



Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
בית המדרש לרבנים ליהדות מתחדשת

For Immediate Release

Contact:

Eileen Fisher, Asst. VP for Communications
efisher@rrc.edu or 267.226.8118

Wendy Univer, New Media Strategist
wuniver@rrc.edu or 215.694.8446

RRC Announces New President Elect

Deborah Waxman, Reconstructionist rabbi and scholar of American Jewish history, to lead seminary and congregational union.

WYNCOTE, PA—(Oct. 9, 2013)—The Reconstructionist Rabbinical College announced today that Rabbi Deborah Waxman, Ph.D., is the organization's new president elect. Waxman plans to take office on January 1. RRC serves a dual mission; Waxman is believed to be the first female head of a Jewish congregational union and also is the first woman rabbi to lead a Jewish seminary.

Waxman, a historian of American Judaism, brings to the fore a vision perfectly suited to the landscape we see today. A recent study by the Religion and Public Life Project of Pew Research found that three quarters of U.S. Jews feel "a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people," although 42 percent of those say they have no religion. "Reconstructionist Judaism brought to the forefront of Jewish thinking the concept of Jewish peoplehood, and our approach continues to offer pathways for non-religious Jews—inviting them to explore and ideally deepen their experience of Judaism and Jewishness," said Waxman.

She added, "The Pew Study confirms core elements of the original Reconstructionist analysis, which centered on the conviction that we need not choose between being Jewish and being modern and American—that Jews can craft multifaceted identities that are vibrantly, sustainably Jewish. What became apparent in the 20th century is even more relevant in the 21st: We

now choose from a vast banquet of spiritual, religious and cultural sources. Reconstructionist Judaism offers a distinctive way for Jews—and the people who make their lives with us—to find meaning and connection,” she said. “We recognize that there are many entryways into Jewish identity beyond religion, and we believe that the Jewish people are strengthened through this diversity.”

Waxman also intends to make it a priority to help progressive religion across the board gain a stronger presence in the public square. “I strongly believe that a pluralistic understanding of religion has much to contribute to constructive dialogue in public life,” she said.

In her previous role as vice president for governance at RRC, she staffed the organization’s board of more than 40 members and 13 committees and was key in the successful integration of the rabbinical college and the congregational union. Waxman brings particular expertise in strategic planning, having played a central role in creating RRC’s first-ever such initiative. Now, along with a team of Reconstructionist movement leaders, she is moving forward another first—a strategic plan for RRC as a combined organization. Waxman also is a strong fund-raiser; her grant proposals have won support from leading foundations, and she has cultivated and stewarded major individual donors for RRC.

Board Chair David Roberts shared the news that on Sunday, Oct. 6, the search committee had recommended Waxman to the board, whose members then voted enthusiastically in favor. Roberts commented, “I’m very happy to know that RRC will be in talented and capable hands. Deborah has been an important driver of our organizational restructuring as well as our strategic planning and assessment efforts. Her expert knowledge of American Jewish history adds invaluable depth and dimension to her vision for the future of the movement.” Waxman will take office at an exciting time for the Reconstructionist community, which in the last year has celebrated RRC’s conclusion of a \$50 million comprehensive campaign, the largest in its history. The College is also in the process of reshaping its rabbinical-education curriculum.

Waxman earned a Ph.D. in American Jewish History from Temple University and, in 1999, her M.A. in Hebrew Letters and title of rabbi from RRC. She has received a number of academic honors, including the Ruth Fein Prize given by the American Jewish Historical Society. Her publications include “‘A Lady Sometimes Blows the Shofar’: Women’s Religious Equality in the Postwar Reconstructionist Movement,” in *A Jewish Feminine Mystique* and [“Distinctiveness and Universalism: How to Remain Jewish if Jewish Isn’t Better”](#) in *Zeek*; both were published in 2010.

She lives in suburban Philadelphia with her partner, Christina Ager, Ph.D., a professor and chair of the Department of Teaching and Learning at Arcadia University in Glenside, PA, and a Jew by choice. Waxman’s [complete personal biography](#) is available on the RRC website.

RRC is the primary organization of the Jewish Reconstructionist movement. We offer progressive rabbinical education and serve the Reconstructionist congregational community; RRC is the first combination of this kind in the Jewish world. We are committed to our roots in tradition, to egalitarianism and inclusion, and to helping Jewish communities flourish.

Read coverage in [The Forward](#).

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