

INTERMARRIED?

REFORM JUDAISM WELCOMES YOU

Yours, mine, ours: Every couple begins with two individuals from different backgrounds. Interfaith couples and their families also face the special challenges posed by different religious traditions and sometimes cultures. For more than thirty years, Reform Judaism has made a commitment to welcoming interfaith couples into congregations, embracing them and their children and offering support and education for their extended families.

Each interfaith love story is unique, but many of them share common themes and concerns. This pamphlet answers some basic questions and suggests additional resources.

OUTREACH & MEMBERSHIP

Strengthening Outreach and Membership in Reform Congregations



UNION FOR
REFORM JUDAISM

אחדות ליברלית רפורמית

SERVING REFORM CONGREGATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA

I AM JEWISH; MY PARTNER IS NOT. ARE WE WELCOME AS A COUPLE TO ATTEND WORSHIP SERVICES IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY?

Yes! The prophet Isaiah said: “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” (Isaiah 56:7) We know from the Torah that from the very earliest days, there have been individuals who lived with the Jewish community but who were not themselves Jewish. Contact your local synagogue to find out about times for Sabbath worship on Friday nights and Saturday mornings, as well as for information about holiday services. For help in finding a synagogue in your neighborhood, see the information on the back of this brochure or visit our website at <http://data.urj.org/conglist>.

I AM NOT JEWISH. ARE THERE PARTS OF THE SERVICE RESERVED ONLY FOR JEWS?

You are welcome at all regular services in the synagogue and, of course, at any life-cycle events to which you are invited (for example, a wedding). Each congregation has its own specifications regarding who may lead services and perform certain roles, but you are welcome to participate in everything that is done or read by the whole congregation at a service. If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to ask the clergy or lay leaders.

I DON'T READ HEBREW. HOW CAN I POSSIBLY FOLLOW THE SERVICE?

Most Reform congregations in North America use both English and Hebrew in the services and provide English translations for many of the Hebrew prayers and readings.

If you wish to participate in reading the Hebrew aloud, transliterations for common prayers in the service are often available. (A transliteration is a phonetically written version of a prayer.)

Transliterations usually appear in the back of Reform prayer books and you can also ask if other transliterations of prayers are available. It is perfectly acceptable to read only the parts of the service with which you feel comfortable or to just sit and listen. If you need help finding the place in the prayer book, simply ask someone nearby. Temple members want visitors to feel welcome and at ease during services.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT JUDAISM? I DON'T WANT TO TAKE A "CONVERSION" CLASS.

Introduction to Judaism, A Taste of Judaism: Are You Curious?[™] and other basic Judaism courses are offered by Reform congregations in many communities. The classes cover such topics as Jewish ideas about God, Torah and other Jewish texts, how to celebrate the holidays and Jewish life-cycle events. A practice Passover seder or a Shabbat event is often featured. Such classes provide you with an opportunity to pose your own questions about Jewish life, belief and practice.

While some of those who take Introduction to Judaism classes may be considering conversion, many take them for other reasons. The classes can be particularly helpful to those who are not Jewish themselves but are considering raising a Jewish child and to those who wish to be more comfortable at Jewish family events, such as a Passover seder. For further information about Introduction to Judaism classes, contact your local congregation or your regional office. A list of regional offices appears on the back of this brochure. Classes in major cities can be located on the web at www.urj.org/outreach/classes.

Many congregations also offer Outreach programming to help members and newcomers (both Jews and non-Jews) learn more about Judaism.

DO I HAVE TO BE JEWISH TO BELONG TO THE TEMPLE? DO I HAVE TO BE JEWISH TO SERVE ON A COMMITTEE OR ON THE BOARD?

Every congregation has its own rules about membership, participation and governance. There is no central authority that dictates these matters. Most congregations include interfaith couples as members and will welcome your participation on committees and in other facets of congregational life. Ask the clergy or lay leaders any questions you have about membership and participation or call the temple office and request to be directed to the proper person.

WILL I BE PRESSURED TO CONVERT IF WE JOIN A SYNAGOGUE?

The Jewish community takes delight in welcoming those who choose to embrace Judaism as their own religion. Our Sages however, have made it very clear that a conversion is not valid if it results from any pressure or coercion. You are welcome in Reform synagogues as a friend of the Jewish people. You do not have to convert.

AS AN INTERFAITH COUPLE, WE WONDER WHAT CHOICES WE HAVE IN PLANNING OUR WEDDING.

Some clergy will officiate at a wedding between a Jew and a non-Jew under certain circumstances; others will not. Most Reform clergy, whether or not they officiate, are eager to meet with you to discuss your individual situation. The issues involved are complex. We encourage you to find a rabbi or cantor with whom you feel comfortable and discuss all your options at length.

