



## **USCJ Standards for Congregational Practice**

(As adopted in 1957 and amended in 1961, 1969, 1971, 1985, 1989, 1991, 2007, 2010 and 2017)

The Standards are set forth in regular text. The bracketed italicized text includes explanatory commentary by the Committee on Congregational Standards. For additional resources, congregations should contact their KRM and/or refer to various *teshuvot* posted on the Rabbinical Assembly website.

### **Preamble**

USCJ affiliated *kehillot* create the conditions for a powerful and vibrant Jewish life that empowers Jews in North America to seek the presence of God, to seek meaning and purpose in Torah and mitzvot, to fully engage with Israel, and to be inspired by Judaism to improve the world and the Jewish people.

It is the responsibility of USCJ to create the spiritual, intellectual and managerial network that enables each of our *kehillot* to fulfill their sacred mission and to connect all our *kehillot* with a common sense of community, shared mission and purpose. Accordingly, USCJ provides resources to assist member congregations in creating these conditions.

These Standards of Congregational Practice are intended to be consistent with the Purpose, Vision and Mission Statement of USCJ – along with the Standards of Rabbinic Practice as adopted by the Rabbinical Assembly and approved *teshuvot* of the Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Law and Standards. They are promulgated with the intention of increasing the level of engagement and practice to the greatest extent feasible by USCJ affiliated *kehillot*.

### **Standard I - The Rabbi**

Each congregation should engage a rabbi as its spiritual leader and *mara d'atra* in accordance with the rules and practices of the Joint Placement Commission and pursuant to a written contract adopted in accordance with the congregation's bylaws and enforceable under all applicable secular laws.

The contract with the rabbi should state that regardless of whether the rabbi is or is not a member of the Rabbinical Assembly, he or she will, in exercising his or her prerogatives as *mara d'atra*, adhere to the Standards of Rabbinic Practice of the

Rabbinical Assembly. The rabbi will rule on all other issues of Jewish law and practice presented for decision only after giving due consideration to the published opinions of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly and the positions of USCJ.

Congregations whose rabbis are not members of the Rabbinical Assembly shall obtain and make all such published opinions available to their rabbi.

When a congregation does not have a rabbi, any individual acting as the leader of the congregation is likewise obligated to adhere to the Standards of Rabbinic Practice and to consult with appropriate rabbinic authority.

*[The Joint Placement Commission may be reached by emailing its placement director at [placement@rabbinicalassembly.org](mailto:placement@rabbinicalassembly.org).*

*The authority of the rabbi as the spiritual leader and mara d'atra (decisor of Jewish law) of the congregation is a basic tenet of Conservative Judaism. Jewish law, which has continuing vitality and relevance in modern life and establishes behavioral norms, is binding upon Conservative Jews. All member congregations are expected to conform to Jewish law. USCJ recognizes that individual rabbis may interpret and apply Jewish law differently, resulting in varying practices among congregations. The teshuvot (validated opinions) of the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards provide halakhic guidance for Conservative Judaism as interpreted by the rabbis of the movement. All practices that are essentially loyal to Conservative Judaism are acceptable to USCJ.*

*USCJ recognizes its obligation to provide guidance on issues of Jewish law and practice to congregations that do not have a rabbi. Congregations requiring such assistance should consult their KRM (Kehilla Relationship Manager). Responsa by the Law Committee on a variety of topics are accessible through the Rabbinical Assembly website, [www.rabbinicalassembly.org](http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org). Published volumes of earlier responsa dating back to 1927 are available for purchase from the Rabbinical Assembly.]*

## **Standard II - Shabbat & Holidays**

Shabbat and the holidays are to be observed in a manner that is essentially spiritual in quality and purpose, and that reflects the sanctity of the day, with all functions and activities on these days conducted accordingly.

*[The observance of Shabbat and the cycle of holidays are a basic tenet of Conservative Judaism. Halakhic issues concerning the observance of Shabbat and holidays should be resolved by the rabbi in consultation with lay leadership. Congregations and clergy should consult and work together concerning all other aspects of the observance of Shabbat and holidays.*

### **Standard III – Kashrut**

Only kosher food is permitted in the synagogue building or served at congregation-sponsored functions and activities, regardless of location.

*[The observance of kashrut is a basic tenet of Conservative Judaism. Halakhic issues concerning the observance of kashrut should be resolved by the rabbi in consultation with lay leadership. Congregations and clergy should consult and work together concerning all other aspects of the observance of kashrut.]*

### **Standard IV – Rites, Ceremonies & Other Functions**

The laws, rules and customs of *Shabbat*, all holy days, and of *kashrut*, as determined by the rabbi, are to be observed at all rites, ceremonies and other functions. The spiritual aspect of weddings, *bar and bat mitzvah* services and associated activities is to be emphasized. All such joyous occasions should be conducted in a dignified manner, including appropriate attire, music, photography and use of alcohol.

Congregations should make it possible for individuals and families celebrating a *bar or bat mitzvah*, *simchat bat*, *brit milah*, *aufruf* or other joyous event to provide an appropriate *kiddush* for all worshippers following services. *Hamotzi* and *Birkat HaMazon* should be recited whenever required by Jewish law or local custom.

