

Dear Supporter,

Like many non-profits, InterfaithFamily.com has been challenged by the economic downturn and the Madoff fraud. I am relieved to tell you that after after reducing our spending and receiving help from some very generous foundations and individuals, we are close to being "out of the woods" with respect to our 2009 funding – see [Finances and Development](#) below.

As you will read in this Update, our activities on behalf of people in interfaith relationships have not been derailed, but continue to grow on all dimensions – site traffic has increased, more welcoming organizations have listed on our site, more couples have been referred to clergy, and more clergy have been helped by our resources. We are looking forward to launching our re-designed website with enhanced functionality in the coming months. And we continue to advocate for the preservation of outreach programs that target people in interfaith relationships, which are again at risk in a time of limited resources.

As always, we welcome your feedback, comments and advice.

Organizational Highlights

1. Strategic Plan and Priorities

Last September we adopted an ambitious three-year strategic plan under which our spending and staff would nearly double. In light of the economic climate we have scaled back our near-term goals.

Key elements of our 2009 Strategic Priorities Plan include:

- **Education:** implement our redesigned website with new functionality enabling personalized delivery of content, add three new Resource Guides, add multimedia and video, and re-package personal narrative content.
- **Connections:** implement new website functionality replacing our current Connections In Your Area system, increase our organization and professionals listings to 650, increase our Jewish clergy officiation referral list to 340, increase the number of officiation referrals we make to 140 a month, and recruit 80 couples and 500 individuals to use our new social networking functionality.
- **Advocacy:** continue the activities of the Resource Center for Jewish Clergy, with modest additions of content to the "for clergy only" section, one or two local/regional clergy conferences, and continuing one-on-one clergy consultations.
- **Marketing:** digital and social marketing to reach goals of 8,000 email newsletter subscribers and 320,000 annual unique visitors.
- **Organizational:** conduct a second online user survey, and grow our Board to 15 with new members from Atlanta, Chicago, San Francisco and/or Washington, D.C.

If you would like a copy of our 2009 Strategic Priorities Plan, please email me at edc@interfaithfamily.com.

2. Board Activity

Building on last year's development process, our Board has been very active. We have created Executive, Governance, and Finance/Audit committees and adopted term limits, job descriptions and committee best practices proposed by the Governance Committee. The Executive and Finance/Audit Committees have met monthly to monitor our financial condition. In February there were several Board changes:

- We are very grateful to Arthur Obermayer, a founding Board member, for his years of service. Arthur has resigned from the Board but fortunately will continue on our Advisory Board.
- We are honored to have Rabbi Rim Meiorowitz and David Rokoff join the Board. Rabbi Meiorowitz was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary and is the rabbi at Temple Shir Tikvah (Reform) in Winchester, Mass. David Rokoff, a retired attorney, is a past member of the national Board of the Union for Reform Judaism and a past president of Temple Beth Elohim in Wellesley, Mass.



Rabbi Rim Meiorowitz, David Rokoff

3. Staff Changes

Rabbi Lev Baesh, the director of our [Resource Center for Jewish Clergy](#), transitioned from a staff position as of January 1 and is continuing to serve as RCJC director on a consulting basis. The RCJC director staff position is open until we have funding to cover it. Amy O'Donnell, who was our first development director, decided to pursue other interests and left us in December.

February 2009

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Education Activities

1. Content Resources

We continue to publish content on a daily basis, with many new personal narratives, and since December we've had a new wedding blog, *The Hitch*, with a couple blogging about interfaith issues as they come up in their wedding planning.

We continue to add to our "how-to" content:

- In December we published the next in our series of Resource Guides, *The Guide to Hanukkah for Interfaith Families*.
- In February our new *Jewish Holidays Cheat Sheet* got rave reviews.
- Our *Guide to Birth Ceremonies for Interfaith Families* is now [completely online](#).

Finally, we've now published 10 posts in our video blog, *Rabbi Reuben's Ruminations*, featuring Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben of Pacific Palisades, Calif., and produced in partnership with the [Jewish TV Network](#).

