reach. And yet, the systemic changes necessary to prevent injustice and poverty in the future elude us. Addressing the fundamental issues of justice and peace that roused the prophets and gave birth to the prophetic ideal of Reform Judaism requires entering the public arena and speaking out on policy matters. Determining how and when to engage in advocacy on social justice issues can be challenging for congregations, yet such activity is most likely to bring meaningful change.

## ■ A HOLISTIC SOCIAL ACTION PROGRAM INCLUDES ADVOCACY

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The world is sustained by three things: Torah, worship, and acts of righteousness.

*Pirkei Avot 1:2*

The structure and programming of many Reform congregations reflect the above dictum from *Pirkei Avot*, which balances the three pillars of Jewish life:

- Torah—Lifelong Jewish education;
- *Avodah*—Worship and ritual; and
- *G'milut chasadim*—Acts of righteousness.

In order to fulfill the third prong—acts of righteousness—congregations engage their members in community service, social action projects, and the pursuit of justice in society at large. We often refer to *tikkun olam*—our mandate to repair our broken world—as central to our mission as Reform Jews.

Much of our social action programming revolves around concern for the needy and support for vulnerable populations in our communities. We have become experts in coordinating Mitzvah Day programs, volunteering at soup kitchens and shelters, providing support services for the elderly, and donating clothing, books, and gifts to the poor. We work with other faith and ethnic groups to promote charitable causes and support nonprofit organizations and agencies that seek to improve our communities.

Hands-on and short-term social action projects provide a powerful point of entry for Jews seeking social justice. As people become invested in a particular issue, they will often seek to advance the agenda beyond addressing the immediate impact of injustice: They will want to tackle the root causes of society's ills and seek long-term solutions. For instance, a congregation committed to tutoring at-risk children in a local school might also be concerned about school-funding issues, health care for impoverished children, and the positions of school board members whose decisions affect its students. As our congregations look within ourselves, and to the world outside, we find problems that are impossible to change as individuals; problems that can only be solved through collective action.

A holistic approach to social justice issues will include not only hands-on projects but also an exploration of avenues that will affect public policy toward creating new societal norms as envisioned by our prophetic tradition. Many Reform congregations offer meals at soup kitchens or house the homeless within their buildings. However crucial these projects are, they provide only temporary assistance for those in need, and they do not prevent an at-risk family from slipping into poverty in the future. Policy initiatives such as raising the minimum wage and adopting fair tax policies will provide greater equity for the working poor and seek to address the increasing gap between the haves and have-nots in our society, but they will not feed a hungry child today. *A combination of hands-on volunteer projects that meet immediate needs, education about the underlying policy issues involved, and advocacy to stimulate long-term solutions will create a more meaningful experience for congregants and have a greater impact on society.*

There are many issues of concern to our community that do not lend themselves readily to hands-on initiatives. For example, separation of church and state, civil rights, welfare reform, and prescription drug benefits for seniors are public policy matters. It is through education about and advocacy on such issues that we impact policy and, by so doing, work to create a better society for ourselves and future generations. Similarly, advocacy for Israel requires political engagement and making our voices heard in the public arena.

## ■ CAN CONGREGATIONS TAKE PUBLIC POLICY POSITIONS WITHOUT AFFECTING THEIR TAX EXEMPTION?

Those who occupy themselves with the needs of the community are as though they are occupied with Torah.

Talmud Yerushalmi, *B'rachot*

**Yes. Congregations and other nonprofit charitable organizations can participate in public policy advocacy (lobbying) to a limited degree.**<sup>1</sup> Religious institutions are permitted to be involved in public policy issues as long as lobbying is an “insubstantial” part of the total activity of the organization. The Union’s Ida and Howard Wilkoff Department of Synagogue Management outlines the limits to lobbying in *To Do Justice: Selected Financial and Legal Issues Facing Congregations*. That publication states: “While any involvement in a *political campaign* is prohibited, synagogues, like other charities, can participate in lobbying to a limited degree. For tax purposes, lobbying is defined as an attempt to influence legislation either directly through legislators or indirectly through grass-root campaigns that ask citizens to contact their legislators.

Letter writing, preaddressed postcards, telephone campaigns, and displaying literature in the synagogue foyer are all acceptable activities if they are directed toward a particular *issue* and not a *candidate*.<sup>2</sup>

*Congregations must be careful not to explicitly or implicitly endorse or oppose a candidate or political party.* There is no place for partisan political activity in the synagogue. However, “get out the vote” campaigns and candidate forums are appropriate as long as they are nonpartisan. Congregations can join coalitions and address public policy issues as long as these activities are within the limits outlined above. Congregations should familiarize themselves with IRS regulations and consult their attorney for specific legal advice on such matters. A detailed analysis of IRS guidelines can be found online at [www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1828.pdf](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1828.pdf) (including examples of permissible and impermissible activities) or obtained from the PEW Charitable Trust at [www.pewforum.org/publications/reports/IRCbroadchureBIG.pdf](http://www.pewforum.org/publications/reports/IRCbroadchureBIG.pdf).

Although lobbying activities designed to influence policymakers are limited for nonprofit institutions, *educational activities that do not promote a particular position on pending legislation are not deemed to be lobbying.* There are no limits on congregations providing educational resources to members on public policy matters. According to the IRS, “Churches and religious organizations may...involve themselves in issues of public policy without the activity being considered lobbying. For example, churches may conduct educational meetings, prepare and distribute educational materials, or otherwise consider public policy issues in an educational manner without jeopardizing their tax-exempt status.”<sup>3</sup>

## ■ Responding to Diversity Within the Congregation

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We bring Torah into the world when we strive to fulfill the highest ethical mandates in our relationships with others and with all of God’s creation. Partners with God in *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, we are called to help bring nearer the messianic age. We seek dialogue and joint action with people of other faiths in the hope that together we can bring peace, freedom and justice to our world. We are obligated to pursue *tzedek*, justice and righteousness, and to narrow the gap between the affluent and the poor, to act against discrimination and oppression, to pursue peace, to welcome the stranger, to protect the earth’s biodiversity and natural resources, and to redeem those in physical, economic and spiritual bondage. In so doing, we reaffirm social action and social justice as a central prophetic focus of traditional Reform Jewish belief and practice.

