



# Pride Month & Civic Engagement

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Compiled by Lea Andersen and Rabbi David Reiner

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## Introduction

In June, we celebrate Pride Month, a month to commemorate the Stonewall Riots, which began the movement for equality for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer community. June is a time to celebrate the LGBTQ community; this June will also mark the launch of the [Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism's Civic Engagement Campaign](#). This campaign encourages us to remember that as we work together to fulfill the sacred mandate of *tikkun olam*, world repair, non-partisan civic engagement in service of our enduring values is an essential way that we stay active in our communities.

Civic engagement, to participate as Jews in the public square, is a vehicle to act on our Reform Jewish values. This non-partisan campaign will bring the full force of the Movement to bear by empowering all people to exercise their right to vote and ensuring that Jewish voices are present in the public square, regardless of party or politics.

**During this Pride month, we are asking Reform Jewish communities to make civic engagement a central piece of their Pride celebration. Civic engagement is a deeply Jewish act and is a means to ensuring acceptance and equality for all LGBTQ people.**

As a response to the many forms of discrimination still faced by the LGBTQ community and in particular – the rescinding of protections for transgender students – the Reform Movement launched its campaign for Transgender Rights as one of the three pillars of the Urgency of Now Campaign. Now, we must make our voices heard through our acts of civic engagement to live out the values of equal rights and protections we articulated in the [Reform Movement's Resolution on the Rights of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People](#).

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## Make Civic Engagement Part of Your Pride Celebration

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- Give a sermon (or invite a congregant/guest speaker to give a sermon) on the importance of LGBTQ equality and civic engagement during June. Below you will find several sermon-starter ideas on these themes.
  - Register voters and sign a pledge to vote at your Pride event!
  - Include our Pride prayer in your celebration. See below.
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## Sermon starters on the themes of Pride and Civic Engagement

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*Important facts and figures* (statistics sourced from [The Williams Institute](#) and [HRC's 2018 LGBTQ Youth Report](#))

- There are about 1.4 million transgender adults in United States and about 150,000 youth ages 13-17
- On February 22, 2017, the Departments of Justice and Education withdrew a Dear Colleague letter that provided guidance to public schools, stating that transgender students are protected by title IX of the Education amendments of 1972. This left questions about the civil rights of transgender students up for interpretation by states and school districts and transgender students susceptible to discrimination
  - Only 26% of LGBTQ youth report that they always feel safe in the classroom
  - 73% of LGBTQ youth have experienced verbal threats because of their actual or perceived LGBTQ identity
  - More than three-quarters (77%) of K-12 Students who were out or perceived as transgender had one or more negative experiences at school because they were transgender, such as being verbally harassed or physically attacked
- Federal Civil Rights law has not been amended and no federal law has been created to include gender identity and sexual orientation. States have passed laws that either affirm discrimination against LGBTQ people or protect LGBTQ people, at varying levels, from discrimination
  - Over 129 anti-LGBTQ bills were introduced in state legislatures in 2017
  - Transgender people face higher-than-average rates of police violence, discrimination in the workplace, housing and healthcare, and are more likely to live in poverty than the general population.
- In recent years, a lot of progress has been made to advance the rights of transgender people. We must continue this progress.
  - The URJ passed a resolution affirming the rights of transgender and gender non-conforming people
  - At least 9 openly transgender people were elected to public office in 2017
  - Anti-trans legislation failed recently in Houston, Anchorage and many state legislatures

### *Jewish Texts*

#### *On Civic Engagement:*

- Do not separate yourself from public life. (Pirkei Avot 2:5)
- A ruler is not to be appointed unless the community is first consulted. (Talmud, B'rachot 55a)

- “This is the generation and those who seek its welfare” (Psalms 24:6). Rabbi Judah the Patriarch and the sages differed in this matter. One opinion was that the character of the generation is determined by its leader. According to the other opinion, the character of the leader is determined by the generation. (Talmud, Arachin 17a)
- Do not stand by while your neighbor’s blood is shed. (Leviticus 19:16)
- Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear of it, people would swallow each other alive. (Pirkei Avot 3:2)

### *On Bamidbar (the book of Numbers) and Civic Engagement:*

By Lea Andersen, Transgender Rights Leadership Team member

In *Bamidbar*, the book of Numbers, we learn about different times that people lobbied Moses, their central authority figure, in order to get some kind of rule or status quo changed. The first of these times is when the Daughters of Zelophehad demand that they be given an inheritance in the Land of Israel, since their father was owed one but had no sons to inherit it. Moses, speaking for God, agrees to this, and the daughters are given the inheritance. This topic was addressed in *Dirshuni*, a collection of new Midrash written by Israeli women, specifically by Rivkah Lubitch, who imagines intellectual outrage on the part of learned women who read this story. They questioned why God would not have simply written the rules into the Torah in the first place for the Daughters of Zelophehad to receive their inheritance, and why they had to, instead, petition Moses and God for their rightful share. God responds, “truth shall spring up from the earth and justice shall fall from the heavens” (Psalms 85:11). Lubitch interprets this to mean that while some of the Torah comes down to us from God, some of it must go up to God from us. If this is so in reference to God, who is considered perfect in our tradition, surely, we must also make our petitions to human systems of law which we know to be flawed.

We also learn of the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half tribe of Menashe, who petition Moses to be allowed to live on the other side of the Jordan River after the Land is conquered. They had found good land there and wanted to set up their ranches on the other side of the river. Moses allowed this but said “build towns for your children and pens for your flocks” (Numbers 32:24). In other words, it was most important that the descendants of Reuben build for their children, and not for their livelihoods. We can take from this that our political lobbying is most effective and important when it is done for the well-being of those who will come after us, and that we must keep them at the forefront of our campaigns and strategies. This is especially important when considering the lives of LGBTQ schoolchildren, our next generation, who are in perilous situations due to political circumstances. We must make them a priority in our activism, just as Reuben, Gad and Menashe had to make their children a priority when petitioning Moses.

## A Prayer for Pride Month

By Lea Andersen, Transgender Rights Leadership Team member

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Mi shebeirach avoteinu v'imoteinu  
Avraham, Yitzchak v'Yaakov,  
Sarah, Rivkah, Leah v'Rachel,  
Asher beirach otanu im kol ha geim  
v'ovrim b'tokheinu,  
Hu y'vareikh et kulanu yoter,  
Im m'tukah v'simchah,  
Im chaim mal'im v'hatzlachah v'sason,  
B'chodesh ha'gaavah hazeh,  
Zman cheirut v'chagigah,  
B'tzaadeinu birchovot,  
B'rikudeinu uv'shirateinu,  
Nismach u'nevareikh m'kor chayeinu.

משברך אבותינו ואמותנו  
אברהם יצחק ויעקב  
שרה, רבקה, לאה ורחל  
אשר ברך אותנו עם כל הגאים ועוברים בתוכנו  
הוא יברך את כולנו יותר,  
עם מתוקה ושמחה,  
עם חיים מלאים והצלחה וששון  
בחדש הגאווה הזה  
זמן חירות וחסגיה  
בצעדתינו ברחובות,  
בריקודינו ובשירתינו,  
נשמח ונברך מקור חיינו.

ובומר: אמן

V'nomar: amein

*May the one who blessed our Ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rivka, Leah and Rachel, who has blessed us with all the queer folks in our midst, bless all of us even more, with sweetness and happiness, with full lives and success and joy, in this month of Pride, the season of freedom and celebration. Through our marching in the streets, in our singing and dancing, we shall be happy and we shall bless the Source of our Lives. And we say: Amen.*