

Israel's Conservative wing OKs gay and lesbian rabbis

by [Michele Chabin](#) in the [May 30, 2012](#) issue

In a landmark decision, the Masorti Movement, the Israeli branch of Conservative Judaism, announced that its rabbinical school will begin to accept gay and lesbian candidates for ordination. Board members of the Schechter Rabbinical Seminary in Jerusalem voted April 19 to enroll gay and lesbian students starting in September.

The decision follows years of disagreement between leaders of Conservative Judaism in the U.S., which permits openly gay and lesbian rabbis, and Masorti leaders in Israel, who have long resisted demands to be more inclusive.

The disagreement came to a head about two years ago, when some gay and straight rabbinical students from two U.S.-based seminaries began to refuse to study at Schechter during their mandatory year of study in Israel. While more liberal than the Orthodox stream of Judaism, the Masorti Movement has been more traditionalist than its U.S. counterpart.

A Schechter statement said its board made its decision following a “long process” of deliberation. “The Schechter Rabbinical Seminary views the serious process leading to this decision as an example of confronting social dilemmas within the framework of tradition and halachah [Jewish law],” said Rabbi Hanan Alexander, chairman of the seminary’s board. “This decision highlights the institution’s commitment to uphold halachah in a pluralist and changing world.” —RNS