The Zionist Organization of the Conservative Movement

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אביב תשע"ה

שנת ס"ז למדינת ישראל

Spring 2015

2014: A Good Year For Religious Pluralism

As the dust settles from the mid-March Knesset elections in Israel and the negotiations are completed towards the establishment of a new government, this is a good opportunity to look back at the previous government and the several major victories that took place during its tenure for non-Orthodox Judaism.

- 1. State-funded rabbinical salaries: Following an eight-year legal battle, the state for the first time began paying salaries to rabbis representing the non-Orthodox movements, albeit only to rabbis serving in congregations within the purview of outlying, regional councils, rather than in major cities.
- 2. Presidential recognition: In his first few and very hectic months in office, Israel's new president, Reuven Rivlin, took the time to meet with North American leaders of both the Conservative and Reform movements. This is the same man who previously had referred to Reform Judaism as "idol worship and not Judaism."
- 3. Tiny Torah trick: For two months in a row, Women of the Wall were able to realize a 25-year-old dream of reading from a Torah scroll at the women's section of the Western Wall. They succeeded by sneaking in a tiny Torah scroll, measuring just 28 centimeters in length but deemed perfectly kosher.
- 4. State funding for youth movement: Noam, the Masorti Movement's youth movement, for the first time ever received state funding through the Ministry of Education. One of the smaller youth movements in the country, Noam has been active in Israel for 30 years but only now met the requirements for state funding with more than 2.000 members.

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MERCAZ President Janet Tobin and Rita Wertlieb, former WLCJ President, speaking to Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy

It's Not Too Late to Vote for the Zionist Congress

What You Need to Know About Voting

General registration and voting, which started on January 13th, ends on April 30th.

Registration and voting may be done either online or by mail. If begun online, it must be completed online; if begun by mail, it may be completed either by mail or online.

For those who are participating in the elections online, it is a one-step process to register and to vote. Once they have submitted the registration form with their email address and paid by credit card, they will get an email with a link to the voting site. They will receive an email confirmation of registration only after they have completed the voting process. Go to www.mercazusa.org and click "vote" to start the process.

Those who prefer using a mail-in paper registration form may opt to vote either by paper ballot or online voting, provided that their email address has been listed on the paper form. The registration form is available to download from the MERCAZ website in the "vote" section.

The deadline for receiving the mail-in form is April 15th in order to vote either by mail-in ballot or by online voting. Paper ballots have started being mailed out and will continue in schedules waves until April 15th. Only those who first registered by mail may receive a paper ballot and vote by mail.

People who already registered by print form but who did not receive their mailed ballots should send an email to azm@election-america.com or call (844) 413-2929 to request a ballot. During the voting period, if anyone requires a replacement mail ballot, he/she must call (844) 413-2929. If you have any questions about registering or voting, contact Election America at (844) 413-2929 or azm@election-america.com.

If you have any questions about MERCAZ USA, our slate of candidates or our platform, visit our website www.mercazusa.org or contact us at (212) 533-2061 or info@mercazusa.org.



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- 5. Authority for performing Orthodox conversions broadened to include local municipal rabbinic councils: One of the last acts of the previous Netanyahu government was to authorize local rabbinic councils to perform conversions, in addition to the centralized rabbinic courts of the Chief Rabbinate. However, while symbolically very important, the new regulation has not been implemented due to the opposition of the Chief Rabbis.
- 6. Easier recognition for overseas conversions: Under orders from the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Interior published for the first time a list of criteria for recognizing conversions performed abroad Until now, these converts would find themselves at the mercy of low-level Interior Ministry bureaucrats, who tended to make their rulings on a case-by-case basis.
- 7. Talmud lesson from a female rabbi: Dr. Judith Hauptman, a Conservative rabbi and Talmud scholar from the Jewish Theological Seminary, became the first guest lecturer from abroad to address the Knesset's weekly religious study session.

What to watch out for in 2015: For many years, the key issues dominating the agenda of the non-Orthodox movements in Israel have been changing the laws that regulate marriage and that regulate conversions. Both matters involve breaking the stranglehold of the Orthodox-run rabbinate on matters of religion and state in the country.

Another important issue for both the Conservative and Reform Movements concerns regulations related to prayer at the Western Wall. Leaders of both groups have been involved in discussions about the proposal from Jewish Agency head Natan Sharansky for a new egalitarian prayer space near the existing gender-segregated areas. To date, however, no agreement has been reached with the Orthodox establishment about how this space will look. Progress in 2015 on both issues will depend on what parties eventually make up the government formed after the March 17th election.

CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT Srael Trips 2015

May 12 - 19, 2015

Ramah Israel Bike Ride & Hiking Trip Price per person: \$900 Bike/\$750 Hike + fundraising commitment Contact: National Ramah Office (212) 678-8881

david@campramah.org

May 27 - June 6, 2015

Cong. Beth El, Bethesda, MD Price per person: \$3,750 Contact: Geryl Baer (301) 652-8569 x 352 gbaer@bethelmc.org

May 31 - June 7, 2015

tehila@masortiolami.org

Masorti Mission to Budapest, Paris & London Price per person: \$1,950 (land only) Contact: Tehila Reuben 011-972-2-624-7106

June 8 - 13, 2015

Schechter Institute 30th Anniversary Celebration

Price per person: \$2,200 (land only) Contact: Karen Kamens (866) 830-3321

Schechter@thelapingroup.com

June 21 - July 3, 2015

B'nai Jeshurun Cong., Cleveland, OH Price per person: \$2,920 (land only) Contact: Rabbi Hal Rudin-Luria or Diane Shalom 216-831-6555

info@bnaijeshurun.org

June 24-July 4, 2015

Cong. Tifereth Israel, Glen Cove, NY Price per person: \$2,399 (land only) Contact: Jessi Chodos (516) 676-5080 office@ctionline.org

December 20 - 31, 2015

Cong. Ohev Shalom/Marlboro JC Price per person: \$2598 (land only) Contact: Rabbi Michael Pont 732-536-2300

rabbipont@mjcnj.com



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