On Being a Rabbi

"An Orderly, A Friendly, A Disciplined Way of Doing Business"

Alan Henkin

Introduction

After decades of attempts to create a rabbinic placement system, the members of the CCAR received yet another plan at the June 1961 Convention held at the New Yorker Hotel. A Special Committee on Placement chaired by Jacob Rothschild (1911–1973) designed the plan, and after a vigorous discussion the plenum ultimately adopted the report. The highlights of the plan called for the CCAR to assume all costs of the proposed placement system, the hiring of a placement director, and the assembling of a Rabbinical Placement Commission (RPC). In addition, and most controversially, the plan would be mandatory for CCAR members, requiring them to seek pulpits only through the Placement Commission and imposing upon CCAR members (but not upon congregations) disciplinary action for willful defiance of the system. Finally, the plan proposed a three-year trial for itself.

In order for the full Conference to approve the plan, the 1961 proposal required a mail-in vote with two-thirds of the members voting in the affirmative. At the time the Conference had 812...
members, so 544 votes in favor would be necessary for passage. On Tuesday evening, June 19, 1962, at the CCAR Convention at the Hotel Radisson in Minneapolis, Minnesota, President Albert Minda (1895–1977) announced the results of the referendum on the placement plan. Having received 546 yes-votes, it narrowly passed. There were 178 no-votes cast, and 13 members abstained. Thus the plan was formally adopted by the CCAR, and consultations with the UAHC and the HUC-JIR were authorized.

Sidney Regner (1904–1993) had served as the CCAR’s first executive director since 1954, and in that capacity sat on the Provisional Placement Commission. At that same 1962 Convention he complained that placement workload for himself and the other volunteers was overwhelming, “There is a limit to what we can do with our other full-time responsibilities.” No wonder he hoped that the UAHC and HUC-JIR would accept the plan so that a full-time director of placement could be engaged.

The Issues
The Board of Governors of HUC-JIR first took up the CCAR’s placement plan at its February 7, 1963, meeting. President Nelson Glueck (1900–1971) wrote in his report to the Board that “the executive staff of the College, including myself, approves wholeheartedly of the plan.” The chairman of the Board of HUC-JIR, Sidney Meyers (1904–2001), convened an ad hoc committee to study the plan and bring a recommendation to the Board, but it was clear that the Board of Governors was deferring to the UAHC Board, which had more at stake in a rabbinic placement plan.

In mid-February 1963 a special UAHC committee appointed by Judge Emil Baar (1891–1985), chairman of the Board of Trustees, met with CCAR leaders to discuss the plan. The special committee was led by Louis Broido (1891–1985), a business executive and lawyer in Pittsburgh and New York with extensive experience in union-management negotiations. Broido’s group included Baar himself, Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath (1902–1973, president of the UAHC) and Rabbi Daniel Davis (1904–1974, director of the New York Federation of Reform Synagogues). Representing the CCAR were Minda, Bernard Bamberger (1904–1980, immediate past president), Leon Feuer (1903–1984, incoming president) and Regner. Broido and his team brought to the CCAR four areas of concern:
(1) the determination of pulpit vacancy, (2) the composition of a proposed Executive Committee that would draw up the panels of recommended rabbis, (3) the composition of the proposed Rabbinical Placement Commission, and (4) the infringement on congregational autonomy inherent in a placement plan. As Broido recounted that meeting: "I think the group understood and discussed very intelligently these problems without any commitment." Broido and Bamberger presented the plan to the UAHC's Executive Committee on Wednesday, April 3, 1963.

In addressing the Executive Committee, Broido recognized that the difficulties that rabbis faced in placement were serious and that the leaders of the UAHC were "sensitive to the problems of the rabbis, deeply sensitive." For his part, Bamberger described two types of incidents that had given impetus to the movement for a placement system. First was the election to prestigious pulpits of young rabbis only a few years after ordination, while "men, ten, twelve, fifteen years in the pulpit, men of demonstrated ability, men at the height of their powers, found themselves simply excluded from consideration." Second were incidents in which rabbis were dismissed or forced to retire unjustly. The discussion of the Executive Committee revolved around the issues raised by Broido's special committee.