If you don't receive our biweekly email newsletter highlighting our newest content and would like to do so, [click here](#).

Connections Activities



1. Jewish Clergy Officiation Referral Service

Our Jewish clergy officiation referral service continues to provide a very useful resource for interfaith couples looking for a rabbi or cantor to officiate or co-officiate at their weddings – a service for which there is great demand. In 2009 we responded to 1,239 requests, an average of 103 a month, from around the country (and a few from around the world). In January we responded to 143, our highest number ever.

Rabbi Baesh receives many thank yous after he responds to requests for help finding a wedding officiant. Here is the latest example, received on March 9:

Thanks so much for the quick response and all of this information. It is very helpful. ... What you are doing is really useful to all of us starting an interfaith family.

IFF now has 275 rabbis and cantors to whom we make referrals. Interested clergy should take our [Jewish clergy survey](#).

2. Connections In Your Area

We now have 553 organizations and professionals listed on our [Connections In Your Area](#) system, from more than 130 communities across North America. Some interesting new additions include:

- A [neighborhood cultural group](#) in the Chicago area.
- A [Washington DC social justice minyan](#) that meets monthly on Friday nights.
- A [Conservative movement pilot program](#) aimed at nursery school parents in the New York area.

Just being listed on our website helps organizations and professionals connect with people in interfaith relationships. For example, in December a rabbi in the Los Angeles area emailed me to say, "I wanted to let you know that I received a call from someone wanting me to officiate at a baby naming service. She found my name on the IFF website. Thanks for encouraging me to sign up with you."

But we also take extra steps to help publicize particular programs:

- In January, for example, our friends at [Israel Encounter](#) in Atlanta emailed us to say "Thanks for all your help in getting the word out" after we sent an email newsletter to our subscribers in the Atlanta area about a subsidized Israel trip for interfaith couples.
- In February, a professional from [The Winchevsky Centre](#) in Toronto emailed our network director, Robin Schwartz, after we featured one of their programs on our home page: "How wonderful!! Many thanks for giving us this extra support in helping us promote our event."

In January we decided to focus our connections and other activities for six-month periods on two metropolitan areas at a time, starting with Atlanta and Chicago. We also developed a "Local Community Initiative" describing how this focusing can help a community raise awareness that it welcomes people in interfaith relationships, which we hope will appeal to funders who are particularly interested in their local communities. If you would like a copy of our Local Community Initiative, please email me at edc@interfaithfamily.com.

3. Discussions

Activity on our [discussion boards](#) continues to grow dramatically; we had nearly 16,000 page views in February 2009, almost double the activity one year earlier, and more than 200 new posts. The conversations touch on wide-ranging aspects of interfaith family life and it is especially gratifying when site users respond with their own experiences in response to other users' questions.

In [one recent example](#), a Jewish woman getting serious with a man who is not Jewish said "I've heard so many ... bleak statistics about failed interfaith marriages.... Anyone have any success stories to share?" After another visitor responded, she said "Thank you so much for your kind words and advice.... It means a lot to know that other couples have chosen unique relationships and have been rewarded with happiness."

4. Social Network

As previously reported, we are engaged in a major functionality redesign of our website. It's a very complicated project and will be implemented in phases. While we still hope to see initial implementation in May, we are anticipating some delay before it is complete. When fully implemented, the new functionality will be very user-friendly both for organizations and professionals to list themselves and their programs, and for people in interfaith relationships to find what they are looking for.



For an advance look at how program providers will be able to use the new functionality, [click here](#).

Advocacy Activities

1. Resource Center for Jewish Clergy

We remain the only Jewish organization providing a cross-denominational resource to help clergy address issues that arise with interfaith couples and families. The password-protected, "for clergy only" section of our website now has 24 articles written by rabbis, for rabbis, on why they do or do not officiate at weddings of interfaith couples, and videos of two rabbi interviews. The "for clergy only" pages were viewed 1,524 times from October through February. Clergy who would like access to these resources should take our [Jewish clergy survey](#). We submitted our articles to the Central Conference of American Rabbis Task Force on Intermarriage in November.

