



Contact : Norman Birnbach
781.639.6701
birnbach@birnbachcom.com



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Contact: Norman Birnbach
Birnbach Communications
781.639.6701
birnbach@birnbachcom.com

December Dilemma Survey Provides Insights about Interfaith Families and Holiday Celebrations

For Most, Christmas and Hanukkah, Though Celebrated the Same Day This Year, Do
Not Add up to “Chrismukkah”

Boston – December 6, 2005 – Hanukkah and Christmas fall on the same day this year but that won’t affect how most interfaith families celebrate their holidays.

According to the 2005 December Dilemma Survey, released by InterfaithFamily.com, (www.interfaithfamily.com), an independent non-profit publisher and advocacy membership association, most interfaith families will celebrate both holidays, but two-thirds of respondents said they will keep their celebrations separate.

Survey respondents say they participate in both holidays celebrations to share in, honor and respect traditions from both sides of their family. However, complicating holiday schedules for more than one million U.S. interfaith households is that for only the fourth time in 100 years, Hanukkah officially begins sunset on Dec. 25th.

Thirty percent will change how they celebrate Hanukkah by lighting a menorah at their non-Jewish relatives’ home on Dec. 25 and eat potato pancakes known as *latkes* with Christmas dinner. Nineteen percent say they will shorten Christmas celebrations to conclude before Hanukkah celebrations begin at night. Others will delay their Hanukkah celebrations.

Despite last year’s attention to “Chrismukkah,” the fictional holiday from the Fox drama “The OC” that combines elements of both holidays, only 57 percent have heard of Chrismukkah. Seventy-eight percent think Chrismukkah is a bad idea because the different backgrounds, meanings and significance of the two holidays are lost when combined and because blending them can confuse children. In contrast, just six percent of respondents feel Chrismukkah is a good idea.

“Because of Chrismukkah and because the holidays occur the same day, there’s been increased concern about the blending of religious traditions known as religious ‘syncretism,’ but the 2005 December Dilemma Survey found that’s not happening,” says Edmund Case, publisher, InterfaithFamily.com.

The 2005 December Dilemma Survey, which fielded responses from 396 people nationwide in October, is the second annual survey designed to understand how people in interfaith families celebrate their own and their partners' holidays and to gain insight into those celebrations. The survey respondents were self-selected, and 81 percent who said they have children raise them as Jews, in comparison to the 33 percent reported in the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-2001. While the survey is not representative of all interfaith families, it provides important new information about interfaith families raising their children as Jews – a very important demographic for Jewish continuity.

“This year’s survey uncovered or confirmed important insights into interfaith families. For example, many interfaith families make a point to honor traditions of both partners while raising children with a single religious identity,” Case adds.

Consistent with last year, the 2005 December Dilemma Survey contains positive news for the Jewish community. For many survey respondents, celebrating Christmas actually strengthens their children’s Jewish identity because Jewish religious identity is formed throughout the year, not just in December. According to one respondent, her daughter “is very clear that this is not her holiday, that she celebrates her mother’s tradition.”

Interestingly, some Jews in interfaith families who participate in Christmas celebrations continue to report residual discomfort. Although 71 percent have Christmas trees in their homes, 30 percent of them feel uncomfortable with its presence.

About InterfaithFamily.com

InterfaithFamily.com (www.interfaithfamily.com) is an independent non-profit publisher and advocacy membership association that works to encourage Jewish choices by interfaith families and increase acceptance of interfaith families by the Jewish community. InterfaithFamily.com publishes a bi-weekly online magazine that reaches out directly to interfaith families, delivering helpful, non-judgmental information about handling situations that arise in interfaith families. InterfaithFamily.com also produced the first-of-its-kind anthology, *The Guide to Jewish Interfaith Family Life: An InterfaithFamily.com Handbook* (Jewish Lights Publishing), to offer much-needed support for interfaith families seeking to explore Jewish life. InterfaithFamily.com is the only national organization that focuses exclusively on reaching out to and helping interfaith families themselves, and advocating on a grass-roots level as their "voice."

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EDITOR’S NOTE: InterfaithFamily.com has developed “Handling the December Holidays: Tips from InterfaithFamily.com” to help interfaith families have a more enjoyable and meaningful holiday season. For a free copy of “Handling the December Holidays,” please send an email to network@interfaithfamily.com.