

**Recommendations of the Project on  
"Lay Involvement in Worship and Liturgical Development,"  
Adopted by the Executive Board, March, 1998**

1. Need for a common prayer book for the Reform movement.

(A) The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) should publish a new prayer book to replace Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayer Book (1975). A single *siddur* is a necessity to maintain a sense of movement identity. Continuity with the Reform past as well as the Jewish past in general is important. Community building is also important, and the community extends beyond the individual congregation. In addition, with the rarest exception, only a denominational body with the resources to do so will create quality liturgy.

(B) The new prayer book should respond to the needs of worshippers so that it will have an adequate life to make it worth purchasing.

2. General recommendations on content.

(A) In developing the new prayer book the CCAR should plan to include more than one service, but not follow the anthology model of the present prayer book. The CCAR should consider inclusion of a limited number of services, perhaps with one as close to the traditional siddur as is possible within Reform; a second, distinctly different from the first service; and a third, a service which provides a balance between "tradition" and creativity, and as a fourth service to be either in the siddur or a separate volume "teaching service" with an elaborate commentary.<sup>1</sup> (Please read the footnote and note particularly the resolution which summarizes a long discussion.) This service should be produced in cooperation with the UAHC, HUC-JIR the ACC and CCAR Liturgy committee.<sup>2</sup>

(B) The new CCAR prayer book should avoid "theme" services, because most congregants fail to recognize the thematic messages as such, and because theme services may fragment the congregation and not be relevant to all congregants. Multivocality is crucial to an effective congregational liturgy .

(C) Based on the knowledge that people come to synagogue to experience a sense of community, the language of the service must strive for inclusivity and address the diversity of worshippers including gays and lesbians, Jews by choice, differently abled. The participation of children should be envisioned without making the service child-centered.

(D) The CCAR should consider feminism as an important lens through which plans for the new siddur should be examined. Women's experiences and voices must be included in the text. God language is a reflection of theology. How we image God will depend in part on whose voices are included in the text. Feminism itself is multivocal and the feminist critique goes well beyond the issue of God language.

(E) The CCAR should take note of the greater appreciation now being given to the traditional texts and should consider, for example, the paragraphs of the Sh'ma which have been deleted in GOP, resurrection of the dead, and other elements of the traditional siddur which Reform has dropped. The conference as a whole must be engaged in this process. Consideration should be given to the possibility of alternatives within the same prayer (e.g. mechayyei hakol next to mechayyei metim).

(F) The new CCAR prayer book should offer significant opportunity for personal private and silent meditation, {preferably without musical background}. Silence facilitates private meaning in a communal setting.

### 3. Recommendations on Hebrew prayer.

(A) The CCAR should engage in a serious discussion about whether any particular Hebrew text is privileged. In the sense that there are certain texts so sacred that cannot be changed, e.g., Shema, the liturgical proof texts for kedusha, etc.

(B) Consideration should be given to the creation of new Hebrew prayers for the prayer book.

(C) Poetry -- especially Hebrew and Yiddish poetry that lends itself to English versions -- should be included in the new CCAR prayer book.

Transliteration, as an invitation to inclusiveness should be included in the new CCAR prayer book. Careful consideration should be given to the amount of transliteration and its placement on the page. Transliteration should be in proximity to the Hebrew to make it easy to use. Placing transliteration at the back of the book would be unsatisfactory

### 4. Recommendations on English prayer.

#### Privileged English

(A) The new CCAR prayer book should offer a faithful translation of the Hebrew into beautiful English. Translation should tell the worshipper what the Hebrew means, connect the worshipper with the historic language of prayer and study, and hopefully facilitate the learning of Hebrew. Help people to pray (The placement of translation on the page and its use in worship requires considerable experimentation. It is clear that whether the English is meant to be prayed, congregants see the prayer book as vehicle for increasing their Hebrew knowledge.)

(B) The CCAR should commission a group of translators (not necessarily CCAR members) to provide high quality translation of Hebrew materials that are being considered for inclusion in the new prayer book. It should also draw Israeli colleagues into a consultative role to the liturgical development in North America.

(C) The new CCAR prayer book should offer English "interpretive translations," and they should clearly be marked as such.

(D) The most gifted writers available should be invited to create new English prayers for the new CCAR prayer book. There is a huge talent pool in our movement and in world wide Jewry. The CCAR should invite submissions of individual prayers and/or services from as many sources as possible.

(E) The new CCAR prayer book should pay special attention to the fact that the written text is intended to be performed orally and heard, not just read. English in the new CCAR prayer book should flow and should be capable of being sung even if there is no intention to set it to music.

