

Dear Supporter,

We ended the first half of 2009 – a very challenging time in the non-profit world – on a high note: the American Jewish Press Association recognized InterfaithFamily.com with a [Rockower Award](#) – a “Jewish Pulitzer” – for Outstanding Website. The AJPA citation reads in part:

A fabulous resource site... easy to use, accessibly written... makes a valuable contribution to the Jewish community using technology.

We're excited that our website re-design is just about ready to launch. 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 the content they are looking for, and connections to others like them and to welcoming organizations, professionals and programs in their local communities. Over the next few weeks you'll start to see changes when you come to the site!

Organizational Highlights



In May we conducted our second online user survey it attracted 1,109 responses, over twice as many as our first survey in 2007! We are still compiling the results and will issue a complete report soon, but preliminary analysis shows that IFF is having very positive impact: 83% of intermarried users with children at home said that in the past two years IFF influenced their knowledge of Jewish life, 73% their participation in Jewish rituals, and 70% their sense of connection to the Jewish community.

We are making good progress on the goals established in our 2009 Strategic Priorities Plan. If you would like a copy of the Plan, or of a detailed Progress Report as of June 30, please email me at edc@interfaithfamily.com.

At the recommendation of the Governance Committee, and after surveying our existing [Advisory Board members](#), our Board approved a plan to create a new Advisory Board over the next few months. The new Advisory Board will have regular communications and meetings to keep current with our progress, and will provide input and expertise to guide our growth.

We are grateful to Joe Morgart, who is stepping down from our Board, and we continue to seek new Board members from around the country.

Education Activities

We've continued to publish content on a daily basis, with many personal narratives. Our Wedding Blog, [The Hitch](#) was very popular; the last entry in late June reported on the wedding of Alex and Lula.

We continue to add to our “how-to” content:

- In May we published our new [Guide to Shabbat for Interfaith Families](#)
- [Passover Resources](#) were mentioned in a [USA Today](#) blog and in Jay Michaelson's column in the [Forward](#)
- Our [Jewish Holidays Cheat Sheet](#), written by Managing Editor Ruth Abrams, has had over 10,000 page views since published in January!

We continue to add and re-publish video:

- Seven more posts in our video blog, [Rabbi Reuben's Ruminations](#), featuring Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben and produced in partnership with the [Jewish Television Network](#)
- Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn explains the [breaking the glass tradition](#)
- Rabbi David Wolpe talks about the [Jewish view of life after death](#), and
- Monologues by two participants in [birthright Israel Next](#), [Greg Aguele](#) and [Ruby Marez](#).

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

June 2009

What's in this Update

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Managing Editor Ruth Abrams accepting Rockower Award at AJPA conference, June 25, 2009

Connections Activities

1. Jewish Clergy Officiation Referral Service



So far in 2009, we've responded to 633 requests to help interfaith couples find a rabbi or cantor for their wedding – an average of 106 a month, which is level with the demand for this service last year. We don't just send names when we respond to couples; we also suggest resources to help their planning, and we send follow-up requests for feedback. On June 1, Rabbi Baesh got this email:

We were successful in finding a rabbi to marry us, but we hit a roadblock in trying to make a ceremony that incorporated both of our family traditions. Using your website, I just made an outline for our ceremony that we both love. We couldn't have done it without InterfaithFamily! Thank you so much!

We now have 302 rabbis and cantors to whom we make referrals, a net increase of 27 since our last Update four months ago. Interested clergy should take our [Jewish clergy survey](#).

2. Our Network

We now have 620 organizations and professionals listed in our organization directory, a net increase of 67 since our last Update. Some interesting new additions include:

- A [local minyan](#) in Columbus OH
- A [post-denominational grassroots community](#) in Los Angeles
- A [community of varying sexual orientations, gender identities, races, family arrangements, and Jewish identities and backgrounds](#) in Brooklyn NY.

We are continuing to focus our connections activities on two areas for six-month periods. In the first half of the year, we focused on Atlanta and Chicago; now we are moving on to Texas and northern New Jersey. If you would like a copy of our Local Community Initiative that describes how this focusing can help a community raise awareness that it welcomes people in interfaith relationships, please email me at edc@interfaithfamily.com.

3. Discussions

Our [discussion boards](#) have been very active – in the first half of the year, they averaged 13,500 page views a month – and readers say they help a lot:

Wow. It's so nice to read these posts and realize that there are others out there... I'm an Israeli-American Jew, and my boyfriend is a Pakistani-American Muslim... We're planning on raising our kids Jewish but still with an awareness of his Muslim background. And he won't be converting. The hard part has been with our families. my dad is saying that he would never be capable of accepting this. My boyfriend's family is...also deeply disappointed. It's so easy to feel completely alone in this...But I'm glad to see that there are others... good luck to everyone else out there!

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. We recently added an article by Rabbi Baesh to our "for clergy only" section about why interfaith couples do not ask congregational rabbis to officiate at their weddings. We have four new articles and one new video interview ready for publication in the coming months.

I am looking forward to speaking at the August retreat of the Schusterman Rabbinic Fellowship – a joint training program for rabbinic students at Hebrew Union College and the Jewish Theological Seminary.

2. Surveys and Speaking Engagements

Our fifth annual [Passover/Easter survey](#) attracted 802 responses and had some interesting findings about attitudes of interfaith families towards Israel. We found that both partners in interfaith couples raising Jewish children support Israel as much as American Jews in general, but the non-Jewish partners feel much less connected to Israel, which supports the need for subsidized trips to Israel for interfaith couples.

