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MEDIATE RELEASE



More Interfaith Families Celebrate Passover than Hanukkah

Despite Proximity of Holidays, Interfaith Families Keep Easter, Passover Separate

Boston – March 07, 2005 – Although Hanukkah gets more attention, Passover is a more significant holiday for interfaith families, judging by participation levels. According to the Passover Predicament Survey, released today by InterfaithFamily.com (www.interfaithfamily.com), an independent non-profit publisher and advocacy membership association, 97 percent of respondents reported participating in Passover celebrations last year compared with 92 percent from an earlier InterfaithFamily.com study who said they participated in Hanukkah celebrations.

The Passover Predicament Survey, which fielded responses from 186 people nationwide in Feb. 2005, 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 77 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 new information about interfaith families who are raising their children as Jews – a very important demographic for Jewish continuity. A similar survey, The December Dilemma Survey, concerning Hanukkah and Christmas, was conducted in Dec. 2004.

According to the Passover Predicament Survey, 71 percent of interfaith families attended a seder, the ritual meal that is the centerpiece of the holiday; 61 percent ate matzah, the unleavened bread that the Israelites ate during the Exodus from Egypt; and 51 percent said they followed Passover's dietary restrictions. In contrast, the survey showed that fewer interfaith families celebrated Easter (59 percent) than Christmas (87 percent). Of those interfaith families who do participate in Easter, not many go to religious services, though more (33%) do than do at Christmas (25%).

“This finding is interesting because the original meaning of Easter is deeply religious and focuses on the precise boundary between Jews and Christians, because it commemorates the divinity of Jesus. So how interfaith families deal with Easter is particularly interesting,” said Edmