

Dear Friend,



In September InterfaithFamily.com was included in the *Slingshot* guidebook to innovative Jewish organizations for the fourth straight year--and described as "the central web address for those in interfaith relationships seeking information about and connections with Jewish life." We were one of only a handful of non-profits awarded a grant from the Slingshot Fund for two years in a row!

We are also proud to be one of the Jewish renaissance initiatives listed in Edgar M. Bronfman's important new book, *Hope, Not Fear*.

We hope you enjoy this Update. As always, we welcome your feedback, comments and advice.

**October 2008**

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## Organizational Highlights

### 1. Board Activity

At its September meeting, our Board elected a new chair, Mamie Kanfer Stewart. That evening we celebrated and thanked Ginny Wise for chairing the Board during two years of tremendous organizational growth.

The Board has approved a new strategic plan under which our spending and staff would nearly double over the next three years. Key elements of the plan include:

- **Content:** a comprehensive set of multimedia and video "how-to" resources to help interfaith families address Jewish holidays, rituals and customs
- **Connections:** expanded, interactive listings of Jewish organizations and professionals who welcome and work with interfaith families, increased use of our Jewish clergy officiation referral service and support for online and in-person social networking groups
- **Marketing:** digital and social marketing to reach goals of 20,000 email newsletter subscribers and 400,000 annual unique visitors
- **Advocacy:** six local/regional clergy conferences a year and a comprehensive manual to help clergy work with interfaith families in our [Resource Center for Jewish Clergy](#), and a comprehensive set of program resources in our [Resource Center for Program Providers](#).



L-R: IFF President Ed Case, Former Board Chair Ginny Wise and Barry Shrage, president of Combined Jewish Philanthropies (the Boston federation)

We would be pleased to share the plan with you. Please contact Amy O'Donnell, our new director of development and communications, at [amy@interfaithfamily.com](mailto:amy@interfaithfamily.com).

### 2. Staff Growth

Robin Schwartz joined us in August as our Network Director. She is responsible for supervising all of IFF's connections activities. A graduate of Columbia University, Robin has extensive experience in higher education administration and community outreach and development in diverse parts of the Jewish community. If we do not have your organization listed, please contact Robin at [robins@interfaithfamily.com](mailto:robins@interfaithfamily.com).



Robin Schwartz

## Education Activities

### 1. Content Resources

We are steadily adding video content:

- In partnership with the [Jewish TV Network](#), we started a video blog, *Rabbi Reuben's Ruminations*, featuring Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben of Pacific Palisades, Calif. We've published the first seven posts, and Rabbi Reuben recently recorded the next seven.
- We've republished a number of videos on our blogs and in our articles, such as cookbook author Sheilah Kaufman's [recipes for the High Holidays](#), a popular short film on Jewish identity called *The Tribe*, and the *Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles'* VideoJew's [humorous videos](#).
- In our "for clergy only" section, we have two 30-minute interviews with rabbis explaining their positions on officiation.

We recently published our *Death and Mourning Guide for Interfaith Families*, which completes our series on life cycle ceremonies, and are in the process of making all of our guides available as fully linked, search engine-optimized web pages, as well as in downloadable PDF and Word formats.

## Connections Activities

### 1. Jewish Clergy Officiation Referral Service

Demand for our free, high-quality clergy officiation referral service has grown steadily. In the last half of 2007 we responded to 74 requests a month; in the first nine months of 2008, the average was 110 — and in the last three months alone, 125.

We now have 290 rabbis and cantors to whom we make referrals, up from the 170 last reported. Interested clergy should take our [Jewish clergy survey](#).

### 2. Connections In Your Area

Twenty nine organizations joined our [Connections In Your Area](#) system between June 1 and Sept. 30, bringing the total to 518, from more than 120 communities across North America.

### 3. Discussions

We continue to have increased activity with more postings on our [discussion boards](#); we are receiving between 8,500 and 11,000 page views a month, and 10 new posts a day.

### 4. Social Network

We are on track with our major social networking platform project, with technical and design development proceeding toward a May 2009 launch. The new system will allow users to indicate their interests and have appropriate personalized content delivered to them; improve our organization, professionals and program listings; facilitate and support the formation of both online and in-person groups; and enable individuals to find others who share their interests.