Rabbi Baesh has had four speaking/training engagements in the past four months, including at synagogues in Connecticut, Maine and New York and a training for PJ Library.

3. Advocacy Writing

In March there was an interesting discussion on JOI's JOPLIN listserv. Rabbi Irwin Kula, the distinguished leader of C'lal, questioned whether programs targeted to interfaith families are needed. I [argued](#) that they are:

I completely disagree with Irwin Kula's suggestion that focusing on a group problematizes or pathologizes that group. Every social intervention responds to a perceived need, often of a particular group. I also disagree with Irwin... to the extent [he is] saying that intermarriage is not an issue, that interfaith families are not different, or that interfaith families no longer have issues particular to the fact of their interfaith relationships, so that programs to address those issues are no longer needed.

I am all in favor of ... making [Judaism] accessible and usable, as Irwin suggests – but responding to the particular needs of interfaith families does not conflict with and in fact is an essential support for that strategy.

This exchange with Rabbi Kula played out further at JOI's national outreach conference in June, which generated an [article](#) and a [letter to the editor](#) in the Philadelphia *Jewish Exponent*.

In April [Synagogue 3000](#) released a fascinating study on [spirituality](#) that found that young adult Jews with just one Jewish parent are more spiritual than those with two Jewish parents. I had a letter to the editor published in the *Forward*:

The authors of the study conclude that stressing spirituality will broaden Judaism's appeal to one of the growth sectors of the Jewish population: the children of intermarried parents, "who sometimes feel marginalized among born Jews but find familiarity in spirituality." The same can be said of interfaith couples and families generally — the more that Jewish communities emphasize spirituality, the more they will be attracted to Jewish life.

Following the [IFF Network Blog](#) is a great way to keep up on intermarriage issues. Some of our other recent postings address:

- Whether rabbinical schools should admit and [ordain intermarried students](#)
- Rabbi Norman Lamm's outrageous comment that "[The Reform Movement may show a rise, because if you add goyim to Jews then you will do OK.](#)"
- The Conservative Movement's shift away from [aggressive promotion of conversion](#)
- [Our appreciation of Gary Tobin](#) who sadly died very prematurely just last week.

Marketing

Traffic to our website in April was our highest ever. I wish I could tell you we had 40,000 unique visitors that month – but we had 39,909! For the quarter ending June 30, traffic was up 47% over last year.

According to [Hubspot's Website Grader](#), IFF scores higher than 97% of other websites in terms of the marketing effectiveness of our search engine optimization.

In May and June, 14% of our visits came from paid search results on Google, up from 9% in December; 2% came from links on Facebook – and .25% came from Twitter. Our Facebook fan page now has 368 fans – just click [here](#) to join.

Key Metrics and Testimonials

- **Website traffic:** We had 333,540 unique visitors in the 12 months ending June 30
- **Bi-weekly email newsletter:** Our June 23 email newsletter was sent to 7,501 mailable email addresses
- **Organizations listed on our Network:** We had a net gain of 67 organizations added to our Network between March 1 and June 30, bringing the total to 620, from more than 130 communities across North America.
- **Requests for Jewish clergy officiation referrals:** 633 from January 1 through June 30, an average of 106 a month.



We are gratified by the expressions of thanks we regularly receive in emails and on our discussion boards. Here are some of the actual messages from the past four months::

Vilma, April 15, commenting on [My Mikvah A Meaningful Part of My Reform Conversion and Journey to Judaism](#):

Thank you so much for posting this. I'm in the process of converting myself, and identify with almost all that you have written... Thank You for putting into words those things that I have been feeling but have been having a hard time putting into words.

A respondent to our user survey, May 5:

Your site informs me of the many situations and attitudes that are prevalent among interfaith couples thereby helping me immensely with my feelings of being married to a non Jew... I can see I am not the ONLY ONE with similar feelings and experiences. I love that about your articles. Thank G-d for you guys!!

A respondent to our user survey, May 5:

The main benefit I have received from interfaithfamily.com is feeling welcomed by the Jewish community, as a Jew who chooses to have a non-Jewish partner... The Jewish community, as many people have experienced, can be very unsupportive of interfaith relationships. We need to provide as many avenues of support as possible, and interfaithfamily.com is a wonderful and necessary resource that has given me strength and a feeling of inclusion for which I am grateful.

Lois, May 26, email to Ruth Abrams:

I think you are doing a great job and providing wonderful support and information for intermarried folks. I am the facilitator for the Portland, OR Mothers' Circle group and your articles have been helpful to them.

G & O, June 16, email to Rabbi Baesh:

Since the beginning of our relationship four years ago we have been subscribers to the emails and avid readers of the interfaithfamily.com website and often find the articles extremely interesting and helpful for our personal situation, a Conservative Jew and a Colombian Catholic. Hopefully, once we get married we can write an article for your website about our interfaith and intercultural relationship.

Finance and Development

In 2008 our total spending was \$988,000. Given the economic climate, we have cut our working expense budget for 2009 by 14%, to \$854,000. We still have a desired 2009 expense budget of \$997,000, which would restore some of the cuts and fill open positions.

We are comfortable projecting likely 2009 income of \$836,000, so we only need to raise \$20,000 to cover our working budget, but still \$160,000 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".

Edmund C. Case, CEO