“A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism,” Pittsburgh, 1999

**As the elected representatives of the congregation’s membership, the Board of Trustees is charged with implementing the mission of the synagogue, which is the “synthesis of the temple’s core values and most cherished beliefs.”**<sup>4</sup> Although not every congregation has its own mission statement, those that do typically include a commitment to the Jewish values of *tikkun olam* and/or *gmilut chasadim*. The mission statement of the Union for Reform Judaism

(Union) includes the mandate to “foster the vibrancy of Reform Judaism through Torah (lifelong Jewish education), *avodah* (worship of God through prayer and observance), and *g'milut chasadim* (the pursuit of justice, peace, and deeds of loving-kindness).”<sup>5</sup>

In fulfillment of a congregation’s mission and that of the Union, leaders of Reform synagogues may be called upon to address policy matters that speak to the congregation’s fundamental values: “One of the missions of a board member is to accept the awesome responsibility and incredible opportunity...to be God’s partner in *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world. Every action you take is potentially critical: You are either helping to repair the world or you are not. Thus you have the ability to shape lives, change lives, be a force for good, and apply our most cherished Jewish values to synagogue work.”<sup>6</sup>

*Board members and Social Action Committees must be cognizant and respectful of the diversity of the synagogue’s membership and the range of views held by its congregants. Policy positions should not be partisan in nature. There is no political litmus test for congregational membership.*

Although a congregation’s leaders should make every effort to determine where the consensus is among the members on a given issue, oftentimes the consensus position of a congregation may not be known and cannot simply be “found.” Consensus may build over a period of time as a congregation becomes involved in an issue, studies the Jewish values at stake, and engages in debate and dialogue among the membership. For example, if a Social Action Committee wants to become involved in a specific community issue but does not know if there is a consensus among the membership, it can work to build that consensus through congregational meetings, educational opportunities, hosting speakers, and other methods to raise awareness about the issue.

**Our diversity should not deter us from speaking out when the voices of the prophets inspire us to stand up for those who are vulnerable and fight injustice. Consensus is not synonymous with unanimity.** In any group, there will be divergent opinions, and policymakers understand that when congregations take positions, there may very well be individuals in the synagogue who disagree with the stated position. Nonetheless, there are certain policy issues that go to the heart of the Reform Movement’s values, and the collective entity of the congregation provides the voice for those values. “Speaking truth to power” is part of the proud history of Reform Judaism and one of its hallmarks. Positions that are taken should reflect the ideals that are inherent in the Reform Jewish identity of the congregation. (See Appendix II for a listing of CCAR statements on the social justice mission of Reform Judaism and discussion questions.)

## ■ DEVELOPING A PROCESS FOR TAKING POLICY POSITIONS

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Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said, “By three things the world is sustained—justice, truth, and peace.”

*Pirkei Avot 1:18*

**There is no single blueprint for congregational policy setting that will work for every congregation.** Every synagogue is different, with its own unique history, membership, and leadership. What works very well in one place may be problematic in another. Each congregation needs to tailor a policy-making process to its own needs. For example, some congregations may be very comfortable with a fairly informal process, while others will prefer a more fixed approach.

As a starting point, synagogue leaders should review the congregation’s mission statement and bylaws for guidance in developing a process for taking positions on public policy issues. Just as not every member of a congregation likes every aspect of the worship experience, it is impractical to expect unanimity among the membership on any given issue. However, the decision-making process itself must be one all can understand and respect and should instill trust and confidence in the congregation’s leadership.

I thought, “I will not mention God, no more will I speak in God’s name.” But God’s word was like a raging fire in my heart, shut up in my bones. I could not contain it; I was helpless.

*Jeremiah 20:9*

*In many cases, the process revolves around the question of whose name should be used when a statement is issued or a position is taken. Several different models exist among congregations regarding where the decision-making power on public policy matters lies. Even within a congregation different policies may be followed, depending on the issue itself. Nonetheless, whenever committees, boards, or leaders are empowered to take positions in the name of the congregation, it is with the understanding that a fair and balanced process will be used to do so. The decision-making body should consist of a diverse membership, with many points of view represented and heard.*

A full discussion of the various models that congregations follow in setting policy can be found in *Lirdof Tzedek: A Guide to Synagogue Social Action*, edited by Evely Laser Shlensky and Rabbi Marc D. Israel, which can be ordered through the Union for Reform Judaism Press at [www.urj.org/cgi-bin/pressdisp.pl?list=167278](http://www.urj.org/cgi-bin/pressdisp.pl?list=167278) or by calling 888.489.8242. In addition, *K’hilat Tzedek: Creating a Community of Justice*, available from the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, outlines a process that will help congregations articulate and implement the goals of their social action program by evaluating their existing program and considering alternative models and structures. To obtain a copy, see [www.urj.org/csa](http://www.urj.org/csa) or call 212.650.4160. The Ida and Howard Wilkoff Department of Synagogue Management’s publication *Who May Abide in Your House? Jewish Ethics and Decision Making* is also a valuable resource for congregations engaged in developing policy guidelines. It is available online at [www.urj.org/synmgmt/publications](http://www.urj.org/synmgmt/publications) or by calling 212.650.4040.

## **The Role of the Social Action Committee**

In most congregations, the Social Action Committee is the central address for public policy matters and brings together those members most passionate about current issues. Many congregations empower their Social Action Committee to speak publicly in the name of the synagogue or in the name of the committee itself. This is especially true of congregations that have a history of activism and prior policy to guide them.

Typically, a Social Action Committee will study a public policy issue by considering relevant Jewish texts and values and the implications of the issue for the congregation and community. It will invite input from fellow congregants by providing educational opportunities for members of the synagogue. As a consensus emerges, the Social Action Committee will develop a strategy to educate the congregation about the position adopted and act upon it in the public arena. Even in cases where a specific position is not taken, the Social Action Committee may nonetheless provide educational information on issues of concern to the community and encourage individual action without making a specific recommendation regarding the policy position.