Rabbi Baesh spoke to the Senior Seminar at the Cincinnati campus of Hebrew Union College in December. On February 4, Rabbi Baesh facilitated our second workshop for rabbis to discuss the officiation issue, in Philadelphia (the first was in May 2008 in Boston). There were 14 rabbis and rabbinical students present. Five did not officiate at interfaith weddings or had not yet. One participant said it was his first opportunity in 20 years as a rabbi to have a meaningful discussion of the issue.

Rabbi Baesh also conducted a meeting in February of Boston area rabbis to discuss end-of-life issues in interfaith families. There was consensus about the need for resource materials and forums for discussion of these issues.

2. Surveys and Speaking Engagements

We had 1,229 respondents to our [fifth annual December Holidays survey](#), almost 50% more than the prior year, and 802 to our fifth annual Passover/Easter survey, an increase of 28% from the prior year.

I spoke at [Temple Emanu-El](#) (Reform) in Marblehead MA in December. Rabbi Baesh conducted several sessions at Limmud Stockholm in November, did a training for BBYO regional directors in New England in December and taught several sessions at Limmud NY in January.



3. Advocacy Writing

We are concerned that the economic downturn and challenges facing non-profit organizations will lead to a reduction in support for programs that target people in interfaith relationships. The Reform movement recently announced that it is closing its regional offices and eliminating its national program departments, presumably including the department of outreach and synagogue membership. As I wrote on IFF's [Network Blog](#),

Everyone ... should be deeply concerned about the implications of these developments on outreach to interfaith families, which the Reform movement pioneered and has led for more than 25 years. ...

We hope that as its reorganization takes shape the URJ will preserve and continue to utilize the expertise of its national and regional outreach professionals – and in particular, we believe it is critically important that the team in Boston stay together and continue with their very effective work.

Earlier, in January, in his first article as the new editor of [Commentary magazine](#), Jonathan Tobin argued for a "circle the wagons" approach against reaching out to interfaith families in a time of limited resources. I submitted this [letter to the editor](#):

I take exception to Jonathan Tobin's comment ("The Madoff Scandal and the Future of American Jewry," February 2009) that "the results of the past two decades suggest that the outreach model is a failure." Tobin quotes Gary Tobin's estimate that the annual amount of Jewish philanthropic giving is \$5 billion. InterfaithFamily.com tracks all outreach programs that target interfaith families; the Jewish community spends less than \$4 million on such programs — less than 1/10 of 1% of its total spending. The outreach model cannot be deemed a failure because it has never been implemented on a national scale.

Moreover, Tobin's statement that "what data there are indicate that these efforts have done little to renew the commitment of Jews on the margins..." is also wrong. Boston is the only local community where the federation has funded outreach programs for interfaith families in an organized and comprehensive fashion and conducted regular demographic studies. Sixty percent of Boston's interfaith families are raising their children as Jews, causing its Jewish community to increase in size, and CJP's annual campaign also has grown steadily, from \$25 million in 2000 to \$42 million in 2008. The Boston example shows that a Jewish community that is open to and seeks to engage everyone — including interfaith families — can indeed renew the commitment of Jews and non-Jews on the margins to the community and its future.

Marketing

1. Search Engine Optimization and Marketing

Our traffic in December was our highest ever, with more than 38,500 unique visitors (the first month we had more than 30,000 unique visitors), 35% higher than December 2007. Fourth quarter traffic was 48% higher this year than last.



Of 44,551 December visits, 4,053, or 9%, came from paid search results on Google; and 938, or 2%, came from links on Facebook. Our Facebook fan page now has 256 fans – just click [here](#) to join.

After more than a year of effort, we got a link to our website placed on [theknot.com](#), the most popular wedding website.