Congregations should engage in sincere outreach to non-Jewish spouses and children of any Jewish members in order to promote participation by such family members in congregational life as permissible under Jewish law, rules and customs, with the goal of encouraging and supporting conversion to Conservative Judaism.

The laws, rules and customs of funerals and mourning are to be observed. Individual members of congregations should consult with their rabbi concerning funeral practice and mourning.

*[Serving food following religious ceremonies is regarded as a seudat mitzvah, an integral part of the celebration.]*

*Congregations and clergy should consult and work together in assuring that all rites, ceremonies and other functions are conducted in accordance with Jewish law and tradition. Interfaith marriages are prohibited by the Standards of Rabbinic Practice of the Rabbinical Assembly and thus are not permitted in the synagogue building or any facility controlled by the congregation. The congregation may not engage clergy who perform intermarriages.]*

### **Standard V – Membership**

USCJ supports every affiliated *kehilla* in developing its own criteria for membership.

*[USCJ, as a valued and trusted partner, is committed to assisting welcoming, vibrant, and caring Jewish communities to fully engage the spiritual gifts of all community members. We celebrate the diversity among and within our kehillot and encourage the engagement of all those who seek a spiritual and communal home in an authentic and dynamic Jewish setting. We call on all of our kehillot to open their doors wide to all who want to enter. Let us strive to make the words of Isaiah a reality in our time: "My House will be called a house of prayer for all people" (Isaiah 56:7).]*

## **Standard VI – Education**

It is incumbent upon congregations to encourage, provide and/or sponsor age-appropriate formal and informal educational programming for all members of the congregation and their families, including early childhood (nursery school); a synagogue school; Kadima and USY programs; a Hebrew high school; participation in KOACH; family education; adult education; and Israel travel programming for teens, college students, adults and families.

The synagogue school should subscribe to the Statement of Aims of the Conservative Synagogue School as adopted by the USCJ Commission on Jewish Education.

The congregation should support the establishment and maintenance of a Solomon Schechter day school in the local Jewish community, where feasible.

## **Standard VII – Fund-Raising**

Congregations should permit fund-raising under their auspices that is in keeping with Jewish law and customs.

*[Fund-raising that is likely to bring discredit to the congregation is not permitted, even though such activity may be permitted under civil law.]*

## **Standard VIII – Moral Dignity**

All congregational and education programming and prayer services should be consistent with the dignity and moral conduct befitting a Jewish community. The manner in which they are announced and publicized, internally and to the general public, and the manner in which they are conducted should bring honor to the congregation.

*[Principles consistent with the dignity and moral conduct befitting a Conservative congregation include but are not limited to hachnasot orchim (hospitality); derekh erez (respect), kavod (honor), tzniyut (modesty), anava (humility), tzedakah (righteousness), tikun olam (repair of the world), and hesed (kindness).]*

## **Standard IX – Relationship With Staff**

In seeking members for professional staff, congregations first should consult the proper placement agency within our movement. Congregations are not to solicit the members of the staff of another congregation to leave their positions in order to accept an engagement with the soliciting congregation.

Congregations should enter into reasonable written contracts with staff, enforceable under local law, in terms consistent with the highest ethical and moral standards of Jewish practice and tradition. Congregations should conduct annual evaluations of professional staff, using the best available instruments and techniques.

Congregations, clergy and professionals should agree to and seek the resolution of all disputes through the mediation and arbitration processes of the USCJ Committee on Congregational Standards. An arbitration clause providing for binding dispute resolution by the USCJ Committee on Congregational Standards should be included in all contracts with clergy and professional staff.

### **Standard X – Respect for Boundaries (Hasagat G'vul)**

An affiliated congregation shall respect the boundaries of other congregations, and shall not commit acts of *hasagat g'vul* against any congregation.

*[An affiliated synagogue may not commit hasagat g'vul. Boundaries may be physical boundaries or, under halachic precedent, demographic, ritual or moral boundaries. An affiliated synagogue may not solicit the members of other congregations by direct action, and should make reasonable efforts to avoid soliciting the members of other congregations in its promotional materials aimed at the general community; this prohibition applies even if the congregation will not open a physical facility in the community. If an affiliated synagogue expands or relocates its facilities to another community, the synagogue entering the community should consult the existing synagogues in the community and make every effort to accommodate their concerns. Both synagogues must address the religious needs of the broader community. If entering the community would endanger the survival of the existing synagogue, the congregation may not enter the community without addressing the survival of the existing synagogue.]*

### **Addendum**

**1.2: PURPOSE.** It shall be the aim and purpose of USCJ:

1.2.2. To be a community of *kehillot* - sacred communities - committed to a dynamic Judaism that is learned and passionate, authentic and pluralistic, joyful and accessible, egalitarian or traditional.

1.2.3 To assist our *kehillot* to create the conditions for a powerful and vibrant Jewish life that empowers Jews in North America to seek the presence of God, to seek meaning

and purpose in *Torah* and *mitzvot*, to fully engage with Israel, and to be inspired by Judaism to improve the world and the Jewish people.

1.2.4 To create the spiritual, intellectual and managerial network that enables each of our *kehillot* to fulfill their sacred mission and to connect all our *kehillot* with a common sense of community, shared mission and purpose.

1.2.5 Together with other centers of energy identified with Conservative Judaism, to articulate and disseminate our approach to Judaism.