Executive Summary – 2021 CCAR/URJ Study of Rabbinic Compensation - Gender Pay Data

The 2021 CCAR/URJ Study of Rabbinic Compensation disaggregates rabbinic salaries by size of congregation and gender, and for the first time since 2012 when gender data was first made available, there is encouraging news to report. The 2021 Study uses 2019 data. We use the 2019 data and compare it to previously published 2016 data. The 2019 data paints an encouraging picture of the narrowing gender pay gap in the Reform rabbinate. However, as much as this data suggests progress, there is still much work to do in the fight towards gender pay equality in the rabbinate. Below, we outline several key observations from the 2019 data that suggest positive (and some negative) change.

First, the 2019 data demonstrates that more categories of rabbis/congregations are making progress towards narrowing, rather than widening, the gender pay gap. Indeed, in 2019, the gap between male and female rabbinic salaries narrowed in fourteen congregational size categories, while the gender pay gap widened in only six categories. By comparison, in 2016, of the 21 congregational size categories where we were able to compare 2016 to 2010 data, the gender pay gap widened in eleven categories, narrowed in nine, and remained the same in one.
Second, while the gender pay gap narrowed between Senior/Solo and Assistant Rabbis in 2019, it increased among Associate Rabbis. The narrowing of the gender pay gap for Senior/Solo Rabbis and Assistant Rabbis reflects a positive trend—that the categories populated with the largest number of rabbis experienced significant narrowing. For example, the 2019 data for Senior/Solo Rabbis serving congregations of 251 to 400 member units (n=105), indicates the gender pay gap narrowed by 8% when compared to the 2016 data. Similarly, the congregational size category with the largest number of Assistant Rabbis – congregations with 1000+ member units (n=29) – narrowed by 6% in 2019.

However, it must be noted that not all trends were positive among the Senior/Solo rabbi categories. In the category of Senior/Solo rabbis with fewer than 150 member units (n=60), the 2019 data shows that the gap between male and female rabbinic salaries is wider than it was even in 2010, even though there has been a 3% narrowing from 2016-2019. In 2010, there was a 7% pay gap between male and female rabbis in this category, which then widened to 17% in 2016. Now, the 2019 data shows a 14% pay gap between male and female rabbis in this category. Therefore, even though when compared to the 2016 data, there is a narrowing in the pay gap of 3%, the pay gap remains wider than it was back in 2010.
Although Senior/Solo and Assistant rabbi categories demonstrate generally encouraging trends, the data for Associate rabbis reflects the opposite. This is particularly true in the largest category of Associate rabbis (n=28), which are those in congregations with 1201-1800 member units. Alarmingly, the 2019 data indicates that the gap widened by 13% in this cohort when compared to the 2016 data. In this category, the cohort of Associate rabbis was 39% male in 2019, while it was 41% male in 2016. Although female rabbis make up a majority of Associate rabbis in both the 2016 and 2019 data sets, and the percentage of male rabbis stayed roughly the same, the gap still widened by a large margin.

However, when comparing Assistant rabbis serving in 1201-1800 member unit congregations with their Associate colleagues serving the same sized congregations, there are vast improvements in the pay gap. In fact, when compared to the 2016 data, female Assistant rabbi salaries in this cohort surpassed male Assistant rabbi salaries, resulting in an 18% narrowing of the pay gap in 2019.

Still, after weighting the data, among all three rabbinic categories, men make roughly 18% more than woman, which is only a slight improvement when compared to the 19% reflected in the 2016 data. This is true even when the 2019 data reflects a meaningful overall increase in the number of female rabbis across all congregational size categories. For example, while only
25% of Senior/Solo Rabbis identified as female in 2016, this number increased to 30% in 2020.¹

Finally, we are also buoyed by the fact that when it comes to Senior/Solo Rabbis, as the size of the congregation increases, the gender pay gap narrows.²

Although the 2019 gender pay data offers new hope in our efforts to eliminate the Reform Movement gender gap, there is still much work to be done - as evidenced by the fact that some categories of female rabbis have not been able to narrow the gap and indeed are falling further behind their male colleagues. We should be pleased that the data is trending in the right direction, but the gender pay gap remains, even in our progressive Reform Movement. Let us all be agents of change—now.

² Id.