



Shifting Our Stance

Policy adopted by the Board of Governors, July 11, 2012

A. Principles

- 1) In the free and open society of America, Jewish life has entered into an unprecedented era of individual choice. In this society, birth no longer determines one's destiny. The continuity of American Jewish life requires that Jews be a community of people who find significant fulfillment in Jewish identity. Fulfillment as a Jew means that one experiences added value in life by embracing Jewish traditions, culture and faith.
- 2) Many non-Jews will find spiritual and social fulfillment within Judaism. Serious efforts to encourage genuine conversions to Judaism can play a crucial role in the flourishing continuity of Jewish life in America. Educational programs can engage the interest of many non-Jews towards joining the Jewish people through conversion.
- 3) Serious programs to encourage conversions to Judaism can be designed without inappropriate missionary tactics. Educational efforts need make no claim to exclusive truths or to Jews' having the sole path to salvation. Nor should they rely upon intrusive or aggressive tactics. Appropriate programs will joyfully share our Jewish religion and civilization with others.
- 4) For ten years, the SANDRA CAPLAN COMMUNITY BET DIN has been involved at the end of the conversion process, waiting for sponsoring rabbis to bring their conversion candidates to us. Now we will also become involved more actively at the start of the process, by identifying prospective conversion candidates and directing them to sponsoring rabbis or educational programs. Both aspects of this work require and deserve support by the wider Jewish community.
- 5) By virtue of its being a pluralistic, interdenominational/transdenominational body and possessed of expertise in conversions to Judaism, the SANDRA CAPLAN COMMUNITY BET DIN is uniquely positioned among Jewish organizations to support and promote the outreach programming described above, in cooperation with other organizations, for the benefit of the entire Jewish community.

6) Properly ordained and trained Rabbis are the traditionally recognized and official administrators of *giyur*, the process of conversion to Judaism. The SANDRA CAPLAN COMMUNITY BET DIN brings together rabbis from all Jewish streams to cooperatively establish standards and procedures for accepting Jews-by-choice into the broad community of Jews.

B. Goals

- 1) Uphold publicly the full interdenominational acceptance of converts as authentic members of the Jewish people.
- 2) Encourage Jewish awareness and knowledge among non-Jews who indicate interest in Jewish life and culture.
- 3) Promote widespread awareness among non-Jews of available paths into Judaism.
- 4) Increase the annual number of non-Jews who become Jews-by-choice.
- 5) Provide a system of ongoing financial support for the SANDRA CAPLAN COMMUNITY BET DIN OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.
- 6) Demonstrate the Jewish community's advantages in multi- and transdenominational cooperation implicit in the structure of the SANDRA CAPLAN COMMUNITY BET DIN.

C. Governance

1) The Board of Governors of the SANDRA CAPLAN COMMUNITY BET DIN has provided full rabbinic leadership for the Bet Din since 2002 when it was organized. Rabbi Elliot Dorff and Rabbi Richard Levy are the founders and chairs of the governing board. The Board of Governors created a pioneering set of principles and practices for the effective operation of a pluralistic Bet Din for conversion to Judaism. The Board of Governors includes 16 rabbis and one lay person as members representing four streams of contemporary Judaism: Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, and transdenominational. The Board of Governors selected two respected rabbis to serve as *Av Bet Din* (Head Rabbi) and *S'gan Av Bet Din* (Associate Head Rabbi). The Board of Governors has also trained 150 rabbis to serve as *dayanim* (judges). The SANDRA CAPLAN COMMUNITY BET DIN has authorized about 250 conversions to Judaism in the past ten years. Governing Board members and all *dayanim* serve as volunteers.

2) This document authorizes the creation of a second leadership group for the SANDRA CAPLAN COMMUNITY BET DIN, a Board of Trustees. The new board will augment and support the ongoing work of the Board of Governors, with full respect for rabbinic control of the conversion process (*giyur*). Mr. George Caplan will serve as the Founder and first Chair of the Board of Trustees. Mr. Caplan has been the chief benefactor of the SANDRA CAPLAN COMMUNITY BET DIN since its founding in 2002; it is named for his deceased wife and in honor of her life as a committed convert to Judaism.

3) A structure shall be established for systematic communication between the two boards.

D. Board of Trustees

1) The Board of Trustees of the SANDRA CAPLAN COMMUNITY BET DIN will be selected initially by George Caplan in consultation with the Board of Governors. The trustees will include respected leaders from all across the Jewish community who embrace the principles expressed in this document. It may include rabbis who are *dayanim* of the SANDRA CAPLAN COMMUNITY BET DIN or serve on the Board of Governors. Each trustee will be expected to “give or get” a minimum annual contribution of two thousand dollars to the Sandra Caplan Jewish Continuity Fund, a 501(c)(3) charity dedicated to exclusive support of the SANDRA CAPLAN COMMUNITY BET DIN.

2) The focus of attention for the Board of Trustees will be on fulfilling the goals listed in Section B above.

3) The Board of Governors retains the authority—and the responsibility—to veto any proposed program that it deems inappropriate for the Bet Din’s auspices.

SCCBD doc #R21, 7/11/12

APPENDIX: Possible Approaches for the Board of Trustees to Explore

(Suggestions from Board of Governors' brainstorming sessions)

- 1) Produce a more informative and user-friendly website for this Bet Din, with welcoming links to all of the participating rabbis' synagogue or professional websites.
- 2) Engage a Search Engine Optimization ("SEO") expert to improve the Bet Din website's visibility.
- 3) Establish periodic public meetings or "Fairs" showcasing the available Introduction to Judaism courses and featuring "testimonials" by successful converts to Judaism.
- 4) Search out and cooperate with the existing outreach efforts of Jewish denominations and synagogues.
- 5) Employ a professional marketing expert to develop public interest in modes of becoming a Jew through conversion.
- 6) Support the development of Jewish awareness activities among converts to Judaism after their conversion.
- 7) Provide forums for Jewish community discussion on the challenges and potential of increased rates of conversion to Judaism.
- 8) Promote informed understanding of conversion psychology by sponsoring research among "alumni" (converts) of this Bet Din, non-Jewish spouses of affiliated Jews, Introduction to Judaism class drop-outs.
- 9) Organize focus groups of new and older converts for feed-back on successful and unsuccessful integration into synagogues. Provide real information to community rabbis on what works and what doesn't work.
- 10) Place ads on websites for Jewish singles such as J Date and other sites likely to be viewed by potential converts.
- 11) Make productive use of social media on the Internet.
- 12) Create an informational brochure for use at synagogues and other venues.

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