



Rabbis to participate but not officiate

At the recent Biennial of the South African Union for Progressive Judaism, our movement made a historic decision when the delegates representing our communities unanimously voted to adopt a rabbinic proposal relating to the marriages of Jews to those who are not Jewish.

Previously, our Progressive Rabbis have not only abstained from participating in these marriages but didn't even attend the ceremonies for fear of the perception that they might be giving an unofficial rabbinic stamp of approval. While this was once the accepted approach, this is now viewed and experienced as unnecessarily punitive. Our rabbis have been hearing more and more from community members about how painful it is for them when their rabbis can't celebrate with them on one of the happiest days of their lives. Often these couples are so hurt that they leave the community, even though we make other types of efforts to be welcoming and inclusive to them and their children, an area in which the Progressive movement has undoubtedly taken many positive steps in which to be proud.

The South African Association of Progressive Rabbis proposed a change to our practice, which would permit us to attend and participate, but not officiate, marriages between Jews and those who are not Jewish. This is in response to the hurt felt by both community members and rabbis at not being able to celebrate these simchas. By clearly delineating between participation and officiation, we hope to strike a balance - showing acceptance and love for these couples while still maintaining the boundaries of what does and does not constitute a Jewish marriage. These marriages will be officiated by a marriage officer who is not a rabbi. Our Progressive rabbis will refrain from using certain pieces of traditional wedding liturgy and will not sign the civil marriage license or k'tubah), We are committed to inviting and encouraging non-Jewish partners to consider conversion to Judaism. Couples who wish for a rabbi to participate in their wedding will be expected to meet with the rabbi in advance so that we can offer support in navigating the challenges that mixed-faith couples often experience.

In approving this proposal, the leaders of our Progressive Movement have joined our rabbis in affirming the value of inclusiveness, putting relationships ahead of religious dogma. Our goal is not to punish those who love and marry someone who is not Jewish but to strengthen their connection to the Jewish community and better ensure Jewish continuity through acceptance, love and celebration. We know this is a significant change for many of our Progressive members and our rabbis are available to discuss this with all who wish to bring forward questions or concerns. We are proud of our leaders for taking this step, and we look forward to celebrating the diversity of love and marriage within our Progressive Jewish communities.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Emma Gottlieb, Chair of the SAAPR

on behalf of the Rabbis of the SAAPR and the National Exec of the SAUPJ