1. Determination of pulpit vacancy

Initially Broido thought this issue was straightforward: a vacancy was created when a rabbi died, resigned, or departed for another position. The CCAR, however, was concerned with rabbis who were unfairly dismissed or not renewed. Broido acknowledged that he knew of occasions "when the rabbi wanted to go to the national mediation or conciliation commission because it had felt that some unfairness had taken place, the congregation refused to go." Bamberger quickly acknowledged that the issue of vacancy was not a serious problem between the UAHC and CCAR, and he thought it could be resolved easily. UAHC Executive Committee member Earl Morse (1908–1988) feared that a requirement for compulsory mediation would make the plan hard to sell to the November General Assembly. Baar reminded the Executive Committee that "mediation does not mean compulsory," and that seemed to end the issue.
2. Paneling

The CCAR plan anticipated that “the [Placement] Commission will submit to the congregation a panel of those, who in its considered judgment will best serve the needs of that congregation...” It was vague as to who would do the actual paneling, although the CCAR representatives seemed to assume that the Director would create the panels of rabbis. The UAHC representatives insisted “that an Executive Committee composed of one representative each from the CCAR, the HUC-JIR, and the UAHC be responsible for drawing up the panels of recommended rabbis in consultation with the Director of the Commission and that their actions be by unanimous consent.” The CCAR Executive Board agreed with the spirit of this suggestion and counter-proposed that the RPC simply create a subcommittee with representatives of the three organizations to work with the Director in assembling the rabbinic panels. This seemed to have solved the problem.

3. RPC composition and congregational autonomy

The issues of the number of representatives on the RPC and the degree of autonomy of congregations were conjoined in the minds of the UAHC leaders. At the November 1950 Cleveland convention the UAHC General Assembly had rejected the idea of requiring congregations to only utilize the proposed placement plan and allowing the CCAR to sanction congregations that bypassed the placement system. To meet this concern, the 1961 plan proposed sanctions only on rabbis who defied the system, leaving the congregations alone. But as Broido pointed out, “it was almost impossible for the Conference to discipline the Rabbinat [sic] without at the same time somewhere along the line disciplining the congregations.” Baar noted that he was reminded by congregational leaders that the UAHC Constitution stipulated that every congregation is autonomous.

Irvin Fane (1904–1982), a Kansas City lawyer on the Executive Committee, pressed the argument that if the plan was mandatory for the rabbis, it secondarily became mandatory for the congregations. Broido acknowledged the point:

It is mandatory upon the congregations only in the sense that the discipline exercised upon the Rabbinat [sic] must necessarily be
exercised upon the congregations, because if the rabbi [i.e., the RPC director] refuses to approve a certain rabbi by going someplace, where a congregation has picked him through this machinery, then he does not go, or the committee takes a position it will not service the congregation, will not furnish the congregation with any proposed rabbis... In other words, you cannot have this kind of machinery without in the end having an effect upon the freedom of the congregation to pick a rabbi.\textsuperscript{15}

Bamberger admitted that the CCAR was well aware of the constraint on congregational choice implicit in the plan but he contended that unless the placement director “was armed with something more than moral suasion,”\textsuperscript{16} the new placement system would be no better than the current provisional plan.

New York City resident and UAHC Executive Committee member Walter Weismann (1891–1969) asked if the proposed plan could be modified to assure checks and balances and to mollify fears of rabbinic restrictions on congregational autonomy.\textsuperscript{17} The 1961 plan envisioned a Placement Commission composed of seven representatives from the CCAR, two from the UAHC and two from HUC-JIR, as well as a paid director from the CCAR. “You are creating in my mind,” said Weismann, “what is called in common parlance of the industry a ‘closed shop.’”\textsuperscript{18} Broido believed that in order to convince the UAHC’s General Assembly to accept the placement plan, he could overcome the congregational misgivings over the mandatory nature of the plan by emphasizing parity within the RPC: three from the CCAR, three from the UAHC, and three from HUC.\textsuperscript{19} Nathaniel Hess of Sands Point, New York (1907–2001) concurred that the plan would be much more palatable to the congregations if there were a fair representation of congregations on the RPC: “I think the rabbis will have just as much to say with three, three and three and with their own placement director, but you will never put across a seven, two and two deal, because the minute you talk about it, it is going to sound suspicious.”\textsuperscript{20}

The UAHC Executive Committee forwarded the plan to the full Board with its approval in principle and with the caveat that the amendments suggested by Broido’s Committee should be incorporated into the plan. The Board was encouraged to study the proposal even while negotiations continued.\textsuperscript{21}
The UAHC Board

At the May 26, 1963, meeting of the UAHC Board of Trustees, the same issues were rehashed. Again Broido opened the discussion with a review of the process and with a recommendation that the Board should adopt the placement plan as amended by Broido's committee. He also urged the Board to endorse the plan for the General Assembly in November. Among his concerns was the possibility that if the Board did not endorse the plan or if the General Assembly did not approve the plan, the CCAR might implement its plan unilaterally, depriving the UAHC of any opportunity to shape it. "This would give rise to a very difficult situation."22

