

Green light for same-sex unions

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AUSTRALIA'S first Jewish same-sex commitment ceremony is likely to be held in Sydney over the summer months, after Progressive rabbis this week agreed on a format for such unions.

Approaches to same-sex commitment, the role of non-Jewish partners and the ethics surrounding the climate-change debate were some of the topics discussed at the Union for Progressive Judaism's (UPJ's) biennial conference in Hobart this week.

At a meeting of the Council of Progressive Rabbis of Australia, New Zealand and Asia (Moetzah) held after the four-day conference, UPJ rabbis adopted a British model for conducting same-gender commitment ceremonies.

Moetzah chair Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins told *The AJN* that a set of guidelines from Rabbi Mark Solomon, a former Australian now with the British Liberal Judaism movement, has been adopted.

The English model was adopted because it makes a clear distinction between a commitment ceremony and a marriage ceremony, he said.

"The distinction is also necessary for legal reasons, as it conforms with Australian law.

"Rabbis can come up with their own ceremonies, but these will be the guidelines," Rabbi Kamins said.

A landmark Moetzah meeting held earlier this year decided that member rabbis would be permitted, but not required, to conduct gay union ceremonies.

Rabbi Kamins said Australia's first Jewish same-sex commitment ceremony is likely to be conducted at Sydney's Emanuel Synagogue "at some time during the summer".

Reaction to the UPJ's decision within Australia's Jewish gay and lesbian communities was positive. "The endorsement of same-sex commitment ceremonies will change my life and the lives of all Jewish gays and lesbians," said Dawn Cohen, co-founder of Jewish gay and lesbian support group Dayenu. "Thanks to Progressive Jewish synagogues, we can now make aliyah back home, back to the heart and soul of our being: the Jewish community that raised us. We will contribute to Progressive Judaism with our gratitude, our pride, our energy, our commitment, our presence and our membership."

The Moetzah also discussed "eco-kashrut" and a Progressive Jewish approach to environmentally unfriendly food manufacture and factory-farming.

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HOW THE CEREMONY WILL WORK

- It will be based on a format used by the British Liberal Judaism movement.
- It will be clearly distinguished from a marriage ceremony.
- The words "husband", "wife", "chatan" (groom) and "kallah" (bride) will not be permitted.
- It will conform to Australian law.
- The first ceremony is likely to take place in Sydney over the summer.