



# The Connection

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### Message from the President

We're pleased to provide our third semi-annual report on progress in fulfilling InterfaithFamily.com's mission: **to empower interfaith families to make Jewish choices** for themselves and their children, and to **encourage the Jewish community to be welcoming of** interfaith families.

Through our **website** and our **advocacy membership association**, the InterfaithFamily.com Network, **we provide supportive educational information, build community, connect interfaith families to local Jewish communities, and advocate for inclusive attitudes, policies and practices.**

In the past six months, we focused on:

- providing timely new content, including issues on Mel Gibson's *The Passion* and on the challenges faced by young people with Jewish fathers ("patrilineal" Jews);
- building participation by Jewish organizations in our **Connections In Your Area** service;
- publicizing InterfaithFamily.com in the secular media; and
- preparing for the next phase of our advocacy work in response to new groups and reports unfavorable to outreach.

### New Advisory Board Members

We're extremely pleased to welcome two eminent outreach leaders to our Advisory Board:

■ Rabbi Rachel Cowan (below on right), co-author of *Mixed Blessings: Marriage Between Jews and Christians*, and former Program Director for Jewish Life at the Nathan Cummings Foundation; and

■ Rosanne Levitt (below on left), founder and director for 18 years of the Interfaith Connection at the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco. They join our other wise and helpful Advisory Board members: Anita Diamant, Lydia Kukoff, Ginny MacDowell, Rabbi Bernard Mehlman, Newton Minow, Sylvia Rothchild, and Rabbi Harold White.



### Expanding Our Reach

The number of **Subscribers**--people who receive our bi-weekly "e-letter" describing the new issue of our Internet magazine--has increased to over 7,500. Readership on our website continues to reach new highs: as of March, we had **over 68,000 monthly visitor sessions** and **almost 27,000 monthly users--a more than 80% increase** over the past year! We're proud of our three-year growth record:

Monthly high As of March:	Visitor Sessions	Unique Visitors
2001	19,491	8,433
2002	26,666 (up 37%)	11,081 (up 31%)
2003	37,465 (up 40%)	14,443 (up 30%)
2004	68,166 (up 82%)	26,864 (up 86%)

## From Our Readers

"Your site is very helpful all the time. A great source of information!"

Tami S, March 5

"Excellent issue on *The Passion*!!

I've printed out three of the articles. I chair the Community Relations Council of the local Jewish Federation. The articles may come in handy during a post-film discussion."

Bill L, February 20

"I am trying a new format for a parents group using the InterfaithFamily.com book as a basis for discussion.

I recommend your site to all my groups."

Ruth G, January 21

"Just a note to say how much I appreciated finding your article on inclusion of interfaith Jewish families. I was searching for naming ceremonies for our soon-to-be-born grandchild, whose mother is not Jewish."

Bonnie K, January 7

# Educating and Supporting Interfaith Families

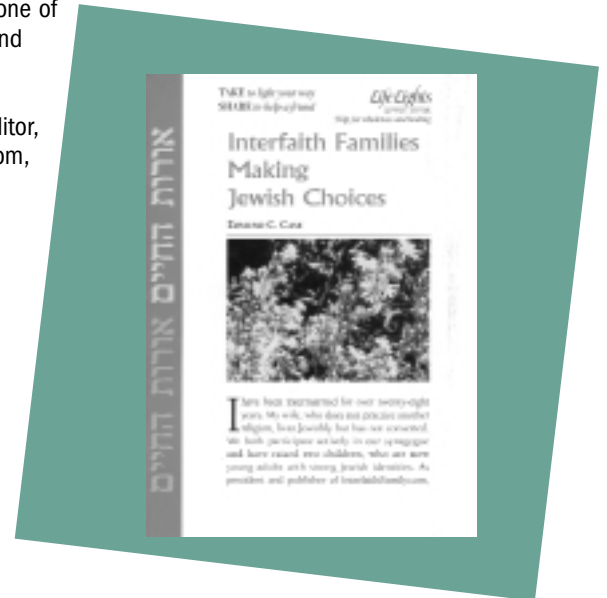
We strive to be topical, current and engaging. Since last Fall, in addition to covering some of our important recurring subjects--the December holidays, Passover and Easter, and extended family relationships--we've had:

- a helpful two-part series on interfaith mourning--explaining Jewish mourning customs and looking at how different interfaith families handled complicated mourning issues;
- a special two-part series on growing up in interfaith families, including a moving issue on the challenges faced by patrilineal Jews;
- an enlightening two-part series on Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion* (one on how stereotypes of a partner's religion affect the other partner, and one featuring film reviews by interfaith couples); and
- a memorial to Egon Mayer, a pioneering advocate for welcoming interfaith families into the Jewish community, who tragically died at age 59 in January.