Board Member Joseph Hecht (1912–2009) of Ontario, California, proposed that the UAHC take over rabbinic placement "rather than trying to make appeasements across the land."23 Baar quickly rejected the suggestion:

With all due respect, Mr. Hecht, the administration of the Union has very carefully considered this matter, and one thing it does not want to do is take responsibility for placing rabbis. There has been so much criticism—unjustified—when there have been, let us call them, errors made, laid at the door of the Union, where we have not been responsible.24

Hecht responded that as a "patron body" the UAHC should assume the responsibilities of supporting its congregations. Baar merely replied that the UAHC could only be the patron of HUC-JIR and that the CCAR was an independent body altogether.25

Broido became strongly assertive in arguing for the Board's endorsement of the plan. First, placement is a rabbinic problem and the rabbis deserve an opportunity to work out their own problem. Second, as he said in his opening, the CCAR will go ahead with this plan with or without the UAHC, and this is the UAHC's moment to influence the plan. Third, by their overwhelming vote for this plan the rabbis had indicated their dissatisfaction with placement and the congregations "have an obligation to our spiritual leaders" to help them to resolve this problem.26 Remember, he added, this plan is only a three-year experiment; if it does not succeed, we will let it expire. Wishing to bring the discussion to a close in order to move on to other agenda items, Baar urged the Board to accept the
report of Brodlo’s committee and to send the plan on to the General Assembly. It would also allow Brodlo’s committee to continue negotiating with the CCAR in advance of its June 1963 convention.

CCAR President Albert Minda addressed the UAHC Board, emphasizing that two factors had led to the plan. First, as a “dignified calling” and “a holy relationship,” the way in which a rabbi comes to a congregation should be “vested with the dignity that rabbi, the rabbinate, deserves and earned.” Secondly, rabbinic morale was severely compromised when hard work, accumulated wisdom, and congregational experience were ignored in professional advancement. “These are things that impair the dignity and prestige of the rabbinate as a whole.” With that, Baar called for the vote, and announced the “ayes” had it. The UAHC Board sent the plan to the General Assembly.

The HUC-JIR Board of Governors weighed in at its June 7 meeting. After Regner presented the CCAR’s position and Eisendrath presented the UAHC’s proposed modifications, the Board discussed the plan in detail. It was referred to a committee to report back at the Governors’ October 24 meeting.

About three weeks after the UAHC Board’s approval of the placement plan, the CCAR plenum responded at its Philadelphia convention at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel. On Tuesday afternoon, June 18, 1963, Bamberger presented the UAHC’s proposed changes to the conference as well as the CCAR Executive Board’s minor revisions. The most significant concession was the acceptance of the UAHC’s insistence that the Placement Commission have equal representation of the three constituents. Also while the UAHC proposed the creation of a Placement Executive Committee to draw up the rabbinic panels, the CCAR’s version called for the convening of a simple subcommittee tasked with the responsibility of paneling. Bamberger emphasized the importance of the CCAR and UAHC collaboration on placement. “The [CCAR] Executive Board felt that everything should be done to bring about the establishment of a joint undertaking, provided it did no injury to the plan or to the members of the Conference.” The Report on the Placement Plan was unanimously adopted.

The final step in the run-up to the November UAHC General Assembly was their Executive Committee meeting of October 8, 1963. Now that the CCAR had approved a placement plan, modified along the lines of the UAHC’s recommendations, the UAHC’s
Executive Committee had to re-endorse it. In fact, the changes were approved by the Executive Committee by mail, but Baar wanted a brief discussion on the topic. He made the point that the placement plan did place a restriction on congregational autonomy but that the restriction was slight and was more than justified by the larger good of maintaining “a solid, homogenous movement.”

One new wrinkle was introduced by Sidney I. Cole (1907–1972) of Chicago. He noted that nowhere in the placement panel was there a provision to withhold placement services to congregations suspended from the UAHC. Although Eisendrath believed that it was implicit in the plan, Cole wanted it explicitly on record in the minutes of the meeting for the sake of the upcoming General Assembly.

The UAHC General Assembly Convention

Prior to the start of the General Assembly at the Conrad Hilton Hotel in Chicago, the UAHC Board met on Saturday night, November 16, 1963. Eisendrath implored the Board to support the resolutions that would be voted on by the General Assembly on Tuesday.

It is my heartfelt hope and desire that each of you participates to the utmost in supporting those matters which you have recommended for adoption to the congregations. Among these items is the rabbinic placement plan . . . I would expect that those who voted and asked the Central Conference to accept these amendments will not only with vote but with voice support the action taken by this Board last May.

