



Contact : Norman Birnbach
781.639.6701
birnbach@birnbachcom.com



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December Dilemma Survey Provides Insights about Interfaith Families and Holiday Celebrations

For Most, Christmas and Hanukkah, Though Celebrated on the Same Day This Year, Do Not Add up to “Chrismukkah”

Boston – November 29, 2005 – Hanukkah and Christmas fall on the same day this year but that won't affect how most interfaith families celebrate their holidays. According to the 2005 December Dilemma Survey, released today by InterfaithFamily.com (www.interfaithfamily.com), an independent non-profit publisher and advocacy membership association, most interfaith families will celebrate both holidays, but two-thirds of respondents said they plan to keep their celebrations separate. The first night of Hanukkah officially starts at sunset on Dec. 25th.

Survey respondents said they participate in both holidays celebrations as a way of sharing in, honoring and respecting traditions from both sides of their family. However, the fact that Hanukkah and Christmas fall on the same day – for only the third time in 100 years – does complicate matters, especially logistics.

Thirty percent said they will change how they celebrate Hanukkah by lighting a menorah at their non-Jewish relatives' home on Dec. 25 and eat potato pancakes known as *latkes* with Christmas dinner

Nineteen percent said they will shorten their Christmas celebrations to conclude before their Hanukkah celebrations begin at night. Others said they will delay their Hanukkah celebrations until after Dec. 25th.

The 2005 December Dilemma Survey, which fielded responses from 396 people nationwide in October, is the second annual survey 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 81 percent of the respondents who said they had children raise 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 new information about interfaith families who are raising their children as Jews – a very important demographic for Jewish continuity.

Despite last year's attention to “Chrismukkah,” the fictional holiday from the Fox drama “The O.C.” that combines elements of both holidays, only 57 percent reported having heard about Chrismukkah.

- more -

Seventy-eight percent said they thought that Chrismukkah is a bad idea primarily because the different backgrounds, meanings and significance of the two holidays are lost when combined and because blending them is confusing to children. In contrast, just six percent of respondents felt Chrismukkah is a good idea.

“Because of Chrismukkah and because the holidays fall on the same day, there has been increased concern about the blending of religious traditions known as religious ‘syncretism,’ but the 2005 December Dilemma Survey found that’s not happening, at levels consistent with last year’s survey,” said Edmund Case, publisher, InterfaithFamily.com. “This year’s survey uncovered or confirmed important insights into interfaith families. For example, many interfaith families make a point to honor traditions of both partners while raising children with a single religious identity.”

Consistent with last year, the 2005 December Dilemma Survey contained positive news for the Jewish community. Many survey respondents wrote that celebrating Christmas actually strengthened their children’s Jewish identity. While Jewish religious identity is formed throughout the year, not just in December, one respondent said her daughter “is very clear that this is not her holiday, that she celebrates her mother’s tradition.”

Interestingly, some Jews in interfaith families who participate in Christmas celebrations continue to report residual discomfort. Although 71 percent had Christmas trees in their homes, 30 percent of them feel uncomfortable with its presence.

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 online 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 “Handling the December Holidays: Eight Tips from InterfaithFamily.com” that is designed to help interfaith families have a more enjoyable and meaningful holiday season. If you are interested in receiving a copy of “Handling the December Holidays,” please send an email to network@interfaithfamily.com.



Contact : Norman Birnbach
781.639.6701
birnbach@birnbachcom.com



2005 December Dilemma Survey Fact Sheet

Chrismukkah

Seventy-eight percent of respondents felt that Chrismukkah is a bad idea while just six percent thought it is a good idea. Two-thirds of respondents said they plan to keep holiday celebrations separate compared with 18 percent who plan to blend the two holidays.

According to one respondent, “The fact that we are in interfaith relationships does not mean that we have an interfaith religion. Our religions are still two separate individual traditions that should be honored as such. Celebrating both Christmas and Hanukkah is one thing, but pretending they are the same holiday is another.”

Holiday Season Expectations

Sixty-three percent said they look forward to the December holidays. Only 15 percent said they don't look forward to the holidays. Contrary to popular impressions, and consistent with the 2004 survey results, Hanukkah is perceived as more fun than Christmas – 87 percent said they enjoyed Hanukkah very much while only 55 percent said they enjoyed Christmas very much. Again consistent with last year, respondents reported that they expected their children to enjoy Hanukkah more than Christmas (81 percent to 73 percent, respectively).

Hanukkah Observance

98 percent of respondents plan to observe Hanukkah in their own homes by:

- Lighting a menorah: 98 percent
- Giving gifts: 91 percent
- Eating Hanukkah foods: 87 percent
- Putting up Hanukkah decorations: 65 percent
- Singing Hanukkah songs: 61 percent

Christmas Observance

85% of respondents plan to observe Christmas:

in their own homes by

- Giving gifts: 83 percent
- Tree decorating: 71 percent
- Hanging stockings: 46 percent
- Decorating with Christmas items: 48 percent
- Singing Christmas songs: 52 percent
- Eating Christmas foods: 48 percent.

in a friend's or relative's home by

- Giving gifts: 94 percent
- Tree decorating: 30 percent
- Hanging stockings: 26 percent
- Decorating with Christmas items: 16 percent
- Singing Christmas songs: 45 percent
- Eating Christmas foods: 64 percent

Attending Christmas services: 22 percent

Holiday Storytelling

“Telling the holiday story” clearly has religious implications to these respondents.

- 62 percent plan to tell the Hanukkah story (up from 55 percent last year)
- 16 percent plan to tell the Christmas story (up from 10 percent last year)

Jews and Christmas Trees

Of the 71 percent of Jews in interfaith families who had Christmas trees in their homes (up from 53% in 2004):

- 46 percent reported feeling more comfortable than uncomfortable with a tree in their home
- 30 percent felt more uncomfortable than comfortable

Attitudes towards Celebrations

The survey asked about the attitudes of those participating in their relatives' holiday celebrations.

- For Jewish relatives who plan to participate in Christmas celebrations:
 - 27 percent expect to feel more uncomfortable than comfortable (up from 19 percent in 2004)
 - 42 percent expect to feel more comfortable than uncomfortable (up from 32 percent in 2004)
- For non-Jewish relatives who participated in Hanukkah celebrations
 - None reported feeling more uncomfortable than comfortable – same as in 2004.
 - 82 percent felt more comfortable than uncomfortable

Verbatim Comments: Why Interfaith Families Think Blending Christmas and Hanukkah is a Bad Idea:

- “The holidays are distinct in their meaning and history. To blend them dishonors both. We try to honor both traditions in our family, while raising our children Jewish. To blend the two makes it impossible to truly understand and appreciate what the holidays mean. It further secularizes the holidays because after eviscerating their meaning, commercialization is all that is left.”
- “Religious diversity isn't about blending traditions; it's about recognizing and honoring different traditions in their own unique ways.”
- “You can't blend them like we combined Washington's and Lincoln's birthdays into Presidents' Day. It insults both traditions.”
- “It confuses children. I think they need to be given one clear and consistent message about which holiday is which, and why each is important in its own right. Mixing the two diminishes the meaning for both.”
- “It would be awfully sad if we got our theological practices from ‘The O.C.’”

#