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New CER programme to help kehilla rabbis deal with modern challenges

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For the first time in Europe the Conference of European Rabbis has launched a programme to secure the future of the rabbinate, strengthening rabbonim in Europe in halocho and kiruv rechokim. The department in charge of training rabbonim has started to implement a three-year project to provide insight and tools to help the community rabbi in the face of challenges, big and small, that arise in communities in Europe of the 21st century.

The programme will be led by the European Beis Din headed by Dayan Chanoch Ehrentreu and members of the standing committee led by Dayan Menachem Geley and a committee of experienced rabbonim in the rabbinate and in kiruv rechokim. This will be headed by Chief Rabbi of Moscow Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt and Rabbi Moshe Lebel, Rosh Yeshivas Toras Chaim in Moscow, who is the rabbinical director of CER.

Rabbi Goldschmidt said in a statement: "The challenges facing community rabbis all over the world and especially in Europe are many;

these need to be dealt with using the right tools for the contemporary reality. The rate of assimilation is very high and community rabbis are the central axis that must stand firm like a protective wall for the mainstream Jewish community that, sadly, in the main does not keep the mitzvos of the Torah."

Rabbi Lebel said: "We are taking steps to provide rabbonim with the right tools and give them adequate preparation to equip them with the spiritual strength they need and enable them to deliver the authentic Jewish message without compromise. They need to be able to present this message in a pleasant manner so that the younger generation will appreciate and reconnect to the timeless values of the Torah and be inspired to join as active members of the community. This is the only way to combat assimilation which is the foremost problem in communities all over Europe. This," he said, "was today more than ever one of the most important duties of the rabbi."

Gadi Gronich, director of the office of the CER president, who is one of the main driving forces behind the initiative under the patronage of

the Patrick and Lina Derhi Fund, said that "the aim of the programme is on the one hand to give the right tools to inexperienced rabbis who are just starting out to be able to tackle the big and small challenges in the best way possible, and to establish a direct line of communication between them and experienced rabbis who have a track record of successful community leadership to whom they should be able to turn to for advice".

The general secretary of the Conference of European Rabbis, Rabbi Ahron Shmuel Baskin who is coordinating the programme said "it comprises of three tracks: firstly, the halachic part to be studied under the existing programme in place at the CER plus its practical implications like kashering kitchens, checking mikvaos, hashgacha on mashgichim in factories and restaurants, family purity, the use of security on Shabbos, arranging marriages and gittin, establishing Jewish identity, family origins and more. Secondly, professional training on the use of computer media, public speaking and rhetoric, fundraising etc. The third part is comprised of halachic mentoring and a general advisory programme from one of



Chief Rabbi Goldschmidt addressing young rabbonim at the launch of the new programme
PHOTO ELI ITKIN

the members of the Conference. For this purpose, a list will be made of suitable rabbonim and halachic experts so that the rabbis will be able to address their relevant questions to them. As part of the programme every participant will have a weekly chavrusa session with his 'personal mentor' from the committee's list of rabbonim or another experienced rabbi with

the aim that the mentor should equip the rabbi with the right tools in his community work and in his personal spiritual development.

"The programme will be spread over three years and there will be several public sessions all over Europe for the participants. In the coming two weeks the candidates will be screened and receive their acceptances into the programme."

