

Transgender people find an ally in Reform Jewish movement

by [Story Hinckley](#)

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([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) Members of the Union for Reform Judaism, the largest movement of Judaism in the United States, passed the most extensive resolution for transgender inclusion of any major religious organization Thursday.

Reform Jews voted on a vow of transgender support during their biennial meeting in Orlando, with more than 5,000 attending.

When the policy was approved without any opposition, the majority of the room stood up and applauded.

"Your reaction in this room shows what this movement is about," said Stephen Sacks, chairman of the Union for Reform Judaism's board, according to the Associated Press. "It makes me very proud."

The transgender resolution suggests providing gender-neutral bathrooms, gender-neutral language, and gender issue education.

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, a senior vice president with the Union for Reform Judaism, told AP: "One of the key components is it calls for resources, development, and training so we get into the congregations and do training with their leaders, youth professionals, rabbis, lay leaders, and then supply them with materials on How do you deal with bathrooms? How do you deal with language? How do you deal with prayer?"

The resolution also proposes dividing children by month of birth rather than gender for youth programs and avoiding gendered titles such as "Mr." and "Mrs."

And to help explain the resolution to their 1.5 million affiliated members, the Reform movement plans to distribute one-page pamphlets to its various synagogues.

The Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, the Unitarian Universalist Church, and the Metropolitan Community Church have also adopted supportive perspectives towards transgender issues. But Michael Toumayan of the Human Rights Campaign says the Reform Jewish movement's policy is especially notable because it lists specific requirements to support inclusion.

"We have gay, lesbian, the whole rainbow members and on our board of trustees," Ken Snitz from Temple Israel in Tulsa, Oklahoma, told Reuters. "We're very open and supportive. We don't just say it. We practice it."

The resolution doesn't require synagogues to do anything, so the 900 different congregations can execute the suggestions however they see fit.

According to a 2013 survey by the Pew Research Center, more than a third of all U.S. Jews identify with the Reform movement.

The Union for Reform Judaism has been known for their inclusion before, passing a resolution in 1977 that affirmed the rights of gays and lesbians. And in 2003, the movement accepted its first openly transgender person to rabbinical school.

This report contains material from Reuters and the Associated Press.