

YU Launches Search For Lamm Successor

An international search was launched this week for a successor to Rabbi Norman Lamm, whose long anticipated resignation after more than 25 years as president of Yeshiva University was announced Tuesday.

Rabbi Lamm, 73, who steered the university through a financial crisis at the outset of his tenure and battled for a Modern Orthodox ideology while many around him pressed for a rightward shift, plans to retire in August 2002.

Robert Beren, the university's board chairman, said Rabbi Lamm would be named chancellor when he steps down and that he would then continue to "play a major role in defining university priorities."

Rabbi Robert Hirt, Lamm's assistant, said the university hoped to find a successor who would "maintain the character of that office," ideally combining rabbinic leadership and academic credentials. "The institution has never been more cohesive, which bodes well for a centralized institution. There is no ideological schism within YU," Rabbi Hirt said.

Several years ago Rabbi Lamm was publicly attacked by members of his own faculty and Orthodoxy's right flank for his position regarding the rights of students at Yeshiva College to establish a gay club on campus. Although he said he personally could not condone homosexual behavior, it was his duty as president of a nondenominational institution to accommodate people from diverse backgrounds and to assure that the university "conform to the applicable provisions of the law."

The clash over the gay club highlighted the tension inherent in reconciling Orthodoxy with modernity at Yeshiva, long an ideological fountainhead of centrist Orthodoxy. Several of the

faculty members who criticized Rabbi Lamm have since retired or left, and Rabbi Hirt said the university now has "more symmetry [and] is much healthier fiscally and educationally."

Steven Bayme, national director of contemporary Jewish life at the American Jewish Committee and a graduate of YU, said that among Rabbi Lamm's other accomplishments is that he took an institution that had an endowment of about \$25 million in the 1970s and helped it grow to \$875 million today. And Bayme said that student enrollment jumped from about 1,200 at the two undergraduate schools in the 1970s to 2,800 today, plus another 3,000 graduate students.

Bayme noted also that although the "weight of intellectual influence in the faculty and student body was tilted in a more isolationist direction, [Rabbi Lamm] resisted a lot of the tide and deserves a great deal of credit for doing so."

As for candidates to succeed Rabbi Lamm, Professor Lawrence Schiffman, chairman of the department of Hebrew and Judaic studies at NYU, noted: "If you look at the job description — a prominent rabbi with an academic degree capable of raising funds for what is now one of America's leading research universities, according to US News & World Report, this is not an easy bill to fill."

But Schiffman said the YU board could change that model, and not necessarily look to find another Norman Lamm.

A former YU official said the board may opt for splitting the job between an administrative president and a head of the rabbinical school, thus eliminating the friction that existed for the centrist Rabbi Lamm with the more right-wing seminary faculty.

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