



# Temple Emanuel Welcomes **Interfaith Families**

Temple Emanuel  
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[www.templeemanuel.com](http://www.templeemanuel.com)

# Welcome

We would like to extend a warm welcome to Temple Emanuel to anyone seeking a connection to God, to Torah, or simply wanting to learn more about the Jewish people. This includes Jews, people who are thinking about or working towards becoming Jews, and people whom our tradition calls *rey'im ahuvim*, beloved companions, those who are not interested in converting to Judaism but would like to know more about Judaism or wish to be supportive of Jews in their family.

The Hebrew word *keruv* means “drawing near”. Temple Emanuel has many opportunities to welcome interfaith families into our community by drawing us nearer to one another.

Interfaith families who are considering joining our Temple community may have questions about Temple Emanuel and its practices. This booklet is intended to help answer some of those questions. In addition, each of our rabbis is happy to meet with potential members to discuss these issues in greater depth. You may contact the rabbis by calling our synagogue office at 617-558-8100. You may also contact the co-chairs of our Keruv Committee; their names and numbers are available through the Temple office.

## Participation in Synagogue Activities

Everyone is welcome to participate in Temple Emanuel's worship services, educational programs, and community activities. If you are attending our worship services but are not familiar with our practices, here are some broad guidelines. You may sit anywhere in the sanctuary, except at the High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when we do have assigned seats because of our high attendance. All men must wear a head covering (*kippah*) at our services and while engaged in other activities in the Temple building as well. *Kippot* (plural of *kippah*) are available inside the entrances to the synagogue and outside the sanctuary as well. Women may choose to wear a *kippah* or other headcovering and a *tallit* (prayer shawl) during services. While it is traditional for all Jewish men to wear a *tallit* during services, a *tallit* is not worn by non-Jews. We have in our Sanctuary a transliterated prayerbook, *Siddur Eit Ratzon*, which will help a person unfamiliar with Hebrew to follow along in our Sabbath worship.

## Marriage

Our rabbis are available for consultation and discussion regarding marriages, although they may not participate in a wedding itself unless both members of the couple are Jewish. There is a tradition known as an *aufbruch* where the groom and, more recently, the bride as well, are called to the Torah for an *aliyah* on the Shabbat before their wedding, and they also receive a special blessing for their marriage. In the case of an interfaith couple, the Jewish member of the couple may have an *aliyah* and receive a blessing for the future.

## Baby Naming Ceremonies

Baby namings for girls take place in our synagogue, while boys have their baby naming at the same time as the *brit milah* (ritual circumcision — see section on Conversion). When a baby is named in the synagogue, it is traditional for both parents to participate in a blessing known as the *misheberach*. The *misheberach* asks God for blessings for the child being named. Both parents, Jew and non-Jew, appear on the *bimah* (pulpit) for the *misheberach*. The child is given a Hebrew name, which usually includes “daughter/son of [parents' names].”

The non-Jewish parent's name may be used with the Jewish parent's name in the blessing in English. In addition, when a baby is named in the synagogue, it is traditional for the Jewish parents to be called to the Torah with their child for an *aliyah* (called to the Torah). However, only a Jew may have an aliyah. This is because the nature of an aliyah recognizes the particular covenant between God and the Jewish people. We respect the faith and life choices of those who are not Jewish and cannot ask them to affirm that which is not in their tradition.

In addition, our rabbis will happily bless new grandparents on the *bimah* on the birth of any grandchild or do a celebration with a family for a baby who will be converted but has not yet been to the *mikvah* (a ritual bath).

## Children Attending Our Nursery School

Our Nursery School imbues our children with a love of Jewish tradition and rituals. Our children celebrate *Shabbat* (Sabbath) every Friday afternoon with prayers over wine and *challah* (bread). They hear the sound of the *shofar* before Rosh Hashanah. They eat a meal in the *sukkah* (temporary dwelling) during the holiday of Sukkot. They help light the Chanukah candles. They passionately boo the tyrant, Haman, on Purim. They talk about Pharaoh and the exodus from Egypt at model *seders* (Passover meals).

All children whose families want them to share in these experiences, including interfaith families, are welcome in our Nursery School.

## Children Attending Our Religious School

Children in kindergarten and first grade attend religious school on Sunday mornings. In second through seventh grades they attend on Sunday mornings and one or two afternoons after secular school. All children whose families want them to have a Jewish education are welcome in our religious school and may participate in all of its activities.

## Children's Religious Identity

The Conservative Movement follows the traditional Jewish law (*halakhah*) of matrilineal descent in determining a child's Jewish identity. While children of interfaith families are welcome in our nursery and religious school, they must be Jewish in order to have a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, which affirms the young adult's new responsibility and obligations to follow the laws and the *mitzvot* (good deeds and obligations) of the Torah. Children in our religious school in the sixth and seventh grades express much excitement in anticipation of their Bar/Bat Mitzvahs which usually take place when the children are 13 years old. The rabbis will meet with all children who are not Jewish and their families at this time to determine if conversion and bar/bat mitzvah is desired.

## Bar/Bat Mitzvah

At a Bar/Bat Mitzvah in our synagogue, the child will participate in reading from the Torah and chanting the *Haftarah*, offer his or her own interpretation of the reading (*D'Var Torah*) and will be called to the Torah for an *aliyah*.

