

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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The Jewish Deaf Resource Center (JDRC) is proud to announce that the Shabbat of May 5th, 2012, is being recognized as Jewish Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Awareness Shabbat. The JDRC builds bridges between Jews who are deaf and hard-of-hearing and the organizations which serve the Jewish community throughout North America. The goal of this Shabbat is to raise awareness about including individuals who are deaf and hard-of-hearing, as well as their families and friends within the wider Jewish community. JDRC's President, Alexis Kashar, added, "We strongly believe the Torah reminds us of the importance of being sensitive to all individuals. When one family member is denied access to the wider Jewish community, the whole family is often without access to Jewish communal life for generations."

This inaugural national program initiated by JDRC has the support of the greater Jewish community including the:

- Rabbinical Assembly (RA),
- Union of Reform Judaism (URJ)
- Rabbinical Council of America (RCA)
- Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (RRA)
- Academy of Jewish Religion (AJR)
- UJA-Federation of New York and
- Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA)

This particular Shabbat was chosen because on that day our Torah reading includes Parshat Kedoshim, which says "Do not insult the deaf...." JDRC is encouraging rabbis across denominations to devote their sermons on May 5th to a discussion about this commandment, to specifically address what this means to them, and to discuss why they believe Torah uses this example to teach us how to become holy. Several of the organizations are reaching out to their rabbinic leaders so they can write sample sermons in advance and disseminate them among their colleagues. Rabbi Goldin, the president of the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) added, "We must do everything we can to grant full access to all individuals in our synagogues, schools and community centers. This entails not only the creation of physical accommodations within our institutions but programmatic accommodations as well."

The timing of this Shabbat is particularly significant to the Conservative Movement as it marks the one year anniversary of the unanimous passing by the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS) of their Rabbinic Responsa, "The Status of the Heresh and of Sign Language." Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, Executive Vice President of the Rabbinical Assembly (RA) said, "Our Judaism is one of inclusion and I am proud that the Law Committee has found a way to enable more members of our community to have access to and to take part in lives of Torah and Mitzvot."



-- P R E S S R E L E A S E --



Jeff Schoenfeld, Chair of the Caring Commission of UJA-Federation of New York, said he is proud to support JDRC's efforts. "The advocacy work of this organization has not only significantly helped to raise awareness regarding the needs of the Jewish Deaf community, but the JDRC has additionally played an integral role in building a more inclusive and welcoming Jewish community for everyone."

Rabbi Rick Jacobs, Incoming President of the Union of Reform Judaism (URJ), added, "The circle of God's love leaves no one out, but too often our Jewish community has shut its hearts and doors to those with special needs. May our communities speedily and soon follow God's lead as we remove the barriers that still keep too many outside our sacred embrace. Practicing inclusion is a Mitzvah—a sacred obligation."

"The Jewish Federations are deeply grateful to the JDRC and key partners like UJA-Federation of New York for their important leadership on this critical issue," said JFNA President and CEO Jerry Silverman. "We echo the call to rabbis and Jewish leaders to help remind us of the sacred importance of embracing the deaf and hard-of-hearing, their families and friends in our community."

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