

**PLACEMENT PROCEDURES**  
**OF THE**  
**JOINT CANTORIAL PLACEMENT COMMISSION**

**As revised August 2003**

## I. INTRODUCTION

This booklet, **Cantorial Placement Procedures**, is the Reform movement's official guide for Cantorial placement, governing both congregations seeking Cantors and Cantors seeking positions.

### A. The Cantor

The Cantor, traditionally called the *Chazan*, is a member of the clergy. He or she participates in leading worship services and officiating at sacred life cycle events. The Cantor performs various other duties within the congregation, depending upon the size and character of the community and its needs. The Cantor also shares in the educational, programmatic, and pastoral work of the congregation, and performs other duties suitable to the size and character of the community, consistent with congregational custom and practice.

Selection of a Cantor by a congregation is a critical and sensitive task with far-reaching implications for the character, spirit, effectiveness, and success of a congregation, as well as for the career of the selected Cantor. It should involve participation of all constituencies of the congregational community and be conducted according to careful procedures and with mutual respect and courtesy for the Cantor and congregation.

## **B. The Joint Cantorial Placement Commission**

The Joint Cantorial Placement Commission (JCPC) is a national body whose members represent the American Conference of Cantors (ACC); the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), and its School of Sacred Music (SSM); and the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ). The JCPC establishes policies and procedures while overseeing the placement process for congregations. It has no adjudicative function after the placement process is completed, and it does not undertake to review or resolve disputes between congregations and their incumbent Cantors. (Any such conciliation or arbitration must be referred to the National Commission for Professional-Congregational Relationships, henceforth referred to as NCPCR.) Placement of Cantors in non-pulpit positions is also within the jurisdiction of the JCPC and is subject to these Cantorial Placement Procedures. From time to time, the JCPC may review and revise current placement procedures.

The jurisdiction of the JCPC extends to (1) URJ-affiliated congregations in good standing; (2) to non-URJ congregations affiliated with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism or the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot pursuant to their election to list with the JCPC and pay an appropriate fee; and (3) to other non-affiliated congregations for interim placement assistance, with the express written approval of the appropriate URJ Regional Director.

## **Constituent Members of the JCPC**

The JCPC includes four representatives each from the American Conference of Cantors, the Union for Reform Judaism and the School of Sacred Music. In addition to these twelve representatives, there shall be a seat of chairperson, held by a member of the ACC, and a seat of vice-chairperson, held by a representative of the URJ. Ex-officio seats are held by the Directors of Placement for the ACC and SSM; the President and Executive Vice President of the ACC; the President and the Chairman of the Board of the URJ, and the President of HUC-JIR. Cantors who are in placement are not permitted to be members of the JCPC. Likewise, lay members of the JCPC may not serve if their congregations are currently in placement.

**ACC:** The American Conference of Cantors is the Reform movement's professional organization of Cantors. Its members are graduates of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, School of Sacred Music. Membership is also extended to qualified individuals who have passed a rigorous certification examination administered jointly by the SSM and the ACC. Membership may further be extended to Cantors who are graduates of the H. L. Miller Cantorial School of the Jewish Theological Seminary or other accredited and accepted cantorial seminaries, and who have met additional criteria established by the ACC in partnership with the SSM. All aforementioned persons are Regular Members. The status of Regular Members begins on the date of investiture, certification, or, in the case of graduates of other seminaries, admittance to the ACC.

**HUC-JIR, SSM:** Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion is the seminary of the Reform movement. Its School of Sacred Music trains students to become Cantors who will serve as clergy primarily in URJ congregations.

**URJ:** The Union for Reform Judaism provides services to and coordinates the work of its member Reform synagogues in North America, and in conjunction with the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

### **Definitions of Other Terms:**

**Associate Members:** Most Associate Members have passed a qualifying membership examination and are engaged in a rigorous program of study to obtain certification from the ACC and HUC-JIR. They are not, however, invested Cantors, i.e., they have neither been graduated from HUC-JIR, SSM nor certified by the HUC-JIR/ACC Board on Cantorial Certification. This category also includes those who attained the status of Associate Member prior to the current certification program.