#### 5. Recommendation on prayer book form and design.

The new CCAR prayer book should look and feel like a sacred text. It should be beautiful. It should be easily readable with adequate white space. Typeface selection is crucial. Attention should be paid to page breaks so that the shaliach/at tzipbur will be able to easily conduct the service. The new prayer book should reflect congregants' preference for a service with as little page skipping as possible so that one section flows into the next without the interruption of instructions. The rubrics should provide a "road map" that clarifies the structure of the service.

#### 6. Recommendations on the process for development of a new CCAR prayer book.

(A) The CCAR should hold a national colloquium to discuss the findings of the project and the recommendations for a new siddur.

(B) In meeting its responsibility for oversight in the development of the new CCAR prayer book, the Liturgy Committee should collect and provide initial screening of materials as well as develop the basic parameters for what should be included and what should be excluded.

(C) The CCAR, in developing the new prayer book, should call upon not only rabbis and cantors, but also on the immense talent which is found in the Reform movement. For example, there are congregants who are accomplished graphic designers, translators, and language specialists.

(D) When materials for the new CCAR prayer book have been submitted and accepted, a special editorial committee should be appointed and chaired by the Liturgy Committee chair. It might include a liturgist, a Hebrew language specialist, an English language specialist, a cantor, a congregational rabbi who is a talented shaliach/at tzipbur, a worshipping congregant, the CCAR Director of Publishing, and the chair of the Siddur Group. The editorial committee should directly oversee the final product, subject it to formal testing, and recommend its approval by the Liturgy Committee.

(E) Testing of the new CCAR prayer book and each of its services should take place in a number of congregations selected with diversity in mind. The period of testing needs to be sufficiently protracted to serve as a good indicator of whether the service is likely to be successful. The material being tested should be in a substantially finished form, both from an editorial and graphic perspective. A participant-observer should conduct focus groups.

(F) The CCAR should make use of the worship journal technique in its testing of the prayer book in development. Its use by the project was reported as non-threatening by rabbis and congregants. The worship journal technique is an empowering tool. It gives congregations a team approach to worship evaluation and change. Building a team approach is ultimately crucial. Only if rabbis, cantors and congregants understand themselves as having an equal stake in the worship system, will they develop more effective worship. (The CCAR and UAHC Joint Commission on Religious Living should promote the use of the worship journal technique as a means for congregations to evaluate their worship experience independent of a new prayer book.)

## 7. Recommendations to the CCAR as a publisher of liturgical materials.

(A) The CCAR should rethink its role as a publisher in an electronic age. The CCAR should take a leadership position in developing electronic liturgical materials at a time when desktop publishing software permits every congregation and every rabbi and cantor to become a publisher. Purchasing the siddur could be linked to an electronic subscription service.

(B) The CCAR should create a liturgical clearinghouse to share experimental liturgies and allow for their field-testing. Further, it should make editable and non-editable texts available on disk and develop a subscription service for new materials, including those for special occasions

(C) The CCAR should examine carefully what if any are the limits to the canon on which one may draw for liturgical texts. (It should develop guidelines to be shared with the members of the conference and with the Reform movement.

(D) The CCAR should make its electronic liturgical materials compatible with commercial software packages rather than attempt to develop its own software.

(E) The CCAR should consider producing alongside a new prayer book a CD ROM version and additional materials for periodic special use and congregational customizing.

(F) In order to respond, to the special needs of congregations (dedication of a new building or major anniversary), rabbis (e.g. new life cycle ritual )or the movement (e.g., Rabin assassination, etc.), the CCAR in consultation with the Joint Commission on Religious Living should provide a "Liturgist On Line" under the supervision of the director of publications and the chair of the liturgy committee.

(G) The CCAR should consider various paradigms for including healing prayers in communal worship.

(H) The CCAR should consider publication of a book of resource materials and guidelines for congregational healing services. (The project developed a loose leaf binder of more than 500 pages of material which should serve as a basis for such a source book.)

## 8. Synagogue Music

The CCAR should examine how the prayer book can link prayer text with music. The project makes no recommendation on music because it was not part of the study's mandate. However, in virtually every project activity, music was identified as an integral part of worship and as a gateway to prayer. Congregants need to be educated to expect that the music repertoire will grow and change. Congregants need to be educated about how to understand and assess new music. It is desirable that the CCAR, the American Conference of Cantors (ACC), Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), and the CCAR-UAHC Joint Commissions on Religious Living and the CCAR-UAHC ACC Joint Commission on Synagogue Music take a fresh look at the relationship of music to worship.

