

Rabbi Charles K. Briskin

Pay Equity

What can congregations and rabbis do to help reduce the wage gap that exists throughout the Reform movement, and beyond? One suggestion is for both to be as transparent and as open as possible. This may require some newly hired rabbis and the rabbis whom they are succeeding to be generous with salary and benefits information—what was, and what is being offered.

During one particular contract negotiation, in addition to utilizing the CCAR salary surveys, I reached out to colleagues, both men and women, serving similar sized congregations to help guide me. They shared salary and benefits and their information helped me negotiate my contract better. Upon further reflection, I do believe that my women colleagues were earning considerably less. I could not name that discrepancy as a wage gap then. I could today if I repeated the exercise.

I recently heard Rabbi Mary Zamore, the Executive Director of the Women's Rabbinic Network report on the troubling issues of pay inequity that many of my women colleagues face. I was disturbed about what she presented; but sadly, I can't say I was surprised. That congregations in our movement, which aspire to promote justice and equity throughout so many different spaces under the large tent of justice work, continue to pay their women rabbis 80 cents on the dollar to similarly qualified men, is an injustice that needs to be named and corrected.

The CCAR has begun to create better transparency by requiring salary ranges to be listed on all applications for new rabbis. This is a tremendous step, however, there is one potential stumbling block. What happens when a hiring congregation lists a salary range whose maximum is still well below the salary of the prior rabbi who served? I noticed this wage gap when reviewing the application for the congregation I most recently served. The highest end of the posted salary range was less than I had been earning when I left. The congregation hired an experienced rabbi who is also a woman. By no fault of her own, or by the congregation for that matter, this downward adjusted salary range will unintentionally add to the wage gap.

The CCAR has helped address the transparency issue by requiring an actual salary range to be listed. Rabbis can help one another by sharing our salary and benefits package with the person who will succeed us. This openness will provide our colleague with a more complete picture of the new congregation when they begin the negotiating process. Furthermore, congregations that have not experienced a drastic reduction in revenue should be strongly encouraged to, at the very least, put the highest end of the salary range at the same place as the former rabbi when they left.

In the years ahead, more women will assume pulpits as solo or senior rabbis. In many cases they will be succeeding a male predecessor. Congregations going through rabbinic transition should not use that moment to reduce salary and benefits.

Transparency within the placement process and open communication among rabbis are two keys to reducing the wage gap. Our colleagues, the Executive Directors of WRN and WRJ, along with Rabbi

Cindy Enger, Placement Director for the CCAR, are doing extraordinary work and it is beginning to make a difference; however, more can be done. I hope my colleagues will begin to be generous with one another. Perhaps, together, we can narrow the wage gap even more.