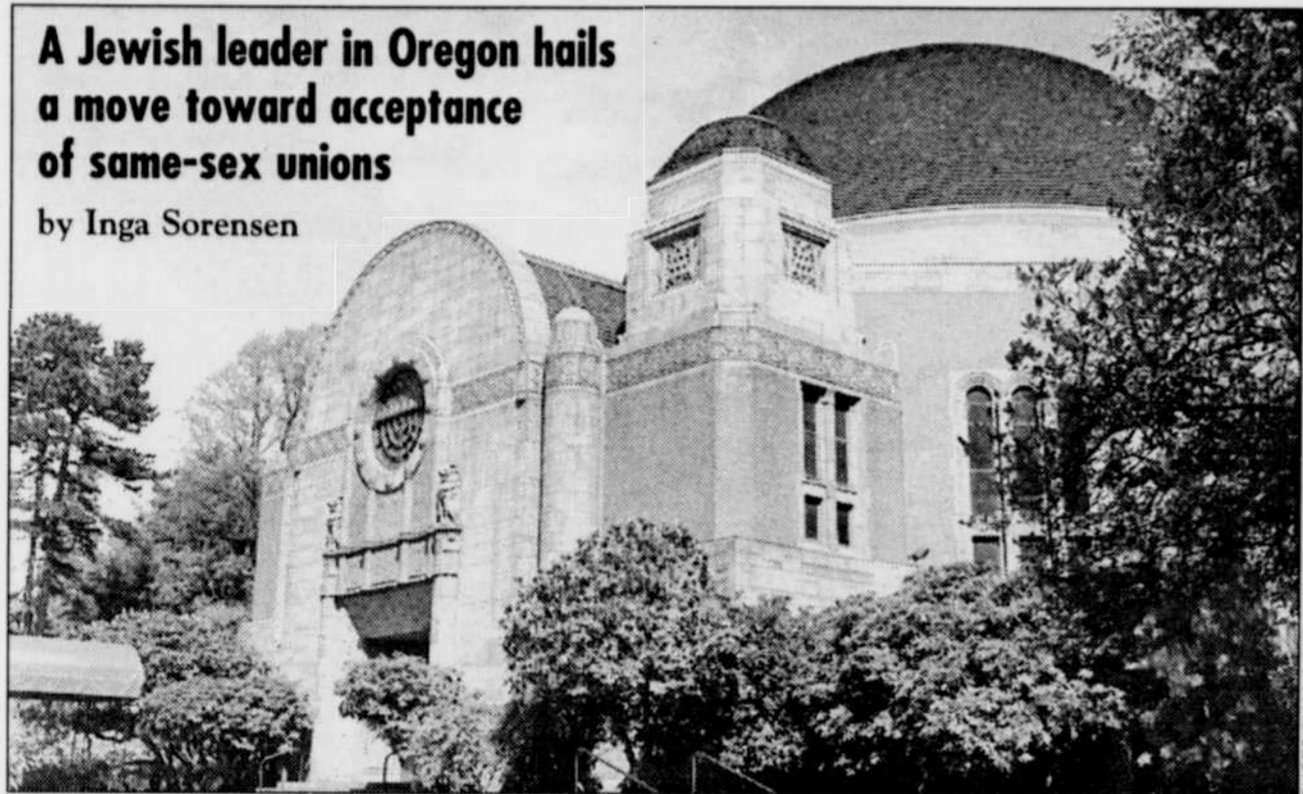


THE RIGHT DIRECTION

A Jewish leader in Oregon hails a move toward acceptance of same-sex unions

by Inga Sorensen



Congregation Beth Israel has ancient roots—and a modern approach to gay civil rights

“It was a motion that had to pass. It should have and it did,” reflects Rabbi Emanuel Rose of the Portland-based Congregation Beth Israel, Oregon’s largest synagogue.

Rose is referring to the Reform rabbinate’s recent passage of a resolution to support the decisions of individual rabbis to officiate—or not—at Jewish same-gender ceremonies.

The vote occurred March 29 during the annual convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. CCAR represents Reform Judaism, the nation’s largest Jewish denomination, with more than 1.5 million members.

The Reform rabbis’ move is the first of its kind by a major U.S. religious denomination.

“This bold, historic decision to affirm our relationships sets a new standard for inclusiveness and equality for a major religion,” says Elizabeth Birch, head of the Human Rights Campaign, a national gay and lesbian political group. “This forward-thinking policy paves the way for voices of reason and fairness within other denominations to step forward and demand that the love that is preached is also practiced.”