## 9. Worship competence.

(A) The CCAR, in cooperation with the UAHC, ACC and HUC-JIR, should give a high priority to developing the worship competence and confidence of congregants. Congregants report enhanced worship experiences when they understand the content and structure of the service and have the skills to participate fully. They report feeling competent in other aspects of their lives, but not in the synagogue. An opportunity exists for the development of instructional materials about the service.

(B) The CCAR, UAHC and HUC-JIR should stimulate the development of learners' minyanim in congregations.

## 10. The role of the sheliach/at tziibbur.

(A) The role of the congregant as a worship leader should be developed by a joint effort of the CCAR, ACC, UAHC and HUC-JIR. This is seen as enhancing rather than diminishing the role of the rabbi and cantor. A series of instructional aids for congregants should be prepared.

(B) The CCAR should develop continuing education for rabbis on the role of the sheliach/at tziibbur.

A full siddur is envisioned including weekday, Shabbat, Shelosh Regalim, Yom ha-Atzmaut, Yom Ha-Shoah, Tisha be-Av, Purim, Hanukkah, etc. The Liturgy Committee should draw up a table of contents. Worship with children present should be included

without making the service pediatric. The inclusion of home rituals should be considered. In every service sources should be noted on the page. This particular recommendation engendered a great deal of discussion. There was concern that the limited number of services would not provide sufficient variety. The project observed a growing tendency in congregations to use a single service. While our study did indicate that some individuals like variety to avoid boredom, merely changing the text of the service on a frequent basis was not sufficient to create inspiring worship. A memorized or nearly memorized service was reported as most desirable. We suggest that in developing the new siddur the Liturgy Committee begin with these limited options and in the process of development and testing can determine if they are sufficient. In GOP each service had a theme. Congregants in the project were unable on their own to identify the theme and when the theme was described congregants understood why they felt included or excluded in a particular service. The liturgy ought to "speak" in a language which can be "heard" in a variety of ways. Theme services are often experienced as preachy and limited. The list is not meant to be exhaustive but illustrative. The choice of language is crucial to avoid unintended or unnecessary hurt. The need for inclusivity should not be understood as mere political correctness nor should it prevent the editors from being faithful to Jewish norms and ideals. Feminist considerations go beyond "add women and mix." In the siddur form as well as content must reflect our desire to address God and one another in an inclusive manner. The project envisions that all services will be gender inclusive but that at least one service will be radically different in form. The details will be worked out during the creative and testing phase. It is important to respect the liturgical history of the Reform Movement. However, many of the ideological considerations that caused us to excise certain sections of the liturgy are no longer applicable. As part of the preparation for the new siddur the Liturgy Committee should undertake a thorough review of the traditional liturgy and make recommendations for inclusion. The CCAR membership at convention or through the mail should have the opportunity to comment on and approve or disapprove of changes in long held positions. The need for alternatives on the same page should be explored to allow for diversity. The research has shown that congregants desire opportunities for silent prayer and/or meditation. Texts that facilitate the person and private prayer are important. While music is crucial to a moving worship service and there should be opportunities to listen as well as sing, silence is also a powerful spiritual tool. As part of any program of worship training people will have to be prepared for silence. The work of Marcia Falk is an example of a serious attempt to provide new Hebrew as well as new English. Debbie Friedman combined English and Hebrew in her *Mishebeirach* which seems to have given it special power. The importance of creativity in Hebrew cannot be underestimated. A frequently heard criticism of our current siddurim is lack of poetry or poetic prose. The use of imagery, metaphor, etc., conveys more than information. The goal must be to touch the heart and allow the worshipper to enter into the mystery, beauty and majesty of the Divine. The word 'versions' is deliberate. The English must carry the power of the original without necessarily slavishly following it. See, however, the recommendation on faithful English translation below 4A.