Both parents have the opportunity to participate in a blessing known as the *misheberach*. The misheberach asks God for blessings for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah child. A non-Jewish parent may stand on the *bimah* (pulpit) for the misheberach. We especially encourage this participation as recognition for the special commitment and gift made by parents who may have different faith traditions themselves, but have chosen to share in raising their child as a Jew.

The Jewish parent of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah also has the opportunity to be called to the Torah for an *aliyah*. Only a Jew may have an *aliyah*. This is because the nature of an *aliyah* recognizes the particular covenant between God and the Jewish people. We respect the faith and life choices of those who are not Jewish, and do not ask them to make this affirmation.

## Burial

Respect for the dead and comfort for the bereaved are the two principles governing Jewish burial. The dead should be buried within 24 hours, if possible, with no embalming or viewing of the body.

At burial in the cemetery, earth is shoveled onto the casket by friends and family who wish to participate in this final act. This ritual of lovingly placing earth on the casket of the beloved departed is called a *chesed shel emet*, a true act of loving kindness. It is a demonstration of love and respect, with no expectation of reward. One need not be Jewish to participate in this ritual of placing earth on the casket of a family member or friend.

When the burial is over, attention shifts to the bereaved. All who wish to comfort the bereaved visit at the home where family members “sit *shiva*” for up to a week following the burial. No flowers are given to the grieving family, but gifts of food are welcomed. Contributions to a charity given in memory of the deceased are also welcomed.

Our tradition says that only Jews may be buried in a Jewish cemetery. Therefore, when a Jew is buried in a Jewish cemetery, a non-Jewish spouse cannot be buried beside him or her. More recently, some Jewish cemeteries have begun to set aside special sections designated for interfaith burial. Two of these are located in Wayland and Sharon.

For more information, our Temple has published a pamphlet, “A Time to Mourn”, which will be helpful in summarizing Jewish traditions at this time of loss.

## Conversion

The Conservative Movement’s adherence to the traditional Jewish law (*halakhah*) of matrilineal descent means that if a child’s mother is Jewish, the child is Jewish, and if the child’s mother is not Jewish, the child must be converted in order to become Jewish. Conversion for a baby or a young child includes immersion in a *mikvah* (a ritual bath), with both parents affirming, orally and in writing, that they agree to raise

their child as a Jew. The ritual *brit milah* (ritual circumcision) for a boy, or baby naming in the synagogue for a girl, can only be done after conversion. If a boy has not had a *brit* (a religious circumcision), then, at the time of conversion, a pinprick drawing of blood from the penis (*hatafat dam brit*) is performed. All religious conversions involve a ritual immersion in a mikvah.

An adult conversion requires a serious and substantial period of study under the supervision of a rabbi. After studying, one appears before a *beit din* (Jewish tribunal) and later immerses in a *mikvah*. A man receives a ritual or symbolic circumcision (*hatafat dam brit*) if a medical circumcision has already been performed. When all of these requirements are satisfied, the individual is recognized as a Jew. Our rabbis are happy to discuss conversion for babies, children, and adults with anyone who wishes to learn more about the process or the ritual itself.

## The Temple Emanuel Community

The Temple Emanuel Community and its rabbis welcome all levels of participation by interfaith families. We encourage questions and are happy to discuss any issues or answer any questions about Judaism and the Jewish people. We encourage your interest. In this spirit, we believe we can all learn together and grow as a welcoming community.

## Contact us these ways:

Telephone: 617-558-8100

Mailing address: 385 Ward Street, Newton, MA 02459

e-mail address: [info@templemanuel.com](mailto:info@templemanuel.com)

Temple web site: [www.templemanuel.com](http://www.templemanuel.com)

We also wish to call your attention to the resources listed on the back page.

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*In certain places in this booklet we have used the terms non-Jew or non-Jewish for stylistic reasons. We recognize their inadequacy in describing individuals who follow another faith tradition, or none at all.*

# Resources for Interfaith Information

## Community Resources

Conservative Movement

United Synagogue (617) 964-8210

Keruv/Interfaith Outreach program

Jewish Discovery Institute • [jdi@uscj.org](mailto:jdi@uscj.org)

Temple Emanuel (617) 558-8100

Introduction to Judaism Class

Jewish Family and Children's Service (781) 647-5327 • [jfcsboston.org](http://jfcsboston.org)

Interfaith Family programs

Workshops, groups, and resources for interfaith couples

Reform Jewish Outreach (781) 449-0404 • [urj.org](http://urj.org)

[InterfaithFamily.com](http://InterfaithFamily.com) (biweekly online magazine)

Jewish Community Centers of Greater Boston (617) 558-6444 • [lsjcc.org](http://lsjcc.org)

Creative Judaica Interfaith programs

## Temple Emanuel Resources

Rabbi Wesley Gardenswartz

(617) 558-8101 • [Wgardenswartz@templemanuel.com](mailto:Wgardenswartz@templemanuel.com)

Rabbi Michelle Robinson

(617) 558-8139 • [Mrobinson@templemanuel.com](mailto:Mrobinson@templemanuel.com)

Keruv Committee

(617) 558-8100

## Suggested Reading

*The Guide to Jewish Interfaith Family Life* by Ronni Friedland and Dr. Edmund Case

*Making a Successful Jewish Interfaith Marriage* by Kerry M. Olitsky

*Place in the Tent* by the Tiferet Project