CCAR’s resolution calls for the Reform rabbinate to develop sample ceremonies for rabbis who choose to officiate such unions and states that relationships of two Jewish people of the same gender are worthy of affirmation through appropriate Jewish ritual.

The resolution leaves it up to the individual rabbi to decide whether she or he chooses to officiate at Jewish same-gender ceremonies.

“This resolution...is groundbreaking in that it is the first time a major religious body has indicated its support for any of its clergy who decide to officiate at same-gender ceremonies,” Rabbi Paul Menitoff, professional head of CCAR, said.

In order to create a consensus with those opposing same-sex unions, compromise language was added saying CCAR would “recognize the diversity of opinion” within its ranks. CCAR also passed a resolution stipulating that the affirmation of same-sex unions does not mean such ceremonies are marriages and that it does not explicitly encourage them.

The “Resolution on Same-Gender Officiation” was originally proposed last year by CCAR’s Women’s Rabbinic Network, which comprises 275 female rabbis.

Said Rabbi Shira Stern, WRN’s co-president: “This is as much a civil rights issue as it is a religious issue, and we believe that passing this resolution does a great deal toward strengthening Jewish families by recognizing the sacred relationship between two Jews—whether they be homosexual or heterosexual.”

Portland’s Rose agrees.

“Morally and ethically, this needed to pass,” he tells *Just Out*, “because it’s the right thing.”

Congregation Beth Israel dubs itself “a home for members of every age, income and lifestyle...united by our commitment to celebrate Judaism, to learn from one another and to transmit Jewish values across the generations.”

Its Northwest Portland temple is designated on the National Register of Historic Places.

Religious services, led by Rose and Rabbi Ariel Stone-Halpern, are held every Friday night and Saturday morning, on the High Holy Days and on all festivals.

Over the years, Rose has spoken against anti-gay ballot initiatives and legislation in Oregon. He has also worked to deter hate crimes.

“Measure 9 was the big one,” he says, referring to the highly charged initiative campaign of 1992. “We really worked hard on that one.”

Who would have thought there would be serious talk around same-sex marriage fewer than 10 years later?

“It’s pretty amazing,” Rose notes.

Though he has performed child-naming ceremonies in the synagogue for the offspring of same-sex couples, Rose says he has yet to officiate a union ceremony for a same-sex couple.

“I’ve never been asked,” he explains.

That may soon change, however, given CCAR’s freshly approved resolution.

So what can a same-sex couple expect if they do ask?

They can expect, Rose says, a serious discussion about their commitment, the depth of their relationship, “all the issues I discuss with heterosexual couples” who plan to marry.

“This decision, combined with the Vermont House passing a civil unions bill, shows the incredible momentum toward recognizing same-sex relationships,” says HRC’s Birch. “This trend will continue as more people learn that same-sex couples have the same responsibilities of married couples, but none of the rights.”

CCAR has already adopted a number of positions on gay rights. In 1977, it adopted a resolution calling for decriminalization of homosexual acts between consenting adults and calling for an end to discrimination against gay men and lesbians.

In 1990, CCAR endorsed an Ad Hoc Committee on Homosexuality and the Rabbinic report urging that “all rabbis, regardless of sexual orientation, be accorded the opportunity to fulfill the sacred vocation that they have chosen.”

The committee also endorsed the view that “all Jews are religiously equal regardless of their sexual orientation.”

EXPERIENCE the POWER!



Strike Back!

A Weekend Course With The Padded Attacker

231-1999

One With Heart Martial Arts Institute

SE 43rd & Hawthorne Blvd.
www.onewithheart.com

A smart financial plan begins with just 7 numbers.

238-6036

WADDELL & REED
The people with a plan for you.



Eric Brown
District Manager
500 NE Multnomah
Portland, OR 97232
503/238-6036



Sometimes I think she really does know everything.

www.glibank.com

My girlfriend told me about this vintage car she’s had her eye on, a 60’s convertible. She also told me about the great interest rates we’d be able to receive through G & L Internet Bank to finance the car. So we applied for an auto loan at the G & L web site and were approved in no time at all. We’re both really enjoying the car; I might even let my girlfriend drive once in a while, but only if I’m with her.

G & L Internet Bank ... We’re not only gay friendly, we’re your ONLY gay bank!

G & L Internet Bank is committed to investing and reinvesting its deposits in the gay community.

What other bank can commit to that?

Member FDIC • Equal Housing Lender
Copyright © 2000 G & L Internet Bank