Eisendrath anticipated a floor fight when the resolution was brought to the delegates and he made clear his expectation that Board members should be outspoken in their support.

Tuesday, November 19, was a typical fall day in Chicago: the high temperature was 54 degrees, no rain was in the forecast, and the winds were blustery. Inside the Conrad Hilton in the International Ballroom the delegates assembled at 2:30 p.m. to consider a number of resolutions, starting with the one on rabbinic placement. With Emil Baar chairing the proceedings, Kalman Druck read the resolution and the plan itself. After some parliamentary conversations, pro and con microphones were set up, and speakers were to be recognized in alternation between the mikes.
Baar called upon Louis Broido to recapitulate the history behind the resolution and in doing so Broido made these points: First, since the CCAR leadership had accepted the UAHC’s changes, the CCAR intended to implement the placement plan on January 1, 1964, with or without the UAHC’s endorsement. Second, it is not healthy for the Reform Movement to have a situation in which two-thirds of the rabbis are dissatisfied with placement. Third, the rabbis of the Reform Movement are willing to give up some of their own autonomy and freedom to bring order and dignity to rabbinic placement.\(^5\)

Questions arose as to how appeals may be made, how much the system would cost, and how much information about a congregation would be required by the Placement Commission. Robert Silver, a delegate from Congregation Beth Emeth of Wilmington, Delaware, asked if a rabbi could enter placement without the knowledge of the congregation. Bamberger spoke assuring the Assembly that while small changes in the resolution that clarify matters are acceptable to the CCAR, significant changes in the resolution were not. He also argued that rabbis must inform their congregations before they take a new position, but the issue is when. At what point should a rabbi inform the congregation? As to the cost of the Commission, Bamberger observed that it would be financed like any other commission except the CCAR would fund it, not the UAHC.

Bamberger pointed out that this plan was in the best interest of the congregations of the UAHC. Congregations would benefit from the improved morale of the rabbis and from the employment of one full-time director who could devote to the congregations a great deal more attention than the current three volunteers of the provisional committee. Furthermore, the placement plan would prevent rabbis from abandoning their congregations whenever an improper overture from another congregation was proffered. In any case, Bamberger said, the plan will expire of its own accord in three years unless it is renewed.\(^6\)

Edward Zolla, a delegate from Chicago’s Sinai Congregation, opposed the resolution because the Commission had no right to determine who was qualified to become a candidate.\(^7\) On the other hand, Harry Gutmann of New Rochelle, New York, favored the resolution because the integrity of the rabbinate was essential to advance the Reform Movement.\(^8\) Gilbert Tillis, president
of Temple Beth El of Great Neck, New York, reiterated Broido's point that this is the moment when the UAHC should take part in implementing the plan to create "a more perfect situation." Samuel Kassel asked an obvious point of information: If the plan will be implemented whether or not the UAHC General Assembly approved, did a vote even matter? Baar replied: "Because it is hoped that the philosophy of the plan would appeal to this assembly of congregational representatives as a cooperative effort to channel on a dignified basis for the rabbinate and an equally dignified basis for the congregations, that is the basis." 40

Rabbi Lawrence Mahrer (1932–) of Beth Hillel Temple in Kenosha, Wisconsin, opposed the resolution because the tenure system contemplated by the plan would disadvantage young rabbis. 41 Another rabbi speaking against the resolution was Martin Siegel (1933–) of Woodsdale Temple in Wheeling, West Virginia, who insisted that rabbinic freedom in placement was sacred and inviolate. 42

This brief synopsis of the debate on the resolution does not capture the intricacies of the parliamentary maneuvering that took place. Points of order, points of information, amendments tabled and untabled, and motion to close debate strained even as able a parliamentarian as Emil Baar. The resolution was even challenged as unlawful under the Religious Corporation Law of the State of New York. 43 With patience, parliamentary expertise, and good humor, Baar steered the debate towards a final vote. Calling that vote proved difficult. First Baar asked for a voice vote, which proved inconclusive. Then he called for a head-count, which was challenged from the floor. Finally, at the late hour of 5:00 p.m., when the delegates were supposed to be preparing for dinner, Baar instructed the delegates to vote by ballot. The announcement of the vote was to be made the next day, Wednesday, November 20, at the 1:30 p.m. closing plenary of the General Assembly.

The next day Baar announced the vote. Of the 790 ballots cast, 442 voted in favor of the resolution and 345 voted against it. Three ballots were ruled invalid. "I declare the motion duly adopted," he said. 44 The issue, however, was not closed. Later during the plenary an unnamed delegate mounted one last challenge, asserting that the chairman or the parliamentarian erred procedurally and therefore the vote on the placement plan was "illegal." 45 Baar dismissed the challenge, claiming that whether the debate was procedurally
correct or not, the General Assembly never disputed the chair’s ruling, “I want to get the record straight on that,” Baar said. “It is not illegal.” At last the UAHC had approved the resolution.