We also reprinted a series of articles on the interfaith family connections of several of the Democratic candidates for president. We're excited about one of our coming topics: interfaith family infertility and adoption issues.

We welcome your input--please contact our editor, Ronnie Friedland, at [ronnief@interfaithfamily.com](mailto:ronnief@interfaithfamily.com), if you're interested in writing or to suggest topics you'd like us to address.

We'd like to do more in print media. In March Jewish Lights Publishing released our new pamphlet, *Interfaith Families Making Jewish Choices*, as part of their *LifeLights* series, which accompanies our book, *The Guide to Jewish Interfaith Family Life: An InterfaithFamily.com Handbook*.



## Building Community

We continue to hear from readers that InterfaithFamily.com **makes them feel that they are not alone** and that **learning how others have dealt with situations** is most helpful to them. Our moderated online discussions continue to be places where readers actively "talk" with and learn from each other. Here are excerpts from some recent postings:

- What do I say as a Catholic to allay whatever religious fears she may have of a relationship with me, including marriage? I'm open to raising children Jewish and keeping kosher if I can keep being Catholic on my own. Thanks for any advice. Jon M, February 29
- Thank you so much for your thoughtful replies. This is very hard work, raising a child Jewish outside of my tradition. But just these small comments of support make such a huge difference. Penelope, December 7
- Recently whenever we discuss [what to do with our future children] he gets really upset. So we have been ignoring it. What can I say to him that will make him understand how important this discussion is? How did other couples deal with this issue or how did you approach this? Thank you so much for your help. Leah S., March 17

We also build community when we help readers connect to local outreach programs listed in **Connections In Your Area**. A few of the requests we've recently answered: about helpful books, workshops in Nashville, groups in Dallas, organizations in Vancouver, help designing a wedding ceremony, and help connecting with other interfaith couples.

# Connecting Interfaith Families to Local Jewish Communities

With generous funding from the Richard & Rhoda Goldman Fund and in partnership with another non-profit, PlanitJewish.com, in September we launched **PlanitJewish/InterfaithFamily.com Connections In Your Area**. This powerful interactive, searchable organization listing and program calendar allows our users to search for welcoming organizations and events in their local communities across North America, receive weekly program reminders, invite friends to events, give feedback, and more. It enables any Jewish organization that wants to reach interfaith families to create and edit its own "Organization Page" listing any information it chooses.

As of March, we had over 200 listing organizations, almost 2,000 unique visitors, and over 5,000 visitor sessions a month to the new system. Dru Greenwood, the Reform Movement's national outreach director, encourages Reform synagogues to use the system. Andrea Hoffman, Hillel's Director of Program Development, encourages Hillel program staff to use our new "Campus" section. As a Program Partner of the Jewish Community Center Association, we continue to attract local JCC listings, and we're developing a relationship with the Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies.

We'd be glad to list **your** organization-- email us at [connections@interfaithfamily.com](mailto:connections@interfaithfamily.com).

## Most Popular Articles

Our **Archive** now contains over 880 articles on every topic of interest to people in interfaith relationships.

Since last Fall, in addition to articles about *The Passion* and about the presidential candidates, the articles that were most frequently referred by readers to their friends include:

- *A Catholic Priest's Perspective on Interfaith Marriage*, by Father Walter Cuenin;
- *Ten Tips to Avoiding Conflict in an Interfaith Marriage*, by Jim Keen;
- *Family Hanukkah Celebrations, Plus Recipes*, by Jayne Cohen; and
- *The A-B-C's of Interfaith Parenting*, by Wendy Harris.