**Student Cantors:** SSM students entering their second, third, fourth and fifth years of study are eligible to serve part-time in congregations while enrolled at HUC-JIR. Placement for students is facilitated through HUC-JIR. (See “Where to Apply.”)

**Graduating Students:** SSM fifth year (senior) students seeking placement in positions that commence in the contractual year following graduation and investiture are under the jurisdiction of the JCPC, and therefore subject to these placement procedures. They are not required to pay placement fees.

**ACC Director of Placement:** The person employed by the ACC who facilitates and oversees Cantorial placement activities, working cooperatively with congregations and Cantors.

## **II. WHERE TO APPLY**

- A. For ACC Cantors (including Graduating Students), congregations should apply *only* to the office of the **Joint Cantorial Placement Commission: 1305 Remington Road, Suite D, Schaumburg, IL 60173. Phone: (847) 781-7800. Fax: (847) 781-8701. Email: [placement@accantors.org](mailto:placement@accantors.org)**. Placement information can also be found on the ACC website, at [www.accantors.org](http://www.accantors.org).
- B. For SSM Student Cantors, congregations should apply to the **SSM Placement Office at HUC-JIR, 1 West Fourth Street, New York, NY 10012. Telephone: (212) 824-2274; fax: (212) 388-1720.**

Placement activity at the JCPC and the SSM is conducted throughout the year.

### III. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR CANDIDATES

**A. Regular Members: All Regular Members are eligible to apply for pulpits in relation to congregational size, as described in the following criteria adopted by the JCPC:**

<b>Tier</b>	<b>Congregational Member Units</b>	<b>Minimum Years of Cantorial Experience</b>
1	Up to 599	Open to all Regular Members
2	Up to 999	Open to Regular Members of 3 or more years
3	1,000 plus	Open to Regular Members of 7 or more years

Note: For purposes of placement eligibility, the number of family units in a congregation is determined by the current online edition of the *URJ Directory of Member Congregations* at [www.URJ.org](http://www.URJ.org); click on the “Congregations” icon.

#### **B. Congregations of Fewer than 401 Member Units**

Congregations of fewer than 401 member units may engage a Regular Member, an Associate Member, or a Student Cantor, but may only apply in **one** category at a time. The *SSM Student Guidelines* as well as this *Cantorial Placement Procedures* booklet should be consulted in order to assist congregations in determining which category may best serve their needs.

### **C. Congregations of 401 to 599 Member Units**

On or about March 1 of each year (immediately prior to the opening of Student Cantor placement), congregations of 401 to 599 member units which have been unable to obtain the services of a Regular Member or Graduating Student may request the permission of the JCPC to withdraw from regular placement in order to seek the services of a Student Cantor for a one-year interim period. A Student Cantor may serve such a congregation for no more than one year, after which the congregation must reapply for a Regular Member for the following year.

### **D. Associate Members**

Congregations may interview Associate Members of the ACC only after all candidates in the two categories of Regular Members and Graduating Students have been canvassed for their interest, and only if no qualified applicant is found. Associate Members are then eligible for placement under the following conditions:

1. Associate Members do not become eligible for placement until 60 days after SSM students have entered the placement process. The current date for Student Cantor eligibility is on or about March 1, and thus for Associate Members on or about May 1.

2. Associate Members are eligible to serve only in “Tier 1” (up to 599 member units) congregations.

## **E. Additional Categories**

### 1. Interim Cantors

Congregations may, in certain circumstances, find it advisable to engage an Interim Cantor for a brief period, generally up to one year. The Director of Placement can be of assistance in determining when this may be a helpful interregnum. Those serving as Interim Cantors are expected to serve in this position no more than one year. This position is open to all tiers.

### 2. Congregations with more than one Cantor

With the need for Cantors growing in URJ congregations, some congregations may wish to add an additional Cantor to their staff. The JCPC will list those positions as Associate or Assistant Cantor, reporting directly to the Senior Cantor. These will be considered “Tier 1”-level positions.

### 3. Limited service and High Holy Day positions

Congregations may seek to engage a Cantor solely to officiate at Shabbat and/or Holy Day worship services for a pre-determined fee. Requests to include other limited duties in this category must have the approval of the Director of Placement and the JCPC. Cantors and congregations should refer to the document *Guidelines for Cantorial-Congregational Relationships* for further details.