The final piece lay with the HUC-JIR Board of Governors. Chairman Sidney Meyers (1904–2001) asked Henry Hofheimer (1884–1975) to chair the Rabbinic Placement Committee, and at the Governors’ January 30, 1964, meeting Hofheimer moved that since the UAHC had approved the resolution two months earlier, HUC-JIR would participate in the plan and appoint its three representatives. The resolution was adopted, and the placement plan could now be implemented.7

Malcolm Stern

In the summer of 1963, in anticipation of the UAHC’s approval of the placement plan, CCAR president Leon Feur approached Malcolm Stern (1915–1994) about the directorship. They were both in Jerusalem for the June dedication of the Hebrew Union College Biblical and Archaeological School:

[Feuer] took me up to his room at the King David [Hotel] and said, “I have a mandate to find a Placement Director, and I think you’re the fellow who could do the job.” After he picked me up, he said, “Are you happy in Norfolk, Virginia?” (I had been there for 16 of an eventual 17 years.) I said “yes” and he said, “All the more reason, I want somebody who is experienced and happy and positive.”

Ordained in 1937, Stern had served Kneseth Israel in Philadelphia as an assistant rabbi before taking leave to work as a chaplain in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II. In 1947 he was elected rabbi of Congregation Ohel Shalom in Norfolk. He told the story of his placement there as an example of “the chaos of placement prior to the existence of any system.”

[Dr. William] Feinschreiber [1878–1968, senior rabbi of Keneseth Israel] got a telephone call from the emeritus in Norfolk, Louis Mendoza [1881–1954], asking, “Do you know a young rabbi who is not a Zionist?” It was a prerequisite for the position in Norfolk, and Feinschreiber said that he had a young man right there, and that’s how I went to Norfolk. That’s the way placement was.
While in Norfolk Stern tried numerous times to go to other congregations, usually through the intervention of friends with the pulpit committees:

But I'm just showing you that it was a whole question of who knew John that created the demand from our colleagues that has evolved into a placement office. When I got the placement director position, when the word got out, I got a call from my beloved mentor and teacher. . . . He said to me, "Just think of the power you will have." Jake Marcus [Rabbi Jacob Rader Marcus, 1896–1995] this was. Until he said that, it never occurred to me that this was a power position. To me it has always been an opportunity for service to colleagues.31

By the time the CCAR tapped him to be placement director, Stern was already renowned as America's preeminent Jewish genealogist. In 1949 the American Jewish Archives appointed him its genealogist, a position he held until 1994. In 1960 he published his landmark Americans of Jewish Descent. Also in 1960 he edited the Union Songster, reflecting his deep love for Jewish music.

Feuer said he approached Stern "because I believe that he possesses in fullest measure the ability, the patience, the integrity and the confidence of his colleagues which are so essential to the effective functioning of the placement process."32 Similarly Regner lauded Stern as a man "whose personality, ability and understanding of the problems of rabbis and of congregations make him an ideal choice for this post."33

Even before he was on the CCAR's payroll, Stern, calling himself "director-elect," convened the Rabbinical Placement Commission for the first time on May 6, 1964, with Bernard Bamberger in the chair. After a review of the procedures of the Provisional Placement Committee, the Commission heard Stern's own suggestions. First, the RPC should create "standardized forms for rabbis and congregations [with the] possibility of eventual use of IBM, if practical for our purposes."34 He also proposed circulating information about placement among rabbis and congregations.35

With a budget of $23,423, Stern began on Monday, August 3, 1964. In his first ten months he surveyed the CCAR members to determine how "contented" the rabbis were in their pulpits and to collect biographies on the rabbis.36 He authored and published a trifold Guide to the Operation of the Rabbinical Placement Commission.
He also wrote out *Guidelines for Rabbinic Interviews* aimed at assisting rabbis and rabbinic students in the interviewing process and *When Your Congregation Seeks a New Rabbi* for pulpit selection committees. In this first year he had put into place the infrastructure for Reform rabbinic placement that is operative still today:

- Dissemination of a list of congregations in search
- Standardized forms for congregations and rabbis
- List of completed placements
- Categories of eligibility
- Placement Director’s report to the RPC
- Placement Director’s visits to HUC-JIR campuses, CCAR regional *kallot*, and UAHC gatherings

He learned a great deal in this first year:

Why do some men fail to interest pulpit committees while others are sought for by those same committees? In most instances, the desirable ingredients seem to include a pleasing personality, strength of conviction without being aggressive about it, and the ability to fill the committee’s image of what a rabbi should be.