## Advocacy Activities

### 1. Resource Center for Jewish Clergy

As the *Slingshot* guidebook recognizes,

One of the biggest barriers to participation in Jewish life for interfaith couples is finding a rabbi who will officiate at their weddings. So that intermarried couples are embraced at the outset, [InterfaithFamily.com](#) has organized a new Jewish Clergy Officiation Referral Service that has already helped hundreds of couples find Jewish clergy and therefore stay connected to the Jewish community during and after this important milestone.

Beyond our referral service, we are the only Jewish organization providing a cross-denominational resource to help clergy address the officiation question, and are pleased to report continued progress. The password-protected, “for clergy only” section of our website now has 22 articles written **by rabbis for rabbis** on why they do or do not officiate at weddings of interfaith couples, up from 16 last reported, and videos of two rabbi interviews. The “for clergy only” pages were viewed 1,663 times from June through September. We know of at least one rabbi who found our resources very helpful in deciding to change his practices; he quoted one of our articles in his Rosh Hashanah sermon on the subject. Clergy who would like access to these resources should take our [Jewish clergy survey](#).

We recently announced that Rabbi Lev Baesh, who has done a terrific job building up the [Resource Center for Jewish Clergy](#), would be transitioning to a consulting relationship with IFF so that he can focus on working directly with people as a teacher, trainer, speaker and counselor. We are currently seeking to fill the position of [RCJC director](#), with someone who is interested in networking with and supporting other clergy, putting resources online and organizing clergy conferences. If you are interested or know of someone we should consider, please contact Heather Martin at [heatherm@interfaithfamily.com](mailto:heatherm@interfaithfamily.com).

### 2. Surveys

In October we launched our fifth annual [December Holidays survey](#). As of today we’ve had over 1,030 responses, up from 860 last year.

### 3. Speaking Engagements



Ed Case (L) speaking at the Wexner Graduate Fellows Summer Institute.

In August I was a panelist with Professor Sylvia Barack Fishman at the Wexner Graduate Fellows Summer Institute. In September I made a presentation at the celebration of Barry Shrage’s 20 years of leadership at [Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Boston](#).

Rabbi Baesh led two workshops in conjunction with PJ Library at CAJE in August, spoke at Temple Beth Hillel in Bloomfield, Conn., in September, presented in two conference calls for PJ Library facilitators and a conference call for PEJE in October, and will conduct several sessions at [Limmud Stockholm](#) in November.

## Marketing

### 1. Search Engine Optimization and Marketing

We have increased our monthly Google ad budget to \$1,200, and in September, started a campaign targeting specific wedding resource-related terms. In September, nearly 1,900 visits to the site were the result of ads on Google.

This summer we began to place ads for our clergy officiation referral service on Facebook. We have also created a [Facebook page for IFF](#) on which we regularly post content. In September, nearly 600 visits to our website were the result of ads on Facebook.

### 2. Press Mentions

The JCC Association featured IFF in its June 16, 2008, email newsletter. I was quoted in an extensive article on intermarriage in the August issue of the *San Diego Jewish Journal* and wrote a letter to the editor of the *Chicago Jewish News*. We continue to have our articles reprinted in Jewish newspapers around the country in cities such as [Los Angeles](#), [Seattle](#) and [Minneapolis](#).

## Key Metrics

- **Website traffic:** We had more than 253,000 unique visitors to our website in the 12 months ending Sept. 30, 2008. Our website traffic in the three months ending Sept. 30 was up 30% over the same period in 2007.
- **Bi-weekly email newsletter:** Our email newsletters are going to more than 7,300 recipients. From June 1 through Sept. 30 we added 344 new subscribers.
- **Organizations listed on Connections In Your Area:** Twenty nine organizations joined our [Connections In Your Area](#) between June 1 and Sept. 30, bringing the total to 518, from over 120 communities across North America.
- **Requests for Jewish clergy officiation referrals:** 493 from June 1 through Sept. 30.

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

## Finance and Development

Since June 1 we have been awarded a grant by one new foundation, increased grants from two current foundation supporters, and renewed funding from seven other current institutional funders. Our expense budget for 2008 is now \$1,029,000.

## 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,



*Edmund C. Case*

Edmund C. Case, President and Publisher