# Advocating for Inclusive Attitudes, Policies and practices

The InterfaithFamily.com Network continues its work as **the leading grass-roots advocate for a Jewish community that is welcoming and inclusive of interfaith families**. In 2003 we conducted the Network's **"We're Interfaith Families... Connecting with Jewish Life" Essay Contest**, a campaign to raise public awareness made possible by generous support from the Walter & Elise Haas Fund. The Contest was featured in two Jewish Telegraphic Agency stories in late November. We continue to distribute our *New York Jewish Week* October 10 "op-ed," **Learning from Interfaith Families**, and we're working to arrange publication of the Contest entries in a book or report soon.

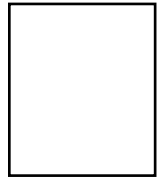
The need to advocate for a more welcoming community remains as great as ever. In November a new group surfaced, the "Jewish In-Marriage Initiative." We of course fully support Jews marrying other Jews, but our concern is that these proponents of in-marriage demean intermarriage as "wrong" or "bad" or worse; we believe welcoming, not pushing away, is the way to help insure a positive Jewish outcome. In November, *The Forward* published our letter on this debate, and we were also featured in a story in *The New Jersey Jewish News*.

March saw the publication of Sylvia Barack Fishman's new book, *Double or Nothing? Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage*. Her central conclusion--that the vast majority of mixed married families who say they are raising their children as Jews are not transmitting Jewish identity because they have Christmas and Easter festivities in their homes--is inconsistent with the lessons of our Essay Contest and what the readers and writers of InterfaithFamily.com express every day.

We're concerned that Jewish leaders will begin to say that the "latest research" shows that encouraging interfaith families to raise their children as Jews, or spending any money trying to do so, is not worthwhile. We've submitted a number of "op-ed" and other pieces countering *Double or Nothing's* arguments, and will be attending conferences and programs in the coming months about the book.

Our advocacy efforts are strengthened when we represent increasing numbers of members. We now have over 360 **Associate Members**, who ask to be included among the people that the Network represents, and over 450 **Supporting Members**, who have made a dues contribution of \$36 or more. If you're not a Supporting Member yet--please join us!

InterfaithFamily.com  
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# The Connection

## We Welcome Your Interest

InterfaithFamily.com today is a unique and critically important resource to interfaith families and to the Jewish community, and we are poised to expand our important message of welcome to a vastly larger audience.

To learn more about our work, please contact Edmund Case at [edc@interfaithfamily.com](mailto:edc@interfaithfamily.com) or 617 581 6805.

## Getting the Word Out

Marketing continues to be a major challenge and opportunity. While pleased with our steady readership growth, we need to greatly expand awareness of InterfaithFamily.com. We continue to enjoy good coverage in the Jewish press, with several mentions in Jewish Telegraphic Agency articles, two featured articles in *Jewish.com's* weekly email, and quotes in an important article about intermarriage, *Married to It*, in the *Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles*.

We recently began an effort to impact the secular press--which our target audience is more likely to read. With the help of Birnbach Communications, we revamped the **About IFF** section of our website to offer information of interest to reporters, and began approaching religion and family writers at secular papers in selected major cities and national publications. So far we've had mentions in the *San Jose Mercury News* and *The Washington Post*, and we've been interviewed by one of the major national news magazines and some regional parenting papers. We were also the subject of an extensive profile in *Newton Magazine*.

We've continued to speak to congregations and Jewish groups, and are participating at upcoming conferences of the Jewish Multiracial Network, the Conference of Rural New England Jews, and the Jewish Outreach Institute in June.

## Making Our Work Possible

**InterfaithFamily.com** relies on grants and tax-deductible charitable contributions to make our work possible. Our institutional funders include the Richard & Rhoda Goldman Fund, the Walter & Elise Haas Fund (which made a new grant of \$60,000 in December), Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Boston, and the Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation. We also enjoy the support of an involved Board of Directors, our Advisory Board, and other individuals.

Like most non-profits facing a difficult fund-raising environment, we need to expand our individual and foundation support. Our "core" expense budget for 2004 is \$250,000. Funding permitting, we would increase 2004 expenses to \$320,000, and to \$425,000 by 2005, to accomplish our Long-Range Plan objectives.

Our position remains unique among the organizations working to make the Jewish communal response to intermarriage a positive one. InterfaithFamily.com **is the only national organization that focuses on reaching, working with and encouraging interfaith families themselves, and advocating on a grass-roots level as their "voice"**--a voice that must continue to be heard.