He had also come to believe that most rabbinic-congregational crises arose from failures of communication. In any event Stern’s first year was a whirlwind of launching the placement system.

Stern’s second year, 1965–1966, was “even more gratifying” than his first. He attended every UAHC regional convention and every CCAR *kallah*. He began counseling the HUC-JIR graduating students on the placement process, and overall he facilitated seventy-one placements. His budget had increased to over $28,000, and the RPC had begun meeting in person once a year. In his report to the CCAR in 1966 he reminded that conference that “next year, at both the CCAR and UAHC conventions, the Placement Plan is scheduled for evaluation and reconsideration.”

**The Renewal**

At the CCAR Executive Board’s meeting on March 14 and 15, 1967, with little discussion and with Stern’s consent, the Executive Board voted to recommend to the 1967 CCAR Convention that the RPC and the placement plan be extended indefinitely. In addition, the
Executive Committee appointed Bamberger to present the recommendation. A month later, on April 10, the RPC members agreed that each one would “recommend to [his] respective body the permanent continuation of the plan.”

In his presentation to the CCAR Convention on Tuesday afternoon, June 20, Bamberger pronounced the placement system a success. “We have achieved a greater measure of fairness, order and dignity in the placement of rabbis than was previously possible.” He cited the “splendid compliance” of rabbis and congregations, and he gave full credit to Stern. “He has become the friendly adviser of many congregations and rabbis, and his counsel has often proved most helpful.” Needless to say, Bamberger’s motion was seconded and carried.

On Sunday, May 28, 1967, the UAHC Board took up a resolution on the continuation of the placement plan. Board chairman Irvin Fane called upon Nathaniel Hess (1907–2001), a member of RPC, to make the report. Hess too acknowledged the success of the system, and he too gave full credit to Stern, whose “understanding and devoted effort to making the Rabbinical Placement Plan operate with satisfaction and effectiveness.” Hess moved to recommend to the upcoming Biennial General Assembly that the plan be continued for three more years. Eisendrath suggested that the period of time should be four years. Regner informed the Board that at the CCAR Executive Committee meeting the recommendation was to extend the plan indefinitely. In the end Hess concurred that the recommended resolution to the Biennial would call for an indefinite continuation. Chairman Fane called for the vote: “Whereupon there was a chorus of ‘Ayes’ and not a single ‘nay.’” Its adoption was unanimous.

Next was HUC-JIR’s turn. At the Board of Governors meeting on October 24, 1967, chairman S. L. Kopald, Jr. (1921–), called upon Robert I. Goldman (1890–1976) to speak to the continuation of the placement program. Goldman reported that the plan was working satisfactorily and he moved that the RPC continue as it presently exists. This motion was seconded and approved.

With the CCAR Executive Board’s and Convention’s resolutions, as well as the UAHC Board’s and HUC-JIR’s Board’s resolutions, the stage was set for the November 1967 UAHC General Assembly meeting in Montreal. On Monday afternoon, November 13, Fane invited Stern to open the session with an invocation:
As we deliberate let us hear Thy voice. Speak to us, we pray Thee, of the nobler world, and guide us as we seek to build it. What must we do to aid our fellowmen? Where shall we find the keys to faith? How can mankind know peace? Oh, let the wisdom of our ancient faith and the dedication of our minds and hearts lead to answers and to actions acceptable before Thee, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.70

Fane called upon the chairman of the President's Message Committee, Sidney Cole, who moved that the placement plan be continued indefinitely.71 A rabbi immediately proposed an amendment to the resolution praising Stern, which engendered a round of applause and Fane's acceptance. Then Eisendrath rose to praise Stern:

There was one thing that was imperative for the successful implementation of this plan and that was a rabbi who could win the confidence of both the rabbinate and congregational leadership... [Stern] has won the confidence of both through his integrity, through his sympathetic understanding, and, therefore, I strongly support the amendment.72

The final resolution read in part:

RESOLVED that the Joint Placement Plan be continued indefinitely...

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Biennial Assembly expresses its gratitude to the members of the Joint Rabbinic Placement Commission and, particularly to its dedicated director, Rabbi Malcolm Stern, for their efforts in achieving a successful program for rabbinical placement.73

The question was called, the vote taken, the resolution passed overwhelmingly, and the motion was adopted. The rabbinical placement plan became a permanent feature of the North American Reform Movement.

