Temporary Policy of the Rabbinical Placement Commission

July 2020

The Rabbinical Placement Commission (“RPC”), made up of representatives of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (“CCAR”), Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion (“HUC-JIR”), and the Union for Reform Judaism (“URJ”), was formed in 1964 to establish policies and procedures that advance a fair, orderly and dignified process of placing CCAR member rabbis in URJ member congregations. The policies and procedures of the RPC are designed to support equity in the search process and lead to engagements in which the skills, abilities and interests of rabbis align with the stated needs, visions and values of congregations. The RPC is committed to the needs of both rabbis and congregations and holds in the highest regard the sanctity of the relationship between rabbi and the congregation he/she/they serves. In recent years, the RPC has adopted some new policies, which address gender and other inequities – e.g., requiring all search applications to include a stated range for base compensation and that search committees answer several questions regarding implicit bias training.

The current Covid-19 pandemic now poses numerous challenges to our lives generally and to the rabbinic search process specifically. The RPC convened a special meeting to discuss how best to ensure a fair, orderly and dignified search process that ensures equity and fairness for congregations and for rabbis while also safeguarding the health, well-being and privacy concerns of rabbis, their families and members of congregational communities.

After careful consideration and recognizing the highest values of equity and pikuakh nefesh, saving lives, the RPC unanimously voted to institute a temporary policy requiring that all candidate interviews, including call-back interviews, be conducted via video-conferencing from now until January 1, 2021.

That is, there is to be no travel related to search processes and no in-person interviews or visits until January 1, 2021. In the fall, soon after the High Holy Days, the RPC will re-evaluate the policy in light of information regarding the status of the pandemic available at that time and determine whether to extend the time-frame or whether to permit travel and in-person interviews/visits after January 1, 2021.

The RPC recognizes that this temporary policy is likely to be received with relief by some and disappointment by others. Moreover, with awareness of the deep significance of the rabbinic search process and outcome in the lives of rabbis in placement and congregations in search, the RPC acknowledges that this temporary policy may pose added difficulties to an already challenging time. The professionals of
the CCAR, HUC-JIR and the URJ are ready to offer support and guidance, including best practices for online interviews for both rabbis and search committees, as we navigate this new terrain with compassion and fairness together as a Movement.

Please be in contact with Rabbi Cindy Enger, Director of Rabbinic Placement, with any questions. She can be reached at cenger@ccarnet.org or (212) 542-8784.