## **The Role of the Clergy**

The clergy's role is very important in both developing the decision-making process and in articulating a policy as a statement of Reform Jewish values. *In most cases, the first step in the process is an examination of the Jewish values at stake in the issue and a determination that Judaism offers an important perspective that should be heard.* Rabbis, cantors, and educators should be engaged in the process by educating the congregation about the Jewish ethics and values that provide the foundation of the synagogue's mission and helping the leadership apply those principles to current issues. An adult education program, sermon, or school curriculum can be the unifying spark that results in congregational action.

## **The Role of the Board**

There should always be good communication between the Social Action Committee and the Board of Trustees, either through regular reports or the establishment of a designated seat on the board for the social action chairperson. In some congregations, the Social Action Committee must make a recommendation to the synagogue board before the temple's name can be associated with a particular issue.

In cases where a congregation decides to involve the entire board in policy making, the synagogue may wish to include provisions for quicker decision making when necessity dictates such an action. For example, when there is a communal crisis that requires quick action, the congregation may want to join with others in responding but must do so immediately. Since legislative matters often move at a very quick pace, a congregation with a history of activism on a given issue may not want to be precluded from taking action because the process for obtaining formal board approval is too lengthy. In such cases, an ad hoc process can be implemented that would allow the leadership of the congregation to act more quickly. Such a process might include an agreement among the rabbi, president, and social action chair, in consultation with others, or convening the Executive Committee by means of a conference call.

## **The Role of the Union for Reform Judaism**

Some congregations limit their policy positions to those officially adopted by the Union, knowing that the Union's resolutions have been passed by a vote of representatives of Reform congregations throughout North America, including delegates from their own congregation. The Union's regional offices often can provide assistance in determining whether local issues are consistent with Movement positions. Where such policy already exists, the congregation can state the position of the Reform Movement and note its relationship as an affiliated congregation, rather than speak in its own name. Congregations that rely on preexisting policy often forego a reexamination of the issue at the local level. Resolutions adopted by the Union are available online on its Web site, [www.urj.org](http://www.urj.org).

In addition to the resolutions adopted by the Union, the Commission on Social Action (CSA) of Reform Judaism seeks to apply the insights of Jewish tradition to such domestic and foreign issues as human rights, world peace, civil liberties, religious freedom, poverty, and other major societal concerns. The CSA is a joint instrumentality of the Union, its affiliates (WRJ, NFTB, NATA, NFTY, NATE, ARZA, and ACC), and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR). CSA positions often form the basis of Union and CCAR resolutions, apply Union and CCAR resolutions to changing circumstances, and provide guidance to the Religious Action Center in speaking on behalf of the Movement to our elected and appointed government officials. To find out about CSA resolutions on specific issues, contact the Commission on Social Action at [www.urj.org/csa](http://www.urj.org/csa), 212.650.4160, or the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism at [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org), 202.387.2800.

## **The Role of Community Organizing**

Public policy issues are often intimately connected to our own congregants' lives. Our synagogues are full of stories of struggles with elder care and the health care system, and the search for affordable, middle class housing. Similarly, our congregations contain talented leaders motivated by these stories to act for change. *Congregation-based community organizing* is a process in which congregations build deep relationships both internally and with other institutions across lines of faith, class, and race. Through building relationships, congregations are able to bring their collective power to successful action, resulting in systemic change that improves the lives of their members and the broader community. To learn more, please contact Just Congregations, the Commission on Social Action's initiative to help synagogues engage in this work at [www.urj.org/justcongregations](http://www.urj.org/justcongregations).

## ■ WHEN SHOULD CONGREGATIONS TAKE PUBLIC POLICY POSITIONS?

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There are eight degrees of charity, each one higher than the others. The highest degree is to aid a person in want by offering him a gift or a loan, by entering into partnership with him, or by providing work for him, so that he may become self-supporting, without having to ask people for anything. In regard to this, it is written: "You shall maintain him, whether stranger or sojourner, he shall live beside you" (Lev. 25:35); that is to say, maintain him so that he may not fall and be in need of help.

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, "Gifts to the Poor" 10:7

In order to be effective, congregations and activists must be selective and "choose their battles." Oftentimes, congregations become involved in specific issues because members of the synagogue are committed to them and bring them to the communal table on their own accord. Congregations may be called upon to join coalitions on issues in which they have expressed an interest or by organizations with which they have partnered in the past. Often, it is the North American Reform Movement that urges congregations to become involved in specific issues. In some cases, the public policy issues that are raised are extensions of ongoing hands-on congregational activities; in other cases, a Social Action Committee may recommend that the congregation take on a new issue in light of current events and changing circumstances.

Congregations may wish to consider these factors as they set their priorities and determine which issues to address:

- Are there Jewish values at stake regarding this issue? Does the Reform Movement have a policy on it?
- Is this issue particularly timely? Is there a piece of legislation, a ballot initiative, or other governmental action that requires input immediately?
- Is this an issue on which the Jewish voice is particularly noteworthy? Do we as Jews have something unique to add to the public debate? Are there any interfaith coalitions that are in search of a Jewish partner regarding this issue?
- Is this an issue that resonates for a significant number of our congregants? Is this an issue around which we can generate interest and activity?
- Will this issue have a significant impact on the lives of our congregants? On our community? On our society?
- Is this issue an extension of other activities and priorities to which the congregation is already committed? Will taking a position on this issue enhance an existing project?
- How will the issue "play" in the congregation? Will it be divisive? Is there likely to be significant opposition to it?

The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC) monitors scores of legislative issues in Washington, DC, and implements the policies adopted by the CCAR and the Union. It provides weekly updates, press releases, and background information about issues of concern to the Reform Movement and alerts congregations to the most pressing policy issues of the day. Many congregations rely on the RAC's legislative information, which can be found on the RAC's Web site, [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org), in determining their policy positions and priorities.

## ■ CONGREGATIONAL ADVOCACY IS DISTINCTIVE AND IMPORTANT

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Hillel said: If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?

*Pirkei Avot 1:14*

**Although the Union, the CCAR, the Commission on Social Action, and, especially, the Religious Action Center all speak publicly on policy issues, congregations have a powerful and unique role to play.**

Elected officials need to hear directly from their own constituents about the issues that are of concern to them. It is the individual citizen whom government leaders represent when they pass legislation, appoint judges, or adopt policy. If we want our values to permeate the halls of power, we must speak out individually and collectively and not rely on others to speak for us.