## **IV. PLACEMENT PROCEDURES**

### **A. For the Cantor**

Only Regular and Associate Members of the ACC in good standing and SSM Graduating Students are eligible for placement. Persons seeking placement through the JCPC pledge that they will conduct their searches in consonance with Cantorial Placement procedures and that they will not seek placement through any other agency or by any other means at the same time that they are registered for placement with the JCPC.

If the JCPC determines that a Cantor has violated this provision of its procedures, it shall have the right to disqualify the Cantor from its placement services for a minimum period of 18 months from the date of that determination and until such privilege is restored by a ruling of the JCPC.

### **Application and Resumes**

1. All applicants for placement shall provide the JCPC with one electronic copy (by e-mail) and three hard copies of complete and accurate professional resumes and (except for Graduating Students) a non-refundable application fee. The application covers the period of the placement season, generally August 1 through July 31 of the following year. If not placed by that time, the candidate is required to pay a new fee.
2. A Cantor seeking to be considered for an available position should so inform the JCPC. If eligible, his/her professional resume will be sent to the congregation's Search Committee. Thereafter, the JCPC must be kept apprised of the progress of the

candidate's status with each congregation to which he/she has applied. A Cantor may not contact a congregation directly until his or her resume has been sent to that congregation, and the Cantor has agreed to seek and accept placement through the JCPC.

3. The JCPC maintains and circulates through the ACC newsletter the current list of congregations seeking Cantors. In addition, members who have applied for placement are informed by e-mail of new positions as they become available. Upon request, each applicant for placement will be sent a copy of the congregation's application form, by e-mail (in Adobe Acrobat format).

**A Cantor under contract, whether oral or written, is ineligible to apply for any position that commences prior to the termination of his/her contractual commitment, without the express written consent of the president of the Cantor's present congregation.**

**Therefore, such consent is required on behalf of any Cantor entering placement before the beginning of the last year of his/her contract. A copy of this consent must be sent to the JCPC.**

## **B. Interviews and Contract for the Cantor and Congregation**

1. Once in receipt of candidates' resumes, congregations may request a first interview with any number of candidates, to be conducted either in person or by telephone. Candidates may accept any number of first interviews with congregations.
2. Congregations may request any number of subsequent interviews with any number of

candidates. Candidates may attend any number of subsequent interviews with any number of congregations. Prior to attending any second in-person interview with a congregation, a candidate must inform the president of the congregation where he/she is presently employed of each subsequent interview the candidate plans to attend.

3. Congregations and candidates (including Graduating Students) may negotiate the terms of prospective employment through any means of communication during and after the first interview described above.
4. All positions offered by a congregation must be in writing, signed by the president of the congregation, and delivered to the candidate. Each such offer should include a description of the candidate's prospective duties, length of employment, compensation, benefits, and any date by which the candidate must accept the offer. Negotiations between the parties may continue as to the terms of employment while an offer of employment remains extant. The Director of Placement is available to both the Cantor and congregation to assist with any coordinating and facilitating the parties may find helpful during this period.
5. The candidate's acceptance of any offer must be in writing, and delivered to the congregation. The candidate must immediately inform the Director of Placement of any offer that is accepted. This accepted offer may be amplified through a more formal contract of employment.
6. Upon accepting an offer from a congregation, a candidate must immediately cease negotiations and interviews with all other congregations, and must immediately notify the

Director of Placement that an offer has been accepted, identifying the congregation.

7. Upon a candidate's accepting employment with a congregation, the Director of Placement shall remove the congregation from the list of those congregations seeking candidates. The candidate and the congregation shall each send to the Director of Placement/JCPC copies of the congregation's offer of employment, and the candidate's acceptance of employment, and any contract the parties execute thereafter.

**The JCPC strongly suggests that the protocols and procedures of the National Commission on Cantorial-Congregational Relationships be incorporated within all contracts and/or letters of agreement.**

#### **B. For the Congregation**

A congregation applying for a Cantor through the JCPC pledges that it will conduct its search in consonance with Cantorial Placement Procedures and that it will not seek to engage a Cantor, Soloist, or any other person to fill the position listed by registering with any other agency or by any other means at the same time that it is registered for placement with the JCPC.

