

Family - 1993

Tarahat hamishpachah...honor accorded to parents, the respect for each member of the family, the love of children... have all been nurtured in the Jewish tradition. (NFTS Resolution, 1965)

Issue

Burdens on families worldwide of increasing pressures and inadequate societal supports; implications of increasing family diversity in Reform congregations.

Background

The United Nations General Assembly has designated 1994 as the International Year of the Family (IYF). Acknowledging the diversity of families, IYF will focus global attention on the family to foster the development of a comprehensive and integrating approach to improving the welfare and advancing the rights and responsibilities of all family members.

In many parts of the world families have been weakened in their ability to meet the basic needs of their members because of poverty, famine, warfare, refugee status, debilitating disease and lack of information about family planning. Government, private agencies and international organizations have sought to provide needed services. In many nations economic recession and high costs of providing social services are resulting in cutbacks which increase family burdens, "particularly on female members" (1994 IYF: Building the Smallest Democracy at the Heart of Society, UN, 1991). IYF will encourage familial gender equality and aim to "bring about a fuller sharing of domestic responsibilities and employment possibilities."

North American families are not exempt from social problems. The United States lacks a coherent family policy to develop and deliver services and resources for those families in greatest need. Although many social programs have been implemented, a more comprehensive approach with higher funding levels is needed. Canadians are concerned that financing for many social programs designed to help families in greatest need will be severely curtailed in the interests of fiscal restraint.

The question, "Is synagogue Judaism user friendly?" can be asked by non-traditional families. In describing his vision of Reform Judaism as we move into the 21st Century, Rabbi Alexander Schindler has said:

...these, too, belong to our Jewish family. Their needs shall be numbered among our responsibilities, and their creative energies shall be tapped. If we render them invisible, we only render ourselves blind; If we condemn them as "Other," we only condemn ourselves to isolation.
(“Reform Judaism 2001” in Reform Judaism. New York: UAHC, Spring 1991)

A special report on gay and lesbian couples in Reform congregations asks:

- 1) How will gay and lesbian couples participate in life cycle events of their children,
- 2) How will family diversity be explained in the religious schools and
- 3) Will health and pension benefits be made available to employees' domestic partners in Reform institutions and in congregations (UAHC Committee on the Jewish Family, 1993).

Sisterhood has always supported those governmental, community and congregational policies that enhance

For more information on WRJ and Social Justice, visit www.wrj.org/social-justice-home

family life. We have called for resources and activities for parenting that enhance Jewish family values and practice, including recognition of the special needs of single-parent families and working women. In 1991 we supported the rights of gay and lesbian families.

Resolution

Women of Reform Judaism, reaffirming its commitment to policies that strengthen the family in all its diverse forms, supports the principles and goals of the International Year of the Family and calls upon all affiliates to:

- 1) Use the new publication of the UN Task Force, Women of Reform Judaism at the United Nations, to educate their constituencies, to publicize the principles and goals of the IYF and to support and participate in IYF events in their communities.
- 2) Urge both the development of comprehensive governmental family policies that address family needs and responsibilities and the enactment of legislation to enable families to become economically self-sufficient, strong and healthy.
- 3) Inform constituencies, congregations and communities about supportive programs for families and participate as volunteers in such programs where possible.
- 4) Be a force in the congregation to develop programs that focus on the diversity of the Jewish family for the purpose of helping congregations to develop a new, more-inclusive understanding of family and institute policies that support and sustain this expanded view.
- 5) Work with temple youth groups to increase their sensitivity to family diversity and sexual orientation and to encourage them to reach out to all young people in the congregation.

Further, the Women of Reform Judaism urge the UAHC Department on Jewish Education to develop curricular materials on family diversity for use in religious schools.