

PROPOSED RESOLUTION ON ETHICAL EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

Submitted by the National Association of Temple Administrators, the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism and the Commission on Synagogue Management to the 69th Union for Reform Judaism General Assembly

The Talmud tells us that the first question a person will be asked by the heavenly court after he or she dies will be: "Did you deal honestly in business?" Shabbat 31a

BACKGROUND

Judaism has a longstanding commitment to the fair and just treatment of workers. Torah teaches that "[t]he wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning" (Leviticus 19:13) and "[y]ou shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow Israelite or a stranger in one of the communities of your land" (Deuteronomy 24:14-15). The Talmud teaches, "The path to Jewish wisdom can be through the business world" (Niddah 60b).

Inspired by these ancient teachings, the Union for Reform Judaism has debated and approved resolutions that call upon congregations, the Union, and its affiliates to adopt specific ethical practices within their own business operations, particularly in the arena of employment practices. In 1992 the Union adopted a resolution on gender equality which, in part, called "upon all UAHC congregations to actively uphold the policy of non-discrimination based on gender in all employment practices, including hiring and promoting rabbis, cantors, educators, administrators, social workers and other professionals." In the Union's 1999 Resolution on Living Wage Campaigns, the Union called upon "our congregations and all arms of the Reform Movement to examine their employment and contracting practices to ensure that they reflect the spirit of this [living wage] resolution." The 1999 resolution defined the "living wage" as no less than the poverty line for a family of four. What is considered a living wage can vary, depending on the cost of living in a given community, and is typically higher than the minimum wage, but it is generally calculated based on the assumption (whether or not it is true for a particular worker), that a worker is working full-time, year-round.

In 2001, the Union adopted a resolution concerning mental health that urged "member congregations and the UAHC to provide health coverage for employees that guarantees parity in mental health coverage." Even when certain ethical practices would result in expenditures of additional funds, we nonetheless have called upon our members to implement them, such as the 1978 resolution that called upon our congregations to modify their facilities to be accessible to members and staff with disabilities.

In addition to these resolutions that directly affect employees of congregations and arms of the Reform Movement, the Movement has adopted numerous resolutions and spoken out on national and local labor issues that reflect our commitment to economic justice. These policies impact businesses throughout our communities, including those we retain to perform work for our synagogues and other institutions. For example, we have spoken out on family leave, sweatshop labor, the status of farm workers, and the right of workers to unionize. We have called upon congregations and Union affiliates to implement consumer practices that support labor rights by purchasing fair trade and 'sweat-free' products. The Reform Movement and individual congregations have participated in living wage campaigns that advocate state and local laws requiring contractors or subcontractors of government services to pay their full-time employees a wage that allows them to live above the poverty level.

As a Movement dedicated to fair labor practices, evidenced most recently by the Resolution on Workers' Rights adopted in Houston in 2005, we must routinely examine our own internal practices and policies. Our congregations are best served as sacred communities when our employment practices—including contracts, job expectations, training, family leave policies, hiring and transitioning procedures—reflect Jewish values. Employees and members are engaged in a sacred partnership with a shared commitment to maintain a thriving, vibrant, and holy congregation. The business operations of our institutions should reflect this holiness as well. The nurturing and care of synagogue employees is one of the most sacred responsibilities of any congregation. Derech Eretz (doing what it takes to make others feel respected) is a principle that can guide many of the

employment policies and practices of our synagogues, including those related to the maintenance staff, administrative support or part-time employees who contribute much to the daily life of the synagogue and deserve the highest level of respect. The employees who may be least visible to our members nonetheless provide crucial support to the operation of our congregations, and it is important that their human needs not be neglected or undervalued.

Ethical labor practices dictate that all synagogue employees should receive compassionate and appropriate treatment. Yet setting goals for the Union, our congregations and Union affiliates also must reflect what is financially feasible given tight budgets and limited resources. Many factors must be considered when running an organization, preparing its budget and setting salary and benefits packages. Employers will, of necessity, distinguish between full and part-time employees, professional and support staff, and long and short term employees. We are well aware that congregations are situated differently and have varying financial resources available. Our policy positions reflect our goals and aspirations, even when not immediately attainable for all. But we should attempt to provide benefits for our own employees that we endorse for workers everywhere, and establish policies that respect their personal and family needs as well as their contributions to our institutions and communities.

This ethical mandate extends to our use of contract labor. Congregations may engage contractors for catering, maintenance, construction or numerous other tasks that are not performed by paid employees of the synagogue. Normative labor practices vary from community to community and from one profession to another, making it difficult to establish a single standard that would apply to all circumstances. In some communities, the use of immigrant labor and/or day labor may be a routine and generally accepted practice. These same circumstances, however, can lead to intimidation and abusive practices imposed on vulnerable laborers without access to legal protections. Congregations should make a good faith effort to do business only with companies that maintain fair and ethical labor practices that are in line with our existing policies.

The National Association of Temple Administrators (NATA), the Commission on Social Action (CSA), the Religious Action Center (RAC) of Reform Judaism, and the Union's Department on Synagogue Management all provide valuable tools to help congregations meet this commitment. Working cooperatively, the Union, its affiliates and its member congregations can provide a framework of Jewish values to guide our employment practices and build communities where God's presence is felt in all of our interactions.

THEREFORE, the Union for Reform Judaism resolves to urge congregations and all arms of the Reform Movement to:

1. Create a workplace environment that promotes a culture of support and respect for all employees;
2. Systematically review and assess on an ongoing basis their existing employment procedures and practices and, when necessary, develop plans to bring their employment policies in line with existing Union recommendations for fair and equitable treatment for all employees;
3. To the greatest extent feasible:
 - a. Provide benefits for full-time employees such as health insurance and retirement support; and
 - b. When outsourcing, seek out businesses that pay a living wage, provide benefits for their full-time workers and engage in fair and ethical employment practices.

THE UNION FOR REFORM JUDAISM FURTHER RESOLVES TO urge the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism and the Commission on Synagogue Management, working in coordination with the National Association of Temple Administrators (NATA), to prepare resources to assist congregations, affiliates and other arms of the Movement to assess their current employment practices in light of these values.