*The Reform Movement's political efficacy is derived from the combined voices of over a million members of nearly a thousand congregations.* Those voices must “resound like a shofar” if they are to be heard above the din of sound bites, media hype, and special interests. As a single entity, our Movement is but one of many special interest groups that seeks to influence policymakers. With over a million individual voters, we can make a significant impact on public policy.

Furthermore, many have quoted the dictum “All politics are local.” Nowhere is this truer than in state and local politics, and nowhere is our advocacy more urgently needed. For example, the Reform Movement has a long-standing policy on capital punishment, but when there is a state initiative to impose a moratorium on the death penalty, it is the local community that will be asked to take a stand. Likewise, the Movement has a policy supporting the separation of church and state, but it is the local congregation that will be asked to speak out against an individual school board's policy permitting prayers at graduations. When a coalition of neighborhood churches, mosques, and synagogues forms to support fair wages in its local community, the congregation must know where it stands.

## ■ THINK SMALL AN APPROACH FOR SMALL CONGREGATIONS

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וְכֹל־הַמְּקַיִּים נַפְשׁ אַחַת מִבְּנֵי אָדָם, מַעֲלָה עָלָיו הַפְּתוּב כְּאִילוּ קִיִּים עוֹלָם מְלֵא.

ONE WHO SAVES A SINGLE SOUL IT IS AS IF THAT PERSON SAVED THE ENTIRE WORLD.  
*MISHNAH SANHEDRIN 4:5*



Recognizing that more than half of the congregations that constitute the Union for Reform Judaism have fewer than 250 membership units, the Ida and Howard Wilkoff Department of Synagogue Management provides a variety of services tailored to small congregations. These include

programmatic materials, consulting services, e-mail discussion groups, and the Small Congregations Resource Fund (a program that provides grants for participation in Union-sponsored events and loans for a variety of temple needs). In addition, the department's publications address the specific needs of small congregations.

Part of the mission of all congregations is to engage in *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world. This mandate applies to all synagogues, regardless of their size. Congregational advocacy and the development of public policy positions may be part of how a temple interprets this mission. In fact, many small congregations are located in areas in which their voice is the only Jewish voice, making it likely that the congregation will be sought out for participation in coalitions and interfaith activities around public policy issues and that the congregation will be the only entity able to provide a Jewish perspective to the public discourse.

One of the avenues of participation that small temples offer their congregants is the opportunity to make a difference in both the life of the congregation and in the larger community. Often members seek to do this through the work of Social Action or Social Justice Committees. In fact, many people are drawn to Reform synagogues because of the Reform Movement's historic commitment to *tikkun olam*. Advocacy can be a key component of the work of a Social Action Committee along with hands on projects and *tzedakah*.

In congregations that are not served by clergy, the Social Action Committee may play an especially vital role. It may become the task of this committee to educate the Board of Trustees and the congregation about the Jewish values regarding issues of public concern. After appropriate study, this committee may then make recommendations to the Board of Trustees regarding policy positions.

Just as small numbers of people can affect important outcomes, as evidenced by the 2000 presidential elections, so, small congregations can make a big difference in the repair of the world. One of the ways in which the impact of a synagogue can be greatly enhanced is by reaching out to local political leaders and to other faith communities.

Whether or not a congregation takes public policy positions, the members can get to know their elected officials and political leaders. Having an ongoing relationship with local politicians is important for keeping the lines of communication open between a congregation and elected officials. Those in the community who hold public office should be familiar with the congregation and the priorities of its congregants. To be most effective, the congregation can cultivate long-term relationships by developing a proactive plan, which might include inviting elected officials to speak regularly at the congregation and seeking meetings when representatives are in their home districts. Because elected officials expect to hear from their constituents, members of the temple should be encouraged to be in contact with elected officials about matters that concern them. The temple can provide to its members a list of both local and national officials with all of their contact information, including their Web site addresses.

Joining efforts with other faith groups in the community can be a very effective tool for making one's policy positions known. With regard to local issues, different faiths can often find areas of common concern and agreement. In many communities, faith groups have joined together to form coalitions that enable them to speak with a unified voice. As a member of a coalition, a small congregation can have the same voice and the same impact as a much larger congregation.

As stated above, in many communities the Reform temple may be the only representative of Jewish values, making it all the more important for those values to be expressed. In other communities, there may be other Jewish institutions, such as a Jewish Community Center or a Federation office. In these communities, the Reform congregation's involvement will insure that the Reform voice will be heard both in the Jewish community and when the Jewish point of view is voiced within the public arena at large.

A synagogue may want to engage in advocacy about Israel. If a Reform temple is the only Jewish organization in a community and does not speak out on matters pertaining to Israel, the Jewish perspective may never be heard. To ensure this does not happen, a synagogue may decide to reach out to other houses of worship and the media. Rabbis and congregational leaders can offer to speak at churches or mosques and civic organizations. Members of a temple can join with those of other religions to discuss current events or engage in text study. ("Open Doors, Open Minds" is a curriculum for such interfaith conversations from the Reform Movement's Interreligious Affairs Commission, available at [www.urj.org/opendoors](http://www.urj.org/opendoors).) Letters to the editor and op-ed pieces can convey the Reform Jewish perspective to the larger community, and meetings with the editorial board of the local newspaper can help achieve balance in reporting.

If congregations wish to involve themselves in advocacy and public policy, they may seek to establish criteria for doing so. Of course, it is important to recognize that in any congregation, even a small one, there will be some diversity of opinion. Appropriate study can help to determine where the consensus is within the congregation, as well as help build and create consensus around new issues. Reform Judaism has never wavered from its commitment to social justice and *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. Every temple, regardless of its size, can be a part of this proud tradition.

## ■ IMPLEMENTING A POLICY POSITION ONCE ONE IS ADOPTED

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We here highly resolve that we will not yield to despair, or to cynicism, or to fatigue; that this Movement, under God and in alliance with like-minded peoples of all faiths and of none, will continue to comfort the desperate, goad the conscience of the comfortable, and be a blessing to all the children of God so that the Jewish demand for justice will never perish from the earth.

