



HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
היברו יוניון קולג' – מכון למדעי היהדות  
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## INTERFAITH AWARD BEING NAMED AFTER BELOVED HUC-JIR PROFESSOR

*The McCoy Prize in Interfaith Relations Will Be  
Highlighted at College-Institute's Annual Tribute Dinner*

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**CINCINNATI** -- Lots of students at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion called Professor Lowell McCoy their “favorite rabbi.” It was their ironic way of showing fondness for a beloved teacher.

You see, McCoy is not a rabbi. He’s not even Jewish. He’s an ordained Methodist minister.

Yet for a half century, he taught rabbinical students at HUC-JIR how to be great orators. In doing so, he helped to shape the way hundreds of Reform rabbis deliver sermons across North America and beyond.

Now, an award has been named after McCoy that will help promote interfaith harmony. It’s called the “Reverend Lowell McCoy Prize in Interfaith Relations.”

HUC-JIR will present it annually to the Ph.D. student who has excelled in advancing interfaith relations on and off the Cincinnati Campus. On Oct. 26, the prize will be featured at HUC-JIR’s annual Cincinnati Associates Tribute Dinner at the Hyatt Regency in Cincinnati.

HUC-JIR awarded the prize for the first time at graduation ceremonies in May, presenting it to Rabbi Tamar Duvdevani. She’s pursuing a Ph.D. degree in Talmud, which are rabbinic interpretations of the Torah collected centuries ago. When she is not in Cincinnati studying, she teaches Talmud and rabbinic literature in her native Israel.



Rev. Lowell McCoy

“Since her arrival on campus, Rabbi Duvdevani has become an integral part of campus life,” said Rabbi Jonathan Cohen, Dean of the Cincinnati Campus. “She has supported student learning and emerged as a vibrant presence, adding to our social fabric. The student body’s selection of Rabbi Duvdevani as the first recipient of the McCoy Prize speaks volumes regarding her interactions on and beyond our campus.”



**Rabbi Tamar Duvdevani**

McCoy, 95, who lives in Hyde Park with his wife, Carolyn, is typically modest about the honor of having the award named after him, saying he “learned much more than he taught” and calling it a “unique privilege” to teach at HUC-JIR.

He said it was natural that he would have an effect on interfaith relations on campus because he was the only Christian faculty member at a Jewish seminary. But he had an effect off campus as well, speaking often at churches and synagogues about Christianity and Judaism, drawing on his in-depth knowledge of both.

Students loved him not only for his skill in teaching them how to deliver sermons but also for his one-on-one relationships with them,

which, in many cases, have lasted decades past their ordinations.

“Throughout his career, Lowell endeavored always to build bridges of understanding and friendship between people of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds,” HUC-JIR said in announcing the prize. “The many lifecycle ceremonies he performed for people of different faiths and his lectures to groups of diverse religious beliefs are just a few of the ways that he made an enduring contribution to our community and our country.”

Rabbi David Whiman, who was ordained by HUC-JIR in 1979, described McCoy as a teacher, mentor and friend who invested love and respect into his students.

“Lowell’s gentle manner, kind and caring heart, and commitment to interfaith understanding and love for Reform Judaism make this prize an apt tribute,” Whiman said.

McCoy started his career as a chaplain in the U.S. Army during World War II in Europe, exposing him to all Christian denominations as well as Jews. He came to realize that denominational commitment is not important. Instead, he said what is important are values that connect human beings to one another and working toward the betterment of humanity.

After serving several Methodist congregations, he started his teaching career in the speech departments at Ohio State and the University of Cincinnati. In the late 1940s, Nelson Glueck, then-president of HUC, asked McCoy to help set up a speech program at HUC.

In his 50 years of teaching, McCoy introduced innovative techniques such as recording students' sermons at the beginning and end of semesters so they could hear their improvements and creating a set time each week on campus for all students and faculty to offer feedback about the sermons. At various times, he chaired the faculty and served as an associate dean. He formally retired in 1989, earning the title "professor emeritus," then continued to teach.

HUC-JIR knows of no other Christian minister who taught at a rabbinical school anywhere in the world.

McCoy loves to joke about being in the religious minority on campus. One year at an ordination service, one of the graduates introduced him to his grandmother.

"As she shook my hand," McCoy recalled, "she looked a bit puzzled."

"McCoy...McCoy," she said. "It doesn't sound like a Jewish name." And then her face brightened. "Of course," she said. "Your mother was Jewish."

McCoy worked with students on more than 2,000 sermons and listened to them lead more than 6,000 services in the campus chapel.

Along the way, he said he developed an admiration, respect and affection for Reform Judaism that equals that of his native Christianity. "If I had been born in a Jewish family," he said, "I would have been very happy to have been Jewish."

*Founded in 1875, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion is North America's first institution of higher Jewish education and the academic, spiritual, and professional leadership development center of Reform Judaism. HUC-JIR educates men and women for service to North American and world Jewry as rabbis, cantors, educators, and nonprofit management professionals, and offers graduate programs to scholars and clergy of all faiths. With centers of learning in Cincinnati, Jerusalem, Los Angeles, and New York, HUC-JIR's scholarly resources comprise the renowned Klau Library, the American Jewish Archives, research institutes and centers, and academic publications. In partnership with the Union for Reform Judaism and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, HUC-JIR sustains the Reform Movement's congregations and professional and lay leaders. HUC-JIR's campuses invite the community to cultural and educational programs illuminating Jewish heritage and fostering interfaith and multiethnic understanding.*

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