

Dear Friend,

Two important new studies on intermarriage, released in March, underline the importance of our efforts to ensure that interfaith couples seeking Jewish clergy at their weddings have a positive experience, and to advocate for the expansion of outreach programs that target interfaith couples. We helped to publicize and comment on the studies, while continuing to provide interesting new content, and working on a significant enhancement of our website's functionality.

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

Organizational Highlights

1. Board Activity

At our May Board meeting we completed the initial phase of a Board development process. We adopted new statements defining the roles and expectations of the Board as a whole, and of individual Board members, and established a new committee structure.

We are extremely grateful to Prudence Steiner and Eve Coulson, who have stepped down from our Board, for their many significant contributions to our growth. We are in discussions with several prospective Board members, including candidates in Washington, D.C., and New York.

2. Staff Growth

We are pleased to announce that Amy B. O'Donnell will be joining us on September 1 as our first director of development and communications. A graduate of Brown, Amy has an M.P.H. from Boston University, extensive project management and communications experience, and a passion for IFF's mission.

Education Activities

1. Content Resources

In time for Passover we released our first holiday guide, the [Guide to Passover for Interfaith Families](#). We are working on a guide to death and mourning customs, which will complete our series on life-cycle ceremonies, and plan to release guides to other holidays in the coming year.

In the past four months we've continued to publish content on a daily basis. We featured more content from teen and young adult children of intermarried parents, including a piece on [dating](#), and another on [bonding as a Jewish spiritual seeker with a non-Jewish dad](#). After the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life released a study showing extensive switching of religions and intermarriage among Americans, we followed up with [Why Do Jews Marry Catholics?](#) And we recently covered, for the first time, [Orthodox outreach to interfaith families](#).

Although we didn't receive sufficient entries to continue with our video contest, we recently posted one of the [submissions](#), and this month, in partnership with the [Jewish Television Network](#), will launch our first video blog, featuring Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben.

Connections Activities

1. Jewish Clergy Officiation Referral Service



For the first five months of 2008, Rabbi Lev Baesh responded to 101 requests a month for help finding a rabbi or cantor to officiate at weddings of interfaith couples, up from 74 a month for the last six months of 2007. We continue to provide a resource for which there is great demand.

Lev now has 170 rabbis and cantors to whom we make referrals, up from the 150 last reported. Interested clergy should take our [Jewish clergy survey](#).

2. Connections In Your Area

Thirty organizations joined our [Connections In Your Area](#) system between February 1 and May 31, bringing the total to 486, from more than 120 communities across North America.

June 2008

What's in this Update

[Organizational Highlights](#)
[Education Activities](#)
[Connections Activities](#)
[Advocacy Activities](#)
[Marketing](#)
[Key Metrics](#)
[Finance and Development](#)



Amy B. O'Donnell

3. Discussions

We continue to have increased activity with more postings on [our discussion boards](#); readership reached 11,000 page views, our best month ever, in March.

4. Social Network

In our last update we reported on a significant grant to build a social networking platform. In preparing and refining our Request for Proposals, we enlarged the scope of the project! Our 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.



We have selected a vendor and are looking to an early 2009 launch of the new functionality.

Advocacy Activities

In March, the Boston federation, Combined Jewish Philanthropies, released [a further report](#) on its 2005 community study which found that 60% of interfaith families in Boston were raising their children as Jews, and the National Center for Jewish Policy Studies at Hebrew College released [a qualitative survey](#) on interfaith couples.



Both studies found a strong correlation between having a rabbi officiate at a couple's wedding and the couple's later Jewish engagement. In addition, the CJP study reported that an amazing 14% of intermarried couples had participated in outreach programs, and when the National Center's researchers asked interfaith couples how the Jewish community could attract more of them, the couples "unanimously suggested that classes, discussion groups and support services be offered for interfaith couples."

I served on a panel of consultants for the policy recommendations in the National Center's study. I was quoted in the March 10 [Boston Globe](#) story on the CJP study, and wrote an op-ed for the March 26 issue of [The \(New York\) Jewish Week](#) which concluded:

"It is open to some rabbis in every community to manifest their welcome of interfaith families by officiating at their weddings. And it is open to every Jewish community to decide to welcome interfaith families and offer outreach programs for them."

1. Resource Center for Jewish Clergy

In March, Sue Fishkoff wrote [a story for the JTA about officiation](#) looking toward discussion of the issue at the Reform rabbis association (Central Conference of American Rabbis) convention in late March. We were the only non-rabbinic organization quoted in the article. The [Baltimore Jewish Times](#) expanded on the JTA story in its March 28 issue.

Rabbi Baesh wrote an [op-ed on officiation](#) for the JTA which was released on March 30 and reprinted in [j, the Jewish news weekly of Northern California](#) and other papers.

Beyond our advocacy writing, 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.

In March, we launched a password-protected, "for clergy only" section of our website, with an inaugural offering of articles written **by rabbis for rabbis** on why they do or do not officiate at weddings of interfaith couples. We now have 16 articles with more coming. We also have one video rabbi interview and another about to be uploaded. The introductory page to the section was viewed 863 times in April and May. Clergy who would like access to these resources should take our [Jewish clergy survey](#).

We mailed a postcard about the new password protected section to the nearly 2,000 members of the CCAR and exhibited at their March conference.

In partnership with The Interfaith Project (TIP) at Temple Shir Tikvah in Winchester, Mass., we co-sponsored a conference for New England area rabbis and cantors on May 18 titled "Best Practices for Jewish Clergy Officiating at Weddings of Interfaith Couples." The gathering attracted a mix of clergy who officiate and who do not. One participant said it was the first occasion he had had in ten years as a rabbi to have a meaningful discussion on the question. We are planning additional gatherings in the coming year. For more information, contact Rabbi Baesh at levb@interfaithfamily.com.

2. Resource Center for Program Providers

We will soon be re-organizing the [Resource Center for Program Provider pages](#). As part of our effort to support program providers with resources to help with their programming efforts, we plan to publish a series of articles by professionals about their experiences conducting outreach programs.

We made presentations in the past four months to funders who expressed interest in supporting comprehensive community programs of outreach to interfaith families in four local communities. We hope that the recent studies will strengthen the will of local communities to create such programs.

3. Surveys

In March we released our fourth annual Passover/Easter survey, [What We Learned from the 2008 Passover/Easter Survey](#). It found that of interfaith families raising their children as Jews, only 36% planned on hosting or attending an Easter dinner, and only very small minorities planned to engage in "religious" Easter activities like telling the Easter story or attending religious services. Those that were participating in Easter overwhelmingly saw their participation as secular.

4. Writing, Speaking Engagements, Appearances and Partnerships

In addition to the CCAR convention at which we exhibited in Cincinnati in March, we will exhibit at the American Cantors Conference in San Francisco in June. I spoke to the Minneapolis Federation's House of Delegates in May at a presentation on innovation in the Jewish community.



Micah Sachs, Ed Case, actress Maryann Elder Goldstein and Elana Kling Perkins of Boston's JF&CS at *Both Sides of the Family*.

Rabbi Baesh was the master of ceremonies at *Mayyim Hayyim's* annual "Mikveh Monologues" in Boston in March, led discussions at the Pioneer Valley Jewish Film Festival in Northampton and Springfield, Mass., in April, and spoke at Beth David Reform Congregation in Gladwyne, Penn., in April and at *Congregation Etz Chaim* in Kennebunk, Maine, in May. He is leading two workshops in conjunction with PJ Library at CAJE in August, and has been invited to speak at Temple Beth Hillel in Bloomfield, Conn., in September and at Limmud Stockholm in November.

We work closely with the outreach program providers in greater Boston who are funded by Combined Jewish Philanthropies. On April 13, we co-sponsored a dramatic presentation, *Both Sides of the Family*, that sparked a great discussion of interfaith relationship issues.

We have a new partnership with *Mayyim Hayyim*, Greater Boston's liberal mikveh. We are developing documents together that will help mikveh users, and the Jewish clergy who work with them, in the process of conversion.



Rabbi Lev Baesh, master of ceremonies at *Mayyim Hayyim's* "Mikveh Monologues."

We have also entered into a partnership with *BBYO*, the leading organization for Jewish teens, to help *BBYO* provide a comfortable environment for Jewish teens from intermarried families. Youth leaders and adult advisors at *BBYO* will become savvier about the particular issues faced by children of interfaith families and will learn how to deal more sensitively with their needs, while *InterfaithFamily.com* will provide a safe environment for teens and parents from interfaith families to share their unique stories with each other.

Marketing

1. Search Engine Optimization and Marketing

We continue to enhance our search engine optimization and marketing. In May we analyzed the 32 search terms that provide our highest-quality traffic. We simultaneously began a process of optimizing the site for these words to produce better natural search results and optimizing our paid Google ad campaign to drive traffic to the site. We also plan to hold focus groups to analyze what other terms prospective users would use to look for content like ours.

2. Press Mentions

Micah Sachs was quoted in an April Associated Press article about Passover seders written by Julie Wiener that appeared on *msnbc.com* and in numerous local newspapers around the country. Rabbi Baesh was highlighted in an article in the *Texas Jewish Post* about a Dallas rabbi, and in an article in *India New England*.

We had articles reprinted in the May 2008 issue of *614*, the eZine of the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, in *The (Philadelphia) Jewish Exponent*, and in several issues of *Bridges*, the San Francisco federation's monthly email newsletter for interfaith couples. Each monthly issue of the email newsletters of the Denver *Stepping Stones* program and the Kansas City JCC's *Genesis Interfaith Program* also links to us.



Key Metrics

- **Website traffic:** We had more than 230,000 unique visitors to our website in the 12 months ending May 31, 2008. Our website traffic in the three months ending May 31, 2008, was up 50% over the same period in 2007.
- **Bi-weekly email newsletter:** Our May 28 email newsletter went to 7,191 recipients. From February 1 through May 31 we added 304 new subscribers.
- **Organizations listed on Connections In Your Area:** Thirty organizations joined our *Connections In Your Area* between February 1 and May 31, bringing the total to 486, from over 120 communities across North America.
- **Requests for Jewish clergy officiation referrals:** 384 from February 1 through May 31.

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

Finances and Development

Since February 1 we have been awarded grants by four new foundations, and increased grants from two current foundation supporters. In the same period we have four new individual donors at the \$1,000 level and two at the \$5,000 level. Our expense budget for 2008 has increased to \$1,080,000.

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

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