Al Vorspan, Union for Reform Judaism Vice President Emeritus

*First and foremost, the decision-making body (Board of Trustees, Social Action Committee, clergy) should inform the membership of the congregation about the position taken, providing educational materials to help congregants understand the issue, the rationale behind the policy taken, and suggested actions. Congregational educators should be encouraged to engage both the youth and adults of the synagogue in learning about the issue, including the underlying Jewish values. The texts appearing throughout these pages and in the appendixes may be helpful in preparing educational opportunities that focus on Reform Jewish values.*

Suggested actions can include both individual and collective activities. Individuals might be encouraged to write, call, or e-mail their elected officials. The Religious Action Center and other advocacy organizations feature e-mail alerts on their Web sites that provide sample letters and electronic-sending options on targeted issues to facilitate such communication. It is always helpful to provide contact information for organizations that coordinate lobbying efforts on the issue at stake for individuals who want to become more involved. Other activities that can engage individual members might include signing petitions, participating in demonstrations or rallies, wearing buttons, and posting signs.

*Perhaps the most important reason for the synagogue to adopt an official position is to enable the congregation itself, as a collective entity, to address a policy issue in the public arena.* Oftentimes, coalitions of faith or ethnic groups form within a community in order to combine their resources and political will on local matters of concern. The Reform congregation might find itself the only entity that can provide a Jewish voice in these efforts. Generally, the presence of a Jewish representative is welcome in these coalitions and the absence of a Jewish presence is noted with dismay.

The media is an important vehicle for spreading the message of Reform Jewish values. Letters to the editor and guest op-eds on a critical issue can send a powerful message to elected officials and the public at large. Releasing a public statement in the name of the congregation is an expression of leadership that will be appreciated by those seeking guidance from the faith community on issues that affect their lives.

Many community advocacy groups host lobby days in state capitals during which representatives of the congregation can meet with elected officials. If a policy issue involves a piece of legislation, there may be an opportunity for the congregation to offer testimony before the state legislature or local municipal bodies by itself or in collaboration with others. These types of activities may initially seem daunting to a volunteer, but they can provide memorable experiences and serve as invigorating opportunities for an individual to become engaged in the democratic process

## ■ CONCLUSION

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Learn to do good. Devote yourselves to justice; aid the wronged. Uphold the rights of the orphan; defend the cause of the widow.

Isaiah 1:17

There is a long and proud tradition of political activism by the Reform Movement. The passion for social justice is reflected in the ancient words of our prophets and sages and in the declarations of our Movement's leaders throughout its history. Their voices continue to inspire Reform congregations to carry on this tradition.

Over time, the issues that capture our attention change, and our priorities shift as the political climate changes. But our commitment to pursuing justice and *g'milut chasadim* must not diminish. "Partners with God in *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, we are called to help bring nearer the messianic age."<sup>7</sup> In each generation we must renew this commitment, teach it to our young, and speak truth to power.

We believe that we can create a better world and that we are an integral part of *tikkun olam*. Our tradition tells that when God created the universe, one part of creation was left undone. That part was social justice—and it is ours to finish.

Rabbi David Saperstein, Director,  
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

## NOTES

1. For U.S. congregations: The IRS defines lobbying as an attempt to influence legislation, clarified as follows: “Legislation includes action by Congress, any state legislature, any local council, or similar governing body with respect to acts, bills, resolutions, or similar items (such as legislative confirmation of appointive offices) or by the public in a referendum, ballot initiative, constitutional amendment, or similar procedure. It does not include actions by executive, judicial, or administrative bodies.” *IRS Tax Guide for Churches and Religious Organizations*, p. 5. [www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1828.pdf](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1828.pdf). For information pertaining to Canadian congregations, please contact the Canadian Council for Reform Judaism, 3845 Bathurst Street, Suite 301, Toronto, Ontario M3H 3N2; 416.630.0375; CCRJ@urj.org.
2. *To Do Justice: Selected Financial and Legal Issues Facing Congregations*, Ida and Howard Wilkoff Department of Synagogue Management of the Union for Reform Judaism, 2003, p. 4. [www.urj.org/synmgmt/publications](http://www.urj.org/synmgmt/publications).
3. *IRS Tax Guide for Churches and Religious Organizations*, p. 5. [www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1828.pdf](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1828.pdf).
4. *Hear, O Israel: Creating Meaningful Congregational Mission Statements*, Ida and Howard Wilkoff Department of Synagogue Management of the Union for Reform Judaism, 2004, p. 2. [www.urj.org/synmgmt/publications](http://www.urj.org/synmgmt/publications).
5. *Constitution and Bylaws of the Union for Reform Judaism*, as amended in November 2003. [www.urj.org/docs/bylaws](http://www.urj.org/docs/bylaws).
6. *Managing the Sacred: A Guide for Synagogue Board Members*, Ida and Howard Wilkoff Department of Synagogue Management of the Union for Reform Judaism, 2004, p. 10. [www.urj.org/synmgmt/publications](http://www.urj.org/synmgmt/publications).
7. CCAR, “A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism,” Pittsburgh, 1999.

### SAMPLE CONGREGATIONAL POLICIES

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#### EXCERPTS OF ADVOCACY POLICY ADOPTED BY TEMPLE EMANU-EL, DALLAS, TEXAS

##### ADVOCACY

###### Background and Context

Speaking out on issues of *tikkun olam* is an obligation we cannot shirk. At the same time, we must respect the diversity of political opinions and approaches in our congregation. Several underlying principles govern our recommendations.

- Temple rabbis have always had and continue to have complete freedom of the pulpit...
- There are certain moral imperatives that we, as Reform Jews, agree are bedrock principles of our sense of social justice. An example would be feeding the hungry.
- Reform Judaism's belief in social action is not synonymous with a particular political agenda.

###### Recommendations

1. Speak out as a congregation on contemporary moral imperatives with the full support of the Board and rabbinic staff.
2. Avoid channeling the congregation into one political point of view.
3. Assess specific legislative issues that are important to us to determine whether there is consensus within the congregation. If there is no consensus, we will restrict official congregational activity to education and referral. The intent will be to give congregants solid information on all sides of the issue, enabling them to make individual decisions on their stance.
4. Commit sufficient staff and financial resources to make public affairs and advocacy work better.
5. Empower the senior rabbi, chair of the Public Affairs/Advocacy Committee, and Executive Committee to decide upon a course of quick action when an issue is urgent enough that it demands an immediate response based on our moral imperative to speak out as a congregation.

