

Survey: Conservative Jews back gay rabbis: Local bodies can make own decisions

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Most of the “key constituents” in centrist Conservative Judaism would support gay and lesbian rabbis, according to an e-mail- and Web-based survey commissioned by the Jewish Theological Seminary.

About two-thirds of the 5,583 rabbis, cantors and JTS students responding to the survey expressed support for openly gay rabbis and cantors. Among Conservative educators and other professionals, the approval rating was 76 percent.

Support varied by gender: Some 86 percent of female respondents approved of gay rabbis and cantors, compared to 60 percent of male respondents. The results may help JTS, the academic center of Conservative Judaism, decide whether to begin admitting openly gay students.

What stood out in survey results, said Arnold Eisen, the seminary’s chancellor-elect, was “the remarkably consistent support for gay ordination across the board among Conservative Jews in the United States, whether clergy or other Jewish professionals or lay leaders or students.” At the same time, he said he saw similar consistency for “the centrality” of Jewish law and egalitarianism and opposition to rabbis officiating at mixed marriages, among other tenets of this branch of Judaism.

Eisen said the survey provided data that will help decide the complex and controversial issue. “A final decision on this matter is expected this spring,” he said.

The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, which interprets religious law for the Conservative Jewish movement, voted in December to accept a legal opinion that allows for the ordination of gay rabbis and the blessing of same-sex unions, while retaining the ban on male homosexual sex. However, the committee also said that local congregations and seminaries could make their own decisions on these

matters.

One author of a permissive opinion, Rabbi Daniel Nevins of Michigan, was appointed dean of the JTS Rabbinical School on January 29. *-Religion News Service*