

Amendment to the 2010 Resolution on Civility
Adopted by the 2019 JCPA Delegates Assembly

Robust, vigorous debate about the pressing issues of the day is vital and essential in a pluralistic society, including within our diverse Jewish community.

Deep divisions are to be expected over how to address many issues including but not limited to the domestic economy, the environment, health care, American military involvement abroad, the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the existential threats posed to Israel by terror and Iranian nuclear ambition. A frank and civil exchange of ideas helps to inform and distill consensus. In recent years, however, we have been witness to an increasing challenge in general society and in our own community. There is greater political and socio-economic polarization, the deterioration of civil interaction, decreased sense of common ground among individuals with divergent perspectives, greater tension around global issues and their impact on American society. At times divisions spill over into racism, anti-Semitism, and other forms of prejudice and bias. It is cause for great concern.

As differences devolve into uncivil acrimony, dignity is diminished and people holding diverse viewpoints cease listening to each other, it becomes more difficult if not impossible to find common ground. We are experiencing a level of incivility, particularly over issues pertaining to Israel, that has not been witnessed in recent memory. Where such polarization occurs within the Jewish community, it tears at the fabric of *Klal Yisrael* – our very sense of peoplehood – and is a cause for profound concern.

Civility is neither the lack of difference nor the squelching of debate. It is the application of care for the dignity of every human being, even those with whom we may sharply disagree. It is listening carefully when others speak, not just to understand what they are saying and thinking, but to open ourselves to the possibility that they may have something to teach. It is the guarding of tongue and the rejection of false witness.

As Jews, our shared past, present, and future require that we find ways to work for a common good, toward *Klal Yisrael*. Each of us has a sacred obligation to heal our broken world. This repair requires that we recognize that the divine is in every one of us.

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs believes that:

- The decline in civility in our community and broader society is a matter of urgent priority that demands we issue a Call for Civility and institute a campaign to address this urgent challenge. This campaign will convene, inspire, and empower Jewish community institutions and their leaders from across the political spectrum to engage in and model for others civil discourse on the most challenging issues. Through this effort, our institutions and leaders will engender mutual respect, shared listening and learning, and become powerful bridge builders who can assist our people to navigate future sensitive community relations challenges.
- Some policies and statements of the government of Israel can have a profound effect on—and/or inspire significant interest from—North American Jewry. Conversations on these topics can either serve as a catalyst for a breakdown in civility or can be a source of useful debate and discussion. JCPA urges that we be mindful in engaging each other on such topics, knowing that words matter in defining not only the tone of future American Jewry-Israel relations, but also the future of our relations with each other as people who share a common destiny.

The Jewish community relations field should:

- Model civility in our own work based on a commitment to dialogue and mutual respect for those with whom we may disagree, and swiftly condemn acts of demonization, defamation, and demagoguery.
- Express any agreements or disagreements they may have with the actions and statements of the Israeli government, Israeli institutions, Diaspora institutions, the U.S. government,

and others in the broader community in a civil manner befitting a family with legitimate disputes.

- Mount Civil Discourse campaigns in communities throughout the country in cooperation with partner organizations.
- Educate our community about the rich sources in our tradition that embrace civility as an ethical and moral duty and that warn of the consequences of incivility.
- Develop resources including training modules for lay and professional leaders on conflict resolution, active listening, and respectful communication.
- Advance programmatic and process oriented solutions for difficult communal issues that afford opportunities for disparate voices to be heard, respected, considered, and valued.
- Examine the role of the internet and other media in the decline of civility.
- Develop respectful mechanisms to challenge false or defamatory communications.