Conclusion

How was it that the placement plan went from bitter controversy in 1963 to enthusiastic acceptance in 1967? More specifically, what caused the UAHC Board and General Assembly to move from
division and acrimony to acclaim and unanimity over the plan in just four years? The answer has three parts: (1) the times, (2) the plan and (3) the person.

Two days after the UAHC approved the placement plan on November 20, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, touching off one of the most turbulent periods in U.S. history. Two major developments define this period: the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War. During the years 1963 to 1967 major U.S. cities like New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Newark endured race riots. This period was also marked by the assassination of Malcolm X, the Selma to Montgomery March, the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Similarly between 1963 and 1967 the Vietnam War ignited enormous social upheaval as it escalated dramatically during these years. The number of U.S. troops in Vietnam increased from 16,000 to 400,000. U.S. casualties during these years jumped from 122 to 11,363. In response, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement and Students for a Democratic Society were founded, and huge street protests erupted such as the one in Berkeley in March 1965 that drew 100,000 demonstrators or the one in New York in April 1967 that drew 300,000. In 1965 UAHC President Maurice Eisendrath joined Clergy Concerned about Vietnam, an interfaith organization of clergy opposed to the War. By 1967 Eisendrath had become an outspoken and controversial opponent of the War.

Add to all this, developments in Israel. Just five months before the UAHC General Assembly, in June 1967, Israel was victorious in the Six-Day War, taking Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. In September 1967 the leaders of thirteen Arab states pledged in the Khartoum Declaration to continue their struggle against Israel. About a week after the UAHC resolution to renew placement, on November 22, the United Nations Security Council approved Resolution 242, creating a framework for peace in the Middle East.

The movement to free Soviet Jews also intensified during these years. In April 1964 the Student Struggle to Free Soviet Jews began at Columbia University, and in that same month major Jewish organizations banded together to form the American Jewish Conference on Soviet Jewry. In October 1964 more than ten thousand people rallied for Soviet Jews at Madison Square Garden in one of the
first public demonstrations. By 1966 the Soviet Union was putting
Jews through show trials for crimes like “anti-Soviet propaganda.”

In the midst of all this national and international disorder the
reauthorization of a rabbinic placement plan must have seemed of
little consequence by comparison. The UAHC General Assemblies
of 1965 and 1967 considered resolutions on discrimination in hous-
ing; equalizing the operation of the law; eradicating poverty; the
Middle East; Soviet Jewry; Israel; the Selective Service; the right
to dissent, among others. With all that was going on in the United
States and in the Jewish world, why worry about a program that
has proven its worth?

This brings us to the second reason that the renewal of the place-
ment plan faced little opposition: it worked. In its first three years
the placement office had made available to the rabbis of the CCAR
more than 500 openings. Over 250 of those openings were in UAHC
congregations. Of those 250, 73 openings were new ones, engaging a
full-time CCAR rabbi for the first time. None of the apocalyptic fears
of closed-shop, rabbinic labor unions or constraints on congrega-
tional autonomy came to pass. As Bamberger succinctly put it: “The
three-year experiment has, I believe, proved most successful.”

The third reason that the renewal sailed through is the person of
Malcolm Stern. Many years later, when Stanley Dreyfus eulogized
Malcolm, he said, “The mechanism of rabbinic placement is of his
devising, and, though refined over the years, it remains essentially
Malcolm’s handiwork.” To be sure, the 1963 Resolution created a
framework for the placement process, but it fell to Stern to build
the structure. For example, the 1963 Resolution called for each
member of the CCAR to “provide his own biography,” but what
information exactly should be provided? In what way should it
be provided? How should the information be stored and shared?
Stern created the formats and the processes for handling the bio-
graphical information on the rabbis.

Beyond his logistical skill Stern earned universal respect for his
integrity and fairness. Typical was Harold Dubinsky (1908–1978)
of St. Louis, Missouri, who said, “In my community and my tem-
ple, we have just gotten a rabbi through this Placement Bureau,
and Malcolm Stern, in his handling of the matter, was most won-
derful.” In contemporary parlance Stern embodied the right com-
bination of technical and adaptive leadership to bring the rabbinic
placement system into existence.
A HISTORY OF REFORM RABBINIC PLACEMENT, PART 2

With the renewal of the placement plan in 1967 and with the infrastructure that Malcolm Stern put into place, the rabbinic placement system was securely established. Through more than a half-century, six directors, and nine RPC chairs, the placement system has facilitated thousands of matches between rabbis and congregations. For more than fifty years the Rabbinical Placement Commission and the Placement Office have constituted the nexus between the CCAR, the UAHC/URJ, and HUC-JIR. As the placement system enters its second fifty years, we continue to build on Malcolm Stern’s legacy even as we adapt to the unprecedented conditions of the twenty-first century.