###### Suggested Action Plan

1. Advocacy in the name of the temple should be viewed as a multilevel process.
2. The Tikkun Olam Council will lead a process to develop a list of the contemporary moral imperatives (perhaps written as issues) as a starting point for creating an advocacy agenda.

The Tikkun Olam Council also will decide which issues are of prime importance to us in the upcoming year. Our rabbis will take the leadership for this process in consultation with the Tikkun Olam Council. It should be reviewed annually.

3. The congregation becomes informed of our moral imperatives through significant internal communications such as the *Window* [temple bulletin], Web site, and ongoing education. The Tikkun Olam Council's communication person(s), in consultation with all appropriate committee chairs and auxiliary group leaders, will spearhead this process.
4. Our congregation will speak out externally on the moral imperatives through op-ed pieces, our Web site, public forums and meetings, and other appropriate public demonstrations of moral communication.
5. The Public Affairs/Advocacy Committee will develop and publish a list of appropriate legislative outlets and other political opportunities for congregants interested in pursuing social justice through political action. This will be done according to legislative and other issue-driven calendars.
6. When the temple takes an official position on an issue, i.e., something under the heading of moral imperative, the issue is brought to the attention of the congregation by our rabbis, the Tikkun Olam Council, other temple groups, and/or individual congregants. Our rabbis will guide us in defining the issue in terms of our faith. The congregation is provided information. The temple moves on it in an appropriate manner.
7. At other times, congregants may agree on the principle behind a social justice issue but hold legitimate differences of opinion on how to solve it. In that case, the Tikkun Olam Council, with temple leadership, can highlight the issue, provide balanced background information on it, suggest various ways to work on it, and distribute a referral list of organizations dealing with the issue. Temple activity, in keeping with our guidelines, may or may not ensue.
8. Once an issue is defined and agreed upon as one that fulfills our moral imperative to speak out, an action plan is developed and approved to externally and internally communicate.
9. The approved action plan is supported by staff time, volunteer time, and money, if necessary.
10. When no agreement can be reached on whether or not to advocate for an issue, the Tikkun Olam Council should determine what common ground exists and the degree of differences that congregants have on the matter and report it to the Board.
11. When an issue does not move forward from the Board, follow-up action from the Board, implemented through the Tikkun Olam Council, should include timely internal communications, congregational forums on the issue, and referral lists of how and where else to get involved. No congregational position is taken publicly.
12. The congregation should limit itself to a few issues in which to get actively involved at any one time in order to maximize our effectiveness.
13. As part of its work, the Tikkun Olam Council, as previously mentioned, will develop an internal communication plan to allow congregants to participate in the development of the social action agenda. It could include quarterly congregational town hall meetings, each of which will center on one of our identified moral imperatives, enhanced use of the Web site that allows for the creation of congregational exchanges, e-mail messages, and space in the *Window* [temple bulletin].

14. The temple should create a space that becomes identified as a “town square,” where congregants can gather to discuss social action issues on a regular basis.
15. The Tikkun Olam Council should develop a mechanism to have ongoing congregational dialogue on issues.
16. The Tikkun Olam Council could suggest dialogue guidelines for the congregation to keep in mind as it considers advocacy. They might be something like the following:
  - We consider our identified moral imperatives to be timeless.
  - Perspectives on the implementation of our moral imperatives make room for different viewpoints on how we act on them.
  - There need to be multiple entry points for congregants to bring social justice issues before us. That includes ways of saying to congregants, “Let’s see how the congregation can support you on this important position” even when the Public Affairs/Advocacy Committee and the Tikkun Olam Council decide not to get involved in that particular issue.

## **TEMPLE SINAI, OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA SPEAKING PUBLICLY ON ISSUES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Even as Reform Jews embrace ritual, prayer, and ceremony more than ever, we continue to see social justice as the jewel in the Reform Jewish crown.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Union for Reform Judaism President

The Temple Sinai Board of Directors, at its October 2002 meeting, adopted a resolution to speak publicly on issues of social justice. The Board’s action is in keeping with the congregation’s purpose: to foster an environment of social responsibility, to provide leadership in the overall community, and to apply the principles of Reform Judaism.

### **Temple Sinai Reaches Out to the City**

Temple Sinai is a visible presence in the city of Oakland through its congregants. Members of all ages participate in the temple’s community outreach programs. These include literacy, antipoverty/anti-hunger projects, and a citywide annual Mitzvah Day. Temple Sinai is aligned with coalitions and agencies in our immediate area: The Jewish Community Federation of the East Bay, OCC (The Oakland Coalition of Congregations), BOSS (Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency), the Alameda County Food Bank, East Bay Sanctuary, and First Place Fund for Youth, among others.

### **The City Comes to Temple Sinai**

Every spring we open our doors to welcome members of our neighboring community for a Pesach celebration: our Annual Freedom Seder. Our guests come from City Hall, the Oakland Unified School District, and Rep. Barbara Lee’s office. Religiously, they represent four faith traditions: Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist.

### **Social Action/Social Justice—Toward a New Vision**

Social action is a critical component of Temple Sinai's mission. As a result of the Social Action Committee's Long-Range Strategic Planning, social action is seen as a congregational rather than an individual responsibility.

### **The Temple Sinai Board of Directors—A Prophetic Voice**

Rabbi Jonathan Omer-Mann, in his religious approach to social action/social justice work, outlines two distinctive roles: the "Priestly" and the "Prophetic." The "Priestly" role is one of feeding, helping, and healing. The "Prophetic" role deals with exposing the underlying causes and changing them.

Like our prophets who were never silent, Temple Sinai's Board of Directors will add voice to our presence in Oakland and from our city to the society beyond. Let our Board be guided by the prophet Micah, whose words decorate the Torah covers in our sanctuary:

What is it that *Adonai* requires of you: to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).

## **TEMPLE SINAI'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS' POLICY ON ADOPTING POSITION RESOLUTIONS**

In furtherance of Temple Sinai's Board of Directors' authority and responsibility to take positions on behalf of the congregation on issues of importance to the congregation and the Jewish community, the Board sets out below its policy for taking positions to promote social justice, Jewish values, and the interests of Temple Sinai.

