



## **Rabbinical Council of California**

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Dear Applicant,

Enclosed please find the application for conversion which you requested. Upon receiving your completed application form, we will set an appointment with the Rabbinic Administrator. At this time, we will briefly answer some commonly asked questions about our program. Please read this letter carefully because it contains important guidelines for our program.

### **HOW DIFFICULT IS AN ORTHODOX CONVERSION?**

Very. Conversion to Judaism is the most significant decision in your life. It requires real lifestyle changes, including many basics such as eating habits and work schedule. Conversion to Judaism can strain family ties, and it will certainly alter the way you look at the world. Nevertheless, if you are willing and able to meet these demands, we will encourage you and do our best to ensure a smooth process.

### **WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME?**

Gradually and at your own pace, you are expected to learn and live as a religiously observant Orthodox Jew. The Rabbis and your other teachers will help guide you in practicing what you learn, but it is up to you to show motivation and a desire to live the Judaism you are taught.

### **LIVING IN AN ORTHODOX COMMUNITY**

In order for the conversion to take place, the RCC will require you to live within reasonable proximity of an Orthodox synagogue, where you can comfortably participate in traditional community life. Walking great distances, or making arrangements to stay with friends on Shabbos, is not an acceptable alternative. There are no exceptions to this requirement.

We do understand that moving can be difficult for financial and other reasons. We insist upon it only because we know it is so essential for your future growth and success.

### **HOW LONG DOES CONVERSION TAKE?**

This varies considerably, depending upon your previous background and knowledge of Judaism. Generally, you should expect the process to take between 18 to 24 months from the time we receive your application. However, some meet our requirements faster, while others do take longer.

## WHY DOES AN RCC CONVERSION TAKE SO LONG? WHAT IS IT THE BEIS DIN LOOKS FOR?

Many applicants come to the Beis Din with a misconception. They think the court's function is chiefly to measure the sincerity of the would-be convert, and to assess the worthiness of the applicant to join the Jewish people. This leads to much frustration when applicants believe they have amply demonstrated their sincerity, yet the Beis Din still holds back from converting them.

In fact, the Beis Din plays a very different role. Jewish law – not the Beis Din – determines who can convert. Simply put, anyone who can fully accept the demands of a committed, halachic Jewish life is a candidate for conversion. But the Beis Din has to determine, based on many years of experience, whether the conversion will be in the best interests of the candidate. The Beis Din has to be able to predict that the obligation of full observance is something that the candidate will be able to bear, given his or her unique situation and challenges. Failing to do so would be irresponsible to the candidate.

To make this prediction, the Beis Din observes the growth and adjustment of the candidate over an extended period of time. How well does he/she integrate in the community? What mentors and teachers are available? How well are they used? What problems, if any, need to be addressed in the short run and the long run?

An RCC conversion requires more than learning material and finding a comfortable synagogue. It means joining a community and developing a support system. This reassures all of us that the decision to convert is a positive and healthy one. It also ensures that your conversion if you choose to complete it will be widely respected and accepted around the world for its thoroughness and integrity.

## RELATIONSHIPS

You undoubtedly know that Judaism does not allow or recognize intermarriage. You can still apply and be accepted in our program even if you are civilly married or have a relationship with a Jewish person. However, if you have a relationship and are considering marriage with a Jewish person, you are **both** expected to participate in the learning process. Failure to be open with us concerning this matter is grounds for dismissal from the RCC program.

We also want you to know that civilly married couples are expected to maintain separate living quarters for a three month period following a conversion. We recognize that this sometimes poses hardships, and will try to assist you to find acceptable solutions where necessary. Singles are expected to maintain an appropriate lifestyle. We invite you to discuss any difficulties you may have in

your meetings with the RCC staff.

### FAMILY TIES

Conversion means taking on a new identity. Judaism understands and expects that you will continue to treat your family of origin with respect and dignity. Nevertheless, an Orthodox conversion will affect family ties in important ways. You will no longer be able to attend church services, even for weddings and other life cycle occasions. While you might be able to eat some foods in family homes, the kosher diet will severely restrict sharing meals. Perhaps most difficult, holidays that families celebrate together such as December 25 and Easter will be off limits. We encourage you to consider these issues and speak with your family about the changes you will adopt.

### SPONSORING RABBI

The RCC conversion program requires you to have a “sponsoring Rabbi”. We do not mean that this Rabbi is responsible for your conversion. What is important is that you have an Orthodox Rabbi who is willing to assist you by providing guidance and direction to help you become part of his community. The sponsoring Rabbi should be willing to periodically report to the Beis Din on your participation in the synagogue activities and classes, and give us oral or email updates prior to each Beis Din meeting with you.

You may apply to our program even if you do not have a sponsoring Rabbi at this time, but this requirement will have to be met for you to advance in the program.

### WHAT ARE THE COSTS?

A \$295 application fee is due with your completed application. When and if the conversion takes place, there is an additional payment of \$200 which covers all other administrative charges. The Mikva charges a fee of thirty to forty dollars per person for the immersion completing the conversion.

### STUDY COSTS

Applicants accepted to the program are assigned a private tutor who will teach the necessary material. Any fees charged by the tutors are paid directly to them and not to the RCC. Tutors generally charge \$50 per study hour. The amount of study required depends greatly on previous Jewish learning.

Your attendance at classes available in the community can reduce the number of tutorial sessions required, but some one on one study is always required.

### WHEN DO I KNOW IF I AM ACCEPTED?

The conversion process has several stages. The first step after application is the interview with the Rabbinic Administrator, who explains the program in detail. You will receive a required reading list, and an overview of Orthodox conversion procedures.

If you decide to continue, we will arrange a meeting with a panel of Rabbis (Beit Din) who will decide the terms and prerequisites for your candidacy. This meeting will give you some idea of the likelihood for success, but our agreement to do the conversion is **not guaranteed** until you have shown significant progress in the total program.

Yours sincerely,

Rabbi Avrohom Union  
Rabbinic Administrator