2. Press and Other Mentions

In the past four months:

- The Rabbinical Assembly, the association of Conservative rabbis, publicized IFF's resources in its November-December 2008 newsletter.
- The Union for Reform Judaism's [December 12, 2008, email newsletter](#) highlighted an article reprinted from our site.
- On January 5, 2009, I was interviewed on an [NECN TV](#) news report on the Madoff fraud.
- Later in January Director of Web Strategy Micah Sachs sent a [letter to the editor](#) of the [San Diego Jewish Journal](#) about an insulting, misinformed column titled "Shiksas are for Practice."
- Julie Wiener mentioned us in "[Jewish Outreach in Lean Times](#)," her February 27, 2009, "In the Mix" column in *The (New York) Jewish Week*.

Key Metrics and Testimonials

- **Website traffic:** We had more than 291,000 unique visitors to our website in the 12 months ending February 28, 2009.
- **Bi-weekly email newsletter:** Our February 17 email newsletter was sent to 7,468 mailable email addresses.
- **Organizations listed on Connections In Your Area:** We had a net gain of 35 organizations added to our [Connections In Your Area](#) system between October 1 and February 28, bringing the total to 553, from more than 130 communities across North America.
- **Requests for Jewish clergy officiation referrals:** 496 from October 1 through February 28, an average of 95 a month. January 2009 was our highest month ever, with 143 requests.



We are gratified by the expressions of thanks we regularly receive in emails and on our discussion boards. We thought you'd like to see some of the actual messages from the last four months:

Becca, February 18, 2009, commenting on [Defining Birthright: Finding Personal Meaning](#):

i cried after i read this. i'm trying to go on a birth right trip and i am in your situation, jewish father/non jewish mother. you made me feel so much better about applying

Becky, December 22, 2008, commenting on [So You Want to Be a Jewish Mother but You're Not Jewish](#):

This is a tremendously helpful article. I'm a non-Jewish woman preparing to start a life with a Jewish man, and not quite willing to convert, but thrilled to raise Jewish children. There are very few resources available for my situation, so thanks.

Andrea, February 3, 2009, commenting on the [Jewish Holidays Cheat Sheet](#):

How did you know that I was looking for this exact thing just this weekend! We are an interfaith family -- I am Jewish and my husband was raised Catholic. He recently gave the "green light" to our son (who is also just about to turn six), to start Sunday School at the synagogue we just joined last September. Joshua is now hearing about these holidays which I need to re-educate myself about! Thank you for this resource and for your website. It has been important to us in this inter-faith journey...

Bajito, January 13, 2009, commenting on [How One Phone Call Helped Me Convert to Judaism](#):

this article gave me the courage to call my temple and schedule a time to talk about conversion. THANKS!!

Carlyn, March 9, 2009, email to Robin Schwartz, InterfaithFamily.com's Network Director:

I have been on your website many times and used it as a resource for Mother's Circle. It is excellent.

Finance and Development

We ended up raising \$870,000 in 2008, which was flat with 2007 and satisfactory, given the economic climate.

Our fundraising efforts for 2009 have accelerated and we are especially grateful to our supporters in these challenging times. In addition to some significant private grants, we have been awarded renewed and/or new funding from the Samuel Bronfman Foundation, the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, the Lippman Kanfer Family Foundation, the Joyce and Irving Goldman Family Foundation, the Jack and Goldie Wolfe Miller Fund, and several generous Board members and individuals.

We are monitoring our expense budget and income projection closely, with monthly review by our Board Executive and Finance/Audit Committees. We started the year with \$140,000 in the bank, a cushion that we plan to maintain through the year and into 2010. We still have a desired 2009 expense budget of \$996,800, which among other things would fill the open RCJC director staff position, but we have reduced our current working 2009 expense budget to \$860,000 by a series of cost-cutting measures including not filling open positions, a voluntary pay cut for senior management and reduced editorial and conference spending. As of mid-March we are comfortable projecting income of \$780,000, so we still need to raise \$80,000 to cover our working expense, and of course more to cover our desired budget.

Thank You for Your Interest!

We appreciate your support and interest very much. We welcome your input and advice--please let us know what you think of our progress.

And please help us by forwarding this update to anyone who might be interested in our work.

[Send to a Friend](#)

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edmund C. Case". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Edmund C. Case, CEO