### **Criteria for Consideration**

The Board of Directors will apply each of the following criteria to review any request for Board consideration of a public resolution:

1. The issue must be properly brought before the Board pursuant to the Procedure to Be Followed by Temple Sinai's Board of Directors to Adopt a Position Resolution. [See page 18.]
2. The issue must have ethical, moral, or social significance to the congregation at large.
3. The subject matter of a proposed resolution must have a bearing on the congregation, the Jewish community, or an issue of the society at large that implicates Jewish values or laws.
4. The Board will not take any action that will result in disqualifying the temple for favorable tax treatment pursuant to Internal Revenue Code § 501(c)(3) (concerning nonprofit organizations) or any other similar federal, state, or local law. In that regard, among other things, the Board shall not support or oppose specific candidates running for a public office, although the Board may take a position on a ballot measure or proposition.

## **Criteria to Consider in Formulating a Stance**

The Board will consider each of the following in adopting any position:

1. Whether the position is consistent with the congregation's mission and purpose, including whether it (a) fosters an environment of social responsibility, (b) provides leadership in the overall community, or (c) applies the principles of Reform Judaism to the values and conduct of the individual family or the society in which we live. (See Temple Bylaws, Article 2.01.)
2. Whether another Jewish organization, including but not limited to the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC), Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ), or the North American Federation of Temple Brotherhoods (NAFTB), has taken a position or adopted a resolution on the subject. Though consideration is to be given to the positions, if any, of such other Jewish organizations, the Board may adopt a position on a subject not addressed by another Jewish organization and/or may adopt a position different from that adopted by another Jewish organization.
3. Input provided by the clergy, professional staff, or any congregant of the congregation.

## **PROCEDURE TO BE FOLLOWED BY TEMPLE SINAI'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS TO ADOPT A POSITION RESOLUTION**

Temple Sinai's Board of Directors will follow the procedure described below to determine whether to adopt and publicize a resolution consistent with the Board of Directors' Policy on Adopting Position Resolutions.

1. Provided that the president of the Board is given reasonable advance notice of the intent to bring a proposed resolution to the Board for consideration, a matter may be brought before the Board by any one of the following methods: (a) upon a motion duly made by any member of the Board; (b) upon the recommendation of one of the congregation's clergy; (c) upon the recommendation of the Social Action Committee; or (d) upon the receipt of a petition or request signed by ten percent (10%) or more of the member units of the congregation, asking that the Board adopt a particular position.
2. If one-third (1/3) or more of all voting members of the Board believe that no action should be taken on a particular matter without first giving notice to the congregation, the matter shall be tabled until after the congregation is (a) notified of the proposed resolution, (b) informed of when the proposed resolution will be considered, and (c) given at least five (5) days to present additional information to the Board relating to the proposed resolution. Where notice is to be given to the congregation, notice shall be provided as broadly as reasonably practicable, including providing notice through the bulletin and through e-mails, and, if it is deemed appropriate, by posting or distributing informational fliers or posters.
3. The Board may consider a proposed resolution at any regular or special meeting of the Board or, in instances where it is deemed appropriate, by way of written consent, provided, however, that action by written consent shall require unanimity by the Board. Where the Board considers a proposed resolution at any regular or special meeting of the Board, after discussion of the proposed resolution, the Board shall vote on whether to

adopt the proposed resolution. The Board shall adopt a resolution or position when at least two-thirds (2/3) of all voting members of the Board vote in favor of the resolution.

4. No employee(s), committee(s), or organization(s) shall adopt a resolution or support a position on behalf of the congregation without the express approval of the Board; nor shall any employee(s), committee(s), or organization(s) use the letterhead of the First Hebrew Congregation of Oakland to adopt a resolution or take a position without the express approval of the Board. This provision is not intended to, and it does not, preclude an employee, committee, or organization from taking a position in his, her, or its individual or organizational capacity (i.e., as distinct from purporting to act on behalf of the congregation).

## ■ APPENDIX II

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### CCAR STATEMENTS ON SOCIAL JUSTICE

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The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) represents the rabbinical voice of Reform Judaism. Since its establishment in 1889, the CCAR periodically has adopted statements (“platforms”) articulating the broad principles of Reform Judaism in its day.

Each of the statements excerpted below includes a reflection on the social justice mission of Reform Judaism. The statements reveal the evolving perspective of the spiritual leadership of the Reform Movement in the sphere of social justice throughout our Movement’s history. As such, these statements provide valuable texts for adult education opportunities in congregations considering taking public policy positions. They provide an answer to the question: Where does the Reform Movement stand?

#### Questions for Discussion

1. *Look at the dates of each platform. What was going on in America during the time it was adopted? Considering the era of each of the statements, do you find anything surprising in the articulated principles? If we had been part of a Reform congregation at the time, would we have shared these values?*
2. *How have the statements evolved over time? Were there periods in the history of our Movement when we seemed more particularistic or more universalistic in our approach to issues?*
3. *If we share the values outlined in these platforms, how do we act on them within our congregations? How do we put these teachings into practice?*
4. *What if we don’t share the perspectives outlined in the CCAR statements? If not these principles, for what does the Reform Movement stand?*
5. *If we were to craft a new platform for our congregation today, what would it say? Where do we stand on the social justice issues facing us today?*

#### Texts

In full accordance with the spirit of Mosaic legislation which strives to regulate the relation between rich and poor, we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve on the basis of justice and righteousness the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society.

Pittsburgh Platform, 1875

Judaism seeks the attainment of a just society by the application of its teachings to the economic order, to industry and commerce, and to national and international affairs. It aims at the elimination of man-made misery and suffering, of poverty and degradation, of tyranny and slavery, of social inequality and prejudice, of ill-will and strife. It advocates the promotion of harmonious relations between warring classes on the basis of equity and justice, and the creation

of conditions under which human personality may flourish. It pleads for the safeguarding of childhood against exploitation. It champions the cause of all who work and of their right to an adequate standard of living, as prior to the rights of property. Judaism emphasizes the duty of charity and strives for a social order which will protect men against the material disabilities of old age, sickness and unemployment.