Whatever choice you make about your wedding, past or future, you are welcome in Reform synagogues. Reform Judaism is committed to providing an atmosphere of welcome in congregations as well as specific programming that embraces and supports interfaith couples as they make and live out their Jewish choices.

IF A JEW MARRIES A NON-JEW, WHAT ARE THE CHILDREN?

Traditional Jewish law says that membership in the Jewish people is matrilineal, that is, passed through the mother. Therefore, matrilineal descent means that if the mother is a Jew, the children are automatically Jewish, too; but if the father is the Jewish parent, the children are not Jewish regardless of the practice in the family home. However, in 1983, after much study and discussion, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the rabbinic body of the Reform Movement, ruled that children with one Jewish parent (mother or father) will be recognized as Jews if they are raised and educated exclusively as Jews. For Reform Judaism, Jewish identity for children is a matter of parental decision.

For more information about patrilineal descent and how it affects your family, we encourage you to contact a Reform rabbi.

SO IF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY INVOLVES MAKING A CHOICE, HOW DO WE CHOOSE? WHO SHOULD MAKE THE DECISION?

Children depend on their parents to teach them about identity in many areas of life. Interfaith couples must make this decision for themselves and their children. It is our experience that children who are given roots in one tradition are more likely to feel a secure sense of belonging. Children who are raised in both traditions too often feel that they do not truly belong in either community. This is a highly personal decision for parents to make and should be approached with respect for both traditions. Often couples find it helpful to contend with these issues in the context of an interfaith couples group. For referral to such a program, contact a rabbi or your regional office.

Many interfaith couples have chosen to raise their children as Jews, and the Reform Movement welcomes them and their children. In those families, non-Jewish parents often play

a key role in providing for their children's Jewish education and in creating a Jewish home environment. If you have decided to raise your children as Jews, contact your local congregation as early as possible to find out what support programs and which people are available to assist you in learning about Judaism and raising your Jewish children.

WE ARE CONSIDERING ENROLLING OUR CHILD IN A RELIGIOUS SCHOOL. ARE PARENTS WHO ARE NOT JEWS WELCOME TO PARTICIPATE IN RELIGIOUS SCHOOL CLASSROOMS AND EVENTS?

Jewish tradition puts a high value on family life. We encourage both parents to be involved in their child's religious school experience and we welcome your participation. Many congregations offer Outreach and other adult education programming that will help you take part fully and comfortably in your child's religious education.

WHAT ABOUT THE NON-JEWISH GRANDPARENTS? CAN THEY BE PART OF MY JEWISH CHILD'S LIFE?

Yes! A child who knows his or her grandparents is a fortunate child. All grandparents are welcome to attend services and events at the synagogue and your child's religious school. Shabbat dinner on Friday nights constitutes a special time for family gatherings that can include grandparents. Grandparents can share family stories, customs and jokes. A child's relationship with a grandparent is a treasure and should be nurtured.

I HAVE QUESTIONS THAT DO NOT APPEAR IN THIS BROCHURE. HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

For the names of Reform clergy in your area and for more information about Reform Judaism, contact your regional office listed on the back of this brochure for contact information. For more general information about Judaism and to learn more about interfaith relationships, the following books are excellent resources:

Diamont, Anita and Karen Kushner. *How To Be A Jewish Parent*. New York: Schocken Books Inc., 2000.

Einstein, Stephen J., and Lydia Kukoff. *Every Person's Guide to Judaism*. New York: URJ Press, 1989.

Friedland, Ronnie, and Edmund Case, eds. *The Guide to Jewish Interfaith Family Life: An Interfaithfamily.com Handbook*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001.

Keen, Jim. *Inside Intermarriage: A Christian Partner's Perspective on Raising a Jewish Family*. New York: URJ Press, 2006.

Kertzer, Morris N. *What is a Jew?* Revised by Lawrence Hoffman. New York: Touchstone, 1996.

King, Andrea. *If I'm Jewish and You're Christian, What are the Kids?* New York: URJ Press, 1993.

Levin, Sunie. *Mingled Roots: A Guide for Grandparents of Interfaith Children*. New York: URJ Press, 2003.

Many good resources are available on the Internet:

- The William and Lottie Daniel Department of Outreach and Membership
www.urj.org/outreach
- www.urj.org/educate/parent The Jewish Parent Page informs and educates about the Jewish holidays and their customs.
- www.interfaithfamily.com, a webzine and community calendar for programs for interfaith couples

UNION FOR REFORM JUDAISM REGIONAL OFFICES

Canadian Council	416.630.0375
Great Lakes Council/ Chicago Federation	847.239.6990
Contact Julie Webb	jwebb@urj.org
Greater New York Council	212.870.2900
Mid-Atlantic Council	202.232.4242
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Midwest Council	314.997.7566
New Jersey-West Hudson Valley Council	201.722.9090
Northeast Council	781.449.0404
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