



Annual Update – September 2008

The Reform Jewish Voice of New York State (RJV) educates congregations on critical public policy issues. We make our voices heard by actively supporting progressive social legislation at the state level.

The Reform Jewish Voice of New York State (RJV) provides innovative programs that educate congregants about current legislative issues in Albany. Members learn to communicate effectively with public policy makers on key social justice issues. Modeled after the nationally recognized Religious Action Center in Washington, D.C., RJV promotes values important to the North American Reform Jewish Movement.

Signature RJV Programs

New York State Consultation on Conscience

RJV and the Union for Reform Judaism - Greater New York Council hosted the New York State Consultation on Conscience on Sunday, March 9, 2008 at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Nearly 100 people attended the event representing dozens of congregations from across New York State.

The Consultation speakers included clergy, legislators, public officials and policy experts in a variety of fields. A recurring theme among the presenters was the importance of constituent and citizen advocacy. Highlights included presentations by New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli, State Senator Liz Krueger and Assembly member Richard Gottfried. Panels on *Access to Healthcare* and *Preserving the Environment* gave participants a focus for advocacy as they met with their legislators to inform public policy decisions in Albany.

Interfaith Advocacy Day

RJV and Interfaith Impact of New York State joined forces for the second Interfaith Advocacy Day on May 19, 2008, bringing together the progressive religious voices of New York. Members of both groups met with over 30 legislators in Albany to advocate for legislation addressing Universal Healthcare, Marriage Equality, Reproductive Health, Healthy Teens and Dignity for all Students. A keynote address by Assembly Member Jack McEneny emphasized the importance of grassroots advocacy.

The program was preceded by a Legislative Briefing focusing on these critical issues for the 2008 Legislative Session, which prepared participants to speak with their legislators. Experts from Family Planning Advocates, Physicians for a National Health Program, Empire State Pride Agenda and New York State Episcopal Public Policy Network engaged RJV members in discussion on these important issues for progressive religious constituents.

RJV received a grant from The Community Foundation for the Greater Capital Region's William and Mary Barnet Family Foundation for support of Interfaith Advocacy Day.

Legislative Breakfast

In October 2007, a Nassau/Suffolk County Legislative Breakfast was held at Central Synagogue of Nassau County in Rockville Center which brought together over 100 people including members of the Long Island Social Action Committee. This meeting of legislators and their constituents focused on *Poverty in Long Island: Housing, Hunger and Homelessness*.

Advocacy on Issues

RJV increased its impact on policy makers in Albany during the 2008 Legislative Session. Reform constituents met with legislators about social justice issues at programs in Albany as well as in local districts. Through action alerts, letters and phone calls, our voices were heard in Albany on a multitude of issues.

During the past year, RJV supported the following legislation: Healthy Teens Act, Marriage Equality Act, Dignity for All Students Act, Reproductive Health and Privacy Protection Act, Increase in Basic Welfare Grant, Access to Higher Education for Public Assistance Recipients and Access to Family Court.

Communications and Outreach

The list of RJV news alert subscribers has nearly doubled in the last six months and the database continues to grow. The RJV website contains RJV Position Papers, Legislative Summary, articles and updates on RJV programs and initiatives. Communications tools, including the website, newsletter and brochure, are being redesigned to allow better dialogue between constituents and their legislators.

During the past year, RJV has increased its outreach to congregations throughout the state, holding special meetings with congregational leaders in Buffalo, Rochester, Poughkeepsie and New York City.

RJV Leadership

Director Barbara Pollard joined RJV in February 2008, bringing extensive experience in the not-for-profit sector. Previously, she worked with education and arts organizations developing educational programs, materials and fundraising efforts.

The RJV Steering Committee is comprised of Reform Jewish leaders from congregations throughout the state. In July 2008, Rabbi Marc Gruber and Honey Heller became the new co-chairs of the Steering Committee, following the leadership of founding chair Arleen Urell. The July Steering Committee retreat welcomed five new members to the committee with expertise in communication, fundraising and policy.

Looking Ahead

As RJV looks to the future, we are confident of continued growth and impact. Our new website, e-newsletter and action alerts will reach greater numbers of people. RJV's growing constituent base will increase our voice on current policy issues and our

programs will continue to raise awareness. RJV training and educational workshops for congregations around the state will help them become effective advocates for justice.