Columbus Platform, 1937

Until the recent past our obligations to the Jewish people and to all humanity seemed congruent. At times now these two imperatives appear to conflict. We know of no simple way to resolve such tensions. We must, however, confront them without abandoning either of our commitments. A universal concern for humanity unaccompanied by a devotion to our particular people is self-destructive; a passion for our people without involvement in humankind contradicts what the prophets have meant to us. Judaism calls us simultaneously to universal and particular obligations.

A Centenary Perspective, San Francisco, 1976

We bring Torah into the world when we strive to fulfill the highest ethical mandates in our relationships with others and with all of God's creation. Partners with God in *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, we are called to help bring nearer the messianic age. We seek dialogue and joint action with people of other faiths in the hope that together we can bring peace, freedom and justice to our world. We are obligated to pursue *tzedek*, justice and righteousness, and to narrow the gap between the affluent and the poor, to act against discrimination and oppression, to pursue peace, to welcome the stranger, to protect the earth's biodiversity and natural resources, and to redeem those in physical, economic and spiritual bondage. In so doing, we reaffirm social action and social justice as a central prophetic focus of traditional Reform Jewish belief and practice. We affirm the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*, setting aside portions of our earnings and our time to provide for those in need. These acts bring us closer to fulfilling the prophetic call to translate the words of Torah into the works of our hands.

"A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism," Pittsburgh, 1999

## ■ APPENDIX III

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### RESOURCES AVAILABLE THROUGH THE RELIGIOUS ACTION CENTER AND THE COMMISSION ON SOCIAL ACTION

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#### SOCIAL ACTION ONLINE

##### **Log onto [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org)**

The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC) has been the hub of Jewish social justice and legislative activity in the nation's capital for over forty years. It has educated and mobilized the American Jewish community on legislative and social concerns as an advocate in the Congress of the United States on issues ranging from Israel and global affairs to economic justice and civil and religious liberty.

The RAC's Web site at [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org) is the hub of Jewish social justice on the Internet. Through the years, the site has received numerous awards and has grown to nearly 1,000 pages. The RAC site is a great social action resource tool. It contains the RAC's legislative priorities, press releases, action alerts, the Social Action Program Bank, publications, tools for congregational Social Action Committees as well as updates on dozens of legislative and policy issues monitored by the RAC staff.

**Make sure your congregation has a link to the RAC's site on its Web site!**

##### **Social Action Program Bank**

Is your congregation looking for more ways to engage the community in projects on social action issues?

Visit the RAC's online Social Action Program Bank, located on the RAC's Web site at [www.rac.org/programbank](http://www.rac.org/programbank), to find examples of successful programs conducted by other congregations, including Irving J. Fain Social Action Award winners.

**If you have a program you'd like to add to the RAC's Program Bank, please contact the RAC at [rac@urj.org](mailto:rac@urj.org).**

##### **Stay Informed and Take Action**

The RAC maintains an e-mail and advocacy system for activists to stay informed and effectively participate in political decision making. The system is customized based on user preferences and areas of interest. There are numerous issue-specific lists, as well as the Advocacy Network and Cell Phone Advocacy Network (CAN), which notify users of crucial and pending legislation when their representatives are "undecided" or important targets on a specific piece of legislation. The Social-Action discussion list allows social action leaders to share program ideas and post questions to one another. To learn about the available lists and sign up, go to [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org).

The Religious Action Center (RAC) has extensive social justice resources, publications, and opportunities available online, [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org), such as RAC's robust and customizable e-news system, RACNews. Many resources are available for order or download including program guides and manuals, issue packets, holiday guides, interfaith resources, Israel resources, Social Action Committee resources, and Tzedek V'Shalom: The Justice and Peace Newsletter of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism (CSA).

*Lirdof Tzedek: A Guide to Synagogue Social Action* (Cost: \$14.00, plus shipping and handling) Whether you are looking to expand a successful social action program or are working to build one, *Lirdof Tzedek: A Guide to Synagogue Social Action* is an important resource for you and your congregation. *Lirdof Tzedek* provides step-by-step guidelines for all aspects of synagogue social action programming, from establishing the appropriate structures within the congregation to effecting change on the local, regional, and national levels. To order this publication, please call the URJ Press at 888.489.8242 or visit the URJ Press Web site at [www.urjpress.com](http://www.urjpress.com).

*K'hilat Tzedek: Creating a Community of Justice* *K'hilat Tzedek* is a discussion guide designed to help congregations through a process of reflection to determine where their social action programs fit into the scheme of congregational life and how they can become models of integrated, justice-seeking congregations. The *K'hilat Tzedek* process will invigorate and deepen the congregation's social justice work. To download this free publication, go to [www.urj.org/csa](http://www.urj.org/csa).

*Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice: Tough Moral Choices of Our Time* (Cost: \$14.00, plus shipping and handling) This text, written by Al Vorspan and Rabbi David Saperstein, is perfect for confirmation, high school students, youth groups, and adult education classes. The book brings together Jewish perspectives and moral policy analysis on scores of urgent issues from abortion to capital punishment and from the Middle East peace process to religious freedom in Israel and the United States. To order this publication, please call the URJ Press at 888.489.8242 or visit the URJ Press Web site at [www.urjpress.com](http://www.urjpress.com).

**Chai Investment Program (CHIP)** This guide for congregations interested in pursuing socially responsible investment policies through the Chai Investment Program (CHIP) is available on the RAC Web site at [www.rac.org/pubs/guidemanuals/chip](http://www.rac.org/pubs/guidemanuals/chip).

**Open Doors, Open Minds: Synagogues and Churches Studying Together** Over the last century, and particularly in the last 40 years, Jewish-Christian dialogue has created better mutual understanding. Much work remains. The Union has joined with four Christian denominations in calling for dialogue and has prepared the *Open Doors, Open Minds* curriculum. Congregations join with a church in their community and commit to several sessions at which adult learners will come together to learn about common aspects of our history and critical distinctions; joint study of sacred texts; social justice issues from a religious perspective; and more. It is available at [www.urj.org/opendoors](http://www.urj.org/opendoors)

To view additional publications, visit [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org).



# THANK YOU

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Your membership in a Union congregation  
has made the Reform Movement the largest  
and most vibrant branch of Judaism.



UNION FOR  
REFORM JUDAISM

האיחוד ליהדות רפורמית

SERVING REFORM CONGREGATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA

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