**If the JCPC determines that a congregation has violated the provision of its procedures, it shall have the right to disqualify the congregation from the placement**

**services of the JCPC for a minimum period of 18 months from the date of that determination and until such privilege is restored by a ruling of the JCPC.**

## **The Search Committee**

The JCPC most strongly suggests that congregations intending to engage a Cantor first form a Cantorial Search Committee including representatives of its various constituencies, and, at its earliest stage, consider and evaluate, with the Rabbi(s) and others as appropriate, the needs, expectations and criteria for selection of a Cantor. This will help to ensure that the search process is, as far as possible, a deliberate and considered effort to meet those needs and criteria. Vocal and musical excellence, religious knowledge, spiritual and personal character, teaching abilities, and compatibility with other clergy are among the qualities the committee should consider. The Director of Placement stands ready to assist the congregation in helping to ensure a successful placement process.

## **Procedures and Time Line**

### **1. Applications**

- a. The congregation, once it has applied to the Placement Office, will be sent an application form requesting information that describes the congregation and its needs/requirements for a Cantor. The form should be completed and signed by the Cantorial Search Committee chairperson and the president of the congregation, and sent electronically (by e-mail) to the JCPC office. (Hard copies may also be sent via the U.S. Postal service.)

Additionally, an original copy of the signature page should be mailed promptly to the JCPC office.

- b. Upon receipt and acceptance of the completed application, the JCPC will inform all eligible Cantors interested in placement of the available position.
- c. The JCPC will then provide to the congregation the professional resumes of eligible Cantors who express interest in the position.
- d. A congregation which has a special interest in an eligible Cantor who has not expressed previous interest in said congregation should make it known promptly to the Director of Placement. He/she will then make an initial contact to determine the Cantor's interest.

## **2. Resumes**

- a. A congregation may not contact a Cantor directly until it has received the Cantor's professional resume and has pledged in writing to seek and accept placement through the JCPC.
- b. Prior to a second interview, a congregation, its Rabbi, or any other member of the professional staff may not contact anyone in the Cantor's current congregation or community, or communicate with any references listed in the professional resume, without receiving prior permission from the candidate.

## **3. Interviews**

- a. When the congregation, through the Search Committee, narrows its focus to (a) particular

candidate(s), arrangements should be made with each candidate for a delegation to visit his/her current congregation. Such a visit would give the Search Committee an opportunity to see and hear the Cantor in relationship with congregants in the candidate's present congregation.

- b. Candidates are not permitted to participate in worship services at an interviewing congregation. However, candidates may be invited to the congregation to be heard in its sanctuary only by members of the professional staff, Cantorial Search Committee, and, at the discretion of the Search Committee, members of the Board of Trustees.
- c. Before making a decision, it is essential that the candidates meet with the Rabbi(s) and other key members of the professional staff and lay leadership. Additionally, a candidate's spouse/partner may also be invited to visit the community. Although protocol may vary, all congregations are responsible for absorbing travel costs and arranging for hospitality for each invited Cantor, and, if applicable, his/her spouse/partner.

#### **4. Interviews and Contract for the Cantor and Congregation**

Congregations are directed to refer back to the section entitled "For the Cantor, Interviews and Contract" (see page 12) for further information on interviews and offers of employment.

## V. IN CONCLUSION

It is the hope of the Joint Cantorial Placement Commission that the Cantor and congregation always honor the sacred nature of their relationship. Congregations and Cantors may want to refer to *Brit Kodesh-Sacred Partnership*, a joint publication of the URJ and Synagogue 2000. In addition, the JCPC suggests that, once a Cantor has been chosen, the congregation form a transition committee to help assure a smooth transition process. The JCPC also recommends that when a Cantor is succeeding a retiring Cantor, both familiarize themselves with the ACC Code of Ethics and the NCPCR Guidelines with regard to the relationship between the Cantor and Cantor Emeritus.

Once again, the Placement Director and the JCPC are ready to assist in this period of transition.