

Repairing the World: The Rabbi Jerome K. Davidson Chair in Social Responsibility

The College-Institute's dedication to *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, has been reinforced by the generosity of Leonard and Ruth Litwin, along with an anonymous donor, who have donated \$1.5 million to endow the Rabbi Jerome K. Davidson Chair in Social Responsibility, the first of its kind at HUC-JIR. Their landmark gifts express a shared belief in Jewish ethical values and recognize HUC-JIR's distinguished alumnus, teacher and role model: Rabbi Jerome K. Davidson.

"These contributors are active members of my congregation and lifelong social activists in the community," notes Rabbi Davidson. "Their support will be responsible for strengthening HUC-JIR's core curriculum with a foundation in social responsibility. Their gifts demonstrate that congregants understand the importance of training Jewish professionals. I hope that this generosity encourages other alumni to reach out to congregants who are able to help HUC-JIR and support the creation and amplification of programs."

their team-taught course, *Tough Choices, Social Action in the Community*, they have helped generations of students prepare for the realities they will one day face as religious and professional leaders.

As part of the new Chair, a national Planning Committee on Social Responsibility has been formed to "shape the guidelines for learning modules, text study, required coursework, field work, and public programming that will then be implemented in an integrated program of required professional development for rabbinical students," notes Dr. Norman Cohen, HUC-JIR Provost. The Committee is comprised of faculty, students, and administrators who serve as representatives from each stateside campus, as well as several alumni who are renowned social activists, including Rabbi Davidson; Rabbi David Saperstein, Director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism in Washington D.C.; and Albert Vorspan.

The Committee is exploring the development of two learning modules, "Rabbinic Leadership and Social Action" and "Rabbinic Leadership and Community Relations," both of which will be required as part of the professional development courses for rabbinical students. Field work related to these professional development courses will be another aspect of the new Chair, in order to provide students with real life experiences and new perspectives on social responsibility and the issues covered in the forthcoming learning modules. The objective is for students to work with organizations including the Religious Action Center, Anti-Defamation League, and NAACP, among others, or to cultivate leadership skills in pre-existing social action-oriented activities such as the New York student-run soup kitchen. Guest lecturers and new programs are also planned to build upon the community service experience required of the students during the Year-In-Israel Program so as to broaden the mission of social responsibility on each campus.

The establishment of the Rabbi Jerome K. Davidson Chair in Social Responsibility is another step that HUC-JIR and its supporters have taken in order to provide tomorrow's Reform Movement leaders with the necessary skills to help shape their rabbinate and transform Jewish communal and civic life.



Ruth Messinger (center), President, American Jewish World Service, engages students in a discussion about current events during the class "Tough Choices, Social Action in the Community," team-taught by Rabbi Jerome K. Davidson (left) and Albert Vorspan (right).

Named the "Suburban Activist" in Murray Polner's book, *Rabbi, the American Experience*, Rabbi Davidson has served as Senior Rabbi of Temple Beth-El of Great Neck since 1971 and has exerted strong leadership in the community and in the field of social service. Ordained at HUC-JIR/Cincinnati in 1958, he is a devoted

alumnus and serves on the Board of Governors, as chair of the Rabbinic Board of Alumni Overseers, and as founding chair of the Alumni Council, and continues to mentor students through courses on practical rabbinics, social justice, and biblical literature. For over a decade, Rabbi Davidson, together with Albert Vorspan, Vice President Emeritus of the Union for Reform Judaism, has brought the mission of social action within congregational life to the fourth-year rabbinical students at HUC-JIR. Through