New print technology may aid the creators of the siddur to place transliteration in a usable position on the page. The meeting of the Siddur Group and the Liturgy Committee

produced many different views. It was suggested that the CCAR Board should take no action on transliteration until it receives the report of the its Hebrew Literacy Taskforce. It was suggested that the CCAR apply for a grant to study how transliteration enhances or inhibits the learning of Hebrew. Some members of the group were concerned that our decision in this matter would have historic consequences. It should be noted that a new interlinear Orthodox siddur with transliteration was recently published. Transliteration has many implications and must be carefully assessed. English in proximity to Hebrew is understood by congregants to be translation. In many instances that is the case but sometimes the English is a thematic rendition of the Hebrew or a substitute for the Hebrew. The repeatedly expressed desire of congregants to use the English in the prayer book as a vehicle for enhancing their own Hebrew translation skill is significant. In no sense should the creators of the new siddur be limited to literal translations but the needs and desires of congregants ought to be accommodated. One experimental prayer book created for the project put the "faithful" translation in the margin when there was no intention of using it as prayer. Translation is an art. Knowing Hebrew well is not sufficient. Liturgical translation requires more than linguistic skills. There was some difference of opinion on this issue in the Siddur Group and Liturgy Committee meeting. However, the project's research indicated that congregants desire clear indication when the Hebrew and English diverge significantly. While the CCAR would maintain overall control, poets and writers could be commissioned or invited to submit versions of prayer or services and/or original creations. There is a growing desire to chant English as well as Hebrew. If the English can be sung, then it will be more likely to read well aloud. Great texts will also encourage musical creativity. The Lilly Endowment has been asked to allow the remaining funds from their grant to be used for that purpose. The Siddur Group will serve as an advisors. They will see materials as developed and will be represented by their chair Rabbi H. Leonard Poller, on the Liturgy Committee and on the editorial committee. It will consult by correspondence and/or conference call. The Siddur Group will meet if necessary at the request of the chair of Liturgy Committee in consultation with CCAR president, executive vice president, director of publications and Siddur Group chair. The new siddur will require the appointment an editor with the possibility of a co-editor. Without an editor the project will founder. As with all congregational prayer books, the adoption of the final manuscript will require a vote of the CCAR membership. The form of the Worship Journal and the questions to be addressed should be reviewed and evaluated before the technique is formally introduced. This may have implications for the printed form of the siddur. For example, some have suggested an open format like loose leaf and others suggest a pocket in the back cover. While this may conflict with an earlier suggestion that the siddur be printed as 'sacred' text, the possibility of more than one format should be carefully explored from both ideological and economic perspectives. This is an important ideological question. Which texts, if any, drawn from non-Jewish spiritual traditions should be included in a new prayer book? May they be included in the main body of the text or only in a section of special reading? Are they available only for private devotion or for public reading as well? The CCAR should vigorously defend its copyright. The Siddur Group and the Liturgy Committee recommend that this section be understood as merely illustrative. The CCAR is must examine how liturgy can address the compelling needs of congregants. Those present

speculated that healing service might be only a fad and were concerned about the creation of unique services which isolated congregants from the remainder of the community. The project explored models for the creation of healing services and recommends that healing is an important dimension which must be included in worship. The question of special needs services requires further study and testing. While the project did not deal with the issue in depth, congregants reported frequently that music made a difference in the quality of worship. Congregants especially appreciate participatory music. An ongoing concern is the role of art music. However, it is important to note that many of today's worshippers are those who were nurtured on more informal styles of music. Diversity of style and aesthetic tasks needs to be assessed. Music presents its own unique challenges and must be investigated in its own right. Congregants as worship leaders ought to be more than substitutes for rabbis. Restoration of the rabbi as teacher/darshan rather than sheliach/at tzipbur should be explored. Continuing education in this area is essential to worship change and renewal. It is an area which is likely to meet significant resistance. On the other hand, the desire and need for continuing education should not be viewed as blaming the clergy for the problems of worship.

----- Notes -----

<sup>1</sup> In every service sources should be noted on the page. This particular recommendation engendered a great deal of discussion. There was concern that the limited number of services would not provide sufficient variety. The project observed a growing tendency in congregations to use a single service. While our study did indicate that some individuals like variety to avoid boredom, merely changing the text of the service on a frequent basis was not sufficient to create inspiring worship. A memorized or nearly memorized service was reported as most desirable. We suggest that in developing the new siddur the Liturgy Committee begin with these limited options and in the process of development and testing can determine if they are sufficient.

<sup>2</sup> To summarize the discussion and to indicate the majority view of those assembled, the Siddur Group and Liturgy committee passed the following motion. **The services in the new Siddur include four modes: 1) As traditional a service as possible within the Reform context 2) A service which provides continuity with our Reform heritage as does service V in GOP which carries over material from the Union Prayer book. 3) A service in contemporary idiom which interpolates the main elements of the liturgy. 4) Creative liturgy regularly produced to be down-loaded from the CCAR which can be mass-produced in congregations.**

---

*Copyright © 1999, Central Conference of American Rabbis  
Most recent update 9 Aug 1999*