

Jewish seminary opens door to gay students: "In keeping with Jewish tradition of pluralism"

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Openly gay students who want to serve as rabbis or cantors in Conservative Judaism are now welcome at the Jewish Theological Seminary, school officials said in New York.

The announcement came three months after the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly, the movement's decision-making body, gave seminaries and congregations permission to ordain homosexual rabbis and bless same-sex unions.

JTS announced its decision March 26 after evaluating thousands of survey responses and conducting discussions with faculty, religious leaders and students.

The application deadline for prospective students has been extended to June 30.

"The decision to ordain gay and lesbian clergy at JTS is in keeping with the long-standing commitment of the Jewish tradition of pluralism," said Arnold Eisen, the seminary's incoming chancellor. "Pluralism means that we recognize more than one way to be a good Conservative Jew, more than one way of walking authentically in the path of our tradition and of carrying that tradition forward."

It also means, added Eisen, "that we respect those who disagree with us and understand that in the context of all that unites us, diversity makes us stronger."

An estimated 1.5 million Americans consider themselves members of the Conservative branch, which ideologically falls between the Reform branch, which allows gay ordination and same-sex unions, and the more traditional Orthodox branch, which does not.

JTS, the academic center of Conservative Judaism, is one of the movement's two U.S. seminaries. The other, the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, has admitted two

openly gay students for its fall term. -*Religion News Service*