

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Searching for Afikomen and Easter Eggs: Interfaith Families' Attitudes towards the Spring Holidays

Despite Overlapping Holidays, Interfaith Families Keep Easter, Passover Separate

Boston – March 28, 2006 – For the eighth time in the past decade, Passover and Easter overlap again this year. And even though the holidays have some similar elements, such as searching for the afikomen and for Easter eggs, 85 percent of people in interfaith relationships will keep the holiday celebrations separate, as opposed to blending them, according to a new survey released today. This is an important finding given concerns about the future of the American Jewish community and the current debate about stepped-up efforts within the Reform and Conservative movements to encourage conversion of non-Jewish spouses.

The second annual Passover and Easter Survey, conducted by InterfaithFamily.com (www.interfaithfamily.com), an independent non-profit publisher and advocacy membership association, found that Passover is an important holiday for interfaith families, with 99 percent of respondents saying they plan to celebrate Passover this year while 64 percent said they will participate in Easter celebrations.

The Passover and Easter Survey, which fielded responses from 270 people nationwide in Feb.-March 2006, was 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 75 percent of the respondents who said they had children raised 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 information about interfaith families who are raising their children as Jews – a very important demographic for Jewish continuity. The first Passover and Easter Survey was conducted Feb. 2005; similar surveys on Hanukkah and Christmas have been conducted in 2005 and 2004.

“Although Passover and Easter often coincide, the second annual Passover and Easter Survey found that interfaith families keep their holiday observances separate. At a time of significant concern within the Jewish community, the survey provides insight into the

practices, rituals and coping strategies of interfaith families in dealing with the holidays' potentially conflicting demands," said Edmund Case, publisher, InterfaithFamily.com. "Along with other resources available on the InterfaithFamily.com website, the survey is designed to help interfaith families navigate the demands of the season."

According to the Passover and Easter Survey, despite the common perception that the convergence of holidays can be stressful as family members struggle with identity crises, conflicting emotions, family guilt, and logistics, just nine percent of people indicated that Passover and Easter caused any conflict. This may be because Easter Sunday rarely falls on a seder night, the ritual meals held on the first two nights of the eight-day Passover celebration. Seventy-six percent plan to attend a seder, with 42 percent planning to host one. Eighty-three percent plan to eat matzah, unleavened bread (up from last year's 61 percent), and 56 percent to follow Passover's dietary restrictions. Thirty-seven percent of respondents reported that their Passover celebrations were more religious than secular, with 69 percent planning to tell the Passover story,

In contrast, despite Easter's more religious nature than Christmas, only 25 percent said they would attend religious services, and only nine percent plan to tell the Easter story. Sixty-four percent plan to participate in Easter celebrations, compared to 85 percent who planned to participate in Christmas celebrations, according to the 2005 December Dilemma Survey. Nearly three-quarters said their Easter celebrations will be more secular than religious; 54 percent said they will attend Easter dinner and 13 percent plan to host one. Eggs were very popular, with 39 percent planning to decorate Easter eggs and 25 percent participating in egg hunts.

The survey respondents readily explained that they participate in Easter celebrations as a way of sharing in, honoring and respecting the traditions of both sides of their family. Several parents explain to their children that they are helping the non-Jewish relatives celebrate their holiday, like going to someone else's birthday party.

However, some respondents noted that eating Easter dinner during Passover could present challenges. For example, one wrote: "Because of the dietary restrictions during Passover I sometimes feel awkward when there is food at Easter dinner that I can't eat." Others said they were able to observe Passover and join in an Easter dinner, commenting on the consideration of non-Jewish family members:

- "My mother-in-law once made matzah lasagna for Easter dinner."
- "There are always Passover favorites served during the Easter Sunday meal."
- "His family at Easter dinner makes certain there is food for me without pork and bread products to eat!"

The Jewish community is currently debating how it should react to interfaith families, particularly whether the children of interfaith parents develop Jewish identities. Several parents commented that participating in Easter celebrations did not negatively impact their children's Jewish identity. Some said it strengthened their children's Jewish identity.

“InterfaithFamily.com provides advice, resources, and a sense of community to the more than one million interfaith households that include a Jewish member. We feel that it’s also important to show respect for other family members’ religion, beliefs and traditions – which could mean attending Easter dinner while observing Passover’s dietary restrictions. What’s encouraging is that many of those attending and those hosting Easter dinner have come up with ways to accommodate each other, like serving Passover-approved foods,” Case added.

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 Web 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.”

###

EDITOR’S NOTE: InterfaithFamily.com has developed “Tips for Interfaith Families: How to Make a Seder Inclusive” that is designed to help interfaith families make their non-Jewish friends and family feel more comfortable attending Passover seders. If you are interested in receiving a copy of the “Tips for Interfaith Families: How to Make a Seder Inclusive,” please send an email to network@interfaithfamily.com.