Notes

3. HUC-JIR records, Board of Governors minutes, MS-20, box B-1/37.
5. Transcript, 44.
6. Transcript, 56. Today the problem is called age-discrimination and it still persists in placement.
7. Ibid.
8. Transcript, 48. Actually the UAHC and the CCAR together created the National Conciliation Commission in 1959 for this purpose. The Commission was renamed the National Commission on Rabbinic-Congregational Relations in 1973.
9. Transcript, 63.
10. Transcript, 108.
11. Transcript, 125.
12. “Report on the Rabbinical Placement Plan,” CCAR Yearbook 73 (1963), 111. The paneling system became a feature of the final plan. In its very first minutes the Rabbinical Placement Commission approved a policy by which the Director was empowered to select candidates for small, “noncompetitive” synagogues; in the case of large synagogues the Director and a subcommittee of the RPC would create panels in consultation. This system remained in effect until the early 1990s shortly after Rabbi Arnold Sher became the Director of Placement.
13. Transcript, 45.
14. Transcript, 100.
15. Transcript, 100-101.
17. Transcript, 86-87.
18. Ibid.
19. Transcript, 101-2
20. Transcript, 104.
23. Transcript of Board meeting, 177.
24. Ibid., 179.
25. Ibid., 180.
26. Ibid., 189-91.
27. Ibid., 200.
28. Ibid., 201.
29. HUC-JIR records, MS-20, box B-1/37. In fact, the October 24 report merely recommended tabling the motion on the resolution until after the UAHC General Assembly meeting.
31. Transcript of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the UAHC, Tuesday, October 8, 1963, p. 7.
32. Ibid., 8-9.
33. Transcript of UAHC Board meeting, Nov. 16, 1963, pp. 128-29.
34. Transcript of the Proceedings of UAHC General Assembly, Nov. 19, 1963, pp. 4-13
35. Ibid., 21-31.
36. Ibid., 37-46.
37. Ibid., 51-52.
38. Ibid., 52-54.
39. Ibid., 61-62.
40. Ibid., 73-74.
41. Ibid., 55-57.
42. Ibid., 59-61.
43. Ibid., 84.
45. Ibid., 102-3.
46. Ibid., 131-32.
47. HUC-JIR records, MS-20, box B-1/37.
48. Malcolm Stern Papers, American Jewish Archives, MS-626, box 31, folder 4, p. 3.
49. Ibid., 4.
50. Ibid. Stern acknowledged his membership in the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism, “although I am not particularly proud of it.” In fact, he was its secretary, but when Israel was created, he argued that “it was time the Council went out of existence.”
51. Ibid., 5.
52. CCAR Yearbook 74 (1964), 5-6.
53. Ibid., 17.
55. Ibid.
56. In the information form that Stern asked the rabbis to complete, they had to check off: “I am satisfied with my present position and do not contemplate changing / I am contented to stay here until something better becomes available / I would like to be offered an opportunity for change / Please find me a new position as soon as possible.”
57. Stern built upon the Provisional Placement Committee’s categories of eligibility. To be eligible for a congregation with 125 members or fewer, a rabbi could be newly ordained. For a congregation with up to 250 members, a rabbi needed three years’ experience. For a congregation with up to 600 members, a rabbi needed five years of experience. For congregations over 600 members, a rabbi needed ten years experience. The “A,” “B,” “C,” “D,” and “E” systems were introduced in October 1965.
58. CCAR Yearbook 75 (1965), 87-88.
59. CCAR Yearbook 76 (1966), 74.
60. Ibid., 21.
62. Ibid., 74
63. Ibid., 47-75.
64. Transcript of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the UAHC, Sunday, May 26, 1967, pp. 240-41.
65. Ibid., 245.
66. Ibid., 246-47.
67. Ibid., 248.
68. Ibid.
69. HUC-JIR records, MS-20, box B1/37.
71. Ibid., 93–94. The resolution on the continuation of the placement plan was presented in the report of the President's Message Committee. At that time resolutions could be brought before the General Assembly either from the Resolutions Committee or the President's Message Committee.

72. Ibid., 98–99.

73. Thanks to Don Jones, executive assistant at the URJ, for locating this resolution in the resolutions binder in the Chairman's Office at the URJ.

74. CCAR Yearbook 77 (1967), 74.


76. Transcript of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the UAHC, Sunday, May 28, 1967, p. 246. The rabbi to whom Dubinsky was referring was Alvan Rubin who became the senior rabbi of Temple Israel in 1967.