

Ethics Code and Guidelines for Rabbi and Rabbi Emeritus Life-cycle Officiation and Pastoral Cooperation

RRA ETHICS CODE Section XIII

SUCCESSOR AND EMERITUS RABBIS

It is the obligation of a rabbi who is becoming emeritus or leaving an organization to provide as much orientation and information to the incoming rabbi as possible. This includes (but is not limited to) organizing and passing on formal records, pastoral information, organizational and ritual policies and concrete information about scheduling, calendar and the like. The departing rabbi should support the transfer of religious leadership to the incoming rabbi.

The incoming rabbi has an obligation to treat predecessors and the emeritus rabbi with kavod and courtesy. Recognizing the emeritus rabbi on formal occasions, listing the emeritus on stationery and printed materials and preserving the record of earlier rabbis' tenures and accomplishments are required parts of kavod.

The new rabbi is the religious leader of the congregation. The emeritus and/or predecessor rabbis should officiate at life-cycle events of their former congregants only with the explicit permission of the new rabbi. Without the prior consent of the new rabbi, the rabbi who is leaving must not make commitments prior to the new rabbi's arrival to officiate at events in the congregation or life-cycle events of congregants that will occur after the rabbi's arrival.

Notes on Ethics Code

The rabbi emeritus should inform the rabbi of any life-cycle events they know of involving a member or the immediate family of a member.

The rabbi emeritus should inform the rabbi when they learn a member is in the hospital or had been hospitalized.

The rabbi emeritus should inform the rabbi when they know that something has happened in the life of a member that the rabbi should know to be able to fulfill the rabbi's pastoral role in the congregation.

The rabbi will decide how they and the rabbi emeritus participate in any life-cycle events so there is no confusion in the minds of the members of the congregation as to who the rabbi is.

The congregation needs to be told in writing how life-cycle events will be handled.

Baby namings

If the naming takes place in the synagogue the rabbi will lead the naming and work out the participation of the rabbi emeritus if the family requests.

If the naming is a home ceremony and the rabbi emeritus officiated at the wedding then the rabbi needs to be informed but has the option as to whether they take part or not.

Bar/t Mitzvah

If a family requests that the rabbi emeritus be part of the shabbat service the rabbi will include the rabbi emeritus in the service.

Weddings

If the wedding is in the synagogue the rabbi will officiate and include the rabbi emeritus in an appropriate way if the family asks for the rabbi emeritus to take part.

If the wedding takes place outside of the synagogue and the family asks that the rabbi emeritus officiate it is usually the case that that happens. If there is an aufruf then the rabbi will have an opportunity to interact with that family.

If the wedding had been scheduled with the rabbi before the rabbi became emeritus the rabbi will officiate and will inform the new rabbi.

If the wedding is for the child of a member and is not taking place in the synagogue and the rabbi emeritus is officiating it is the norm for the family – since they are the member – to inform the rabbi. This enables the rabbi to congratulate their member.

Funerals

The norm is for the rabbi to officiate. If the family asks to have the rabbi emeritus take part because of their relationship with the family or with the person who has died it is usually the case that the rabbi emeritus delivers the eulogy given that it is not uncommon for more than one person to deliver a eulogy at a funeral.

Unveilings

The norm is for the rabbi to officiate the unveiling. If the family requests the rabbi emeritus the rabbi will invite and include the rabbi emeritus.

Shiva

The rabbi and the leadership of the congregation should develop a policy on who leads a shiva service – clergy and laypeople.

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The new rabbi may choose to invite the emeritus to speak from the pulpit, teach a class or otherwise participate in the leadership of the congregation. While the emeritus rabbi may only participate if there is such an invitation, the emeritus rabbi has the right to decline any invitation.

Former and emeritus rabbis and their families are obliged to avoid interfering in the organizational and personal relationships of succeeding rabbis. Even when leaders or members of the organization actively seek their opinion, support or intervention, former and emeritus rabbis are obligated to practice circumspection and avoid involvement, particularly in areas of controversy or conflict.

Rabbis naturally have a major role in the hiring and retention of their assistants or co-rabbis. However, their role in the hiring of their successors is very limited. The Reconstructionist Placement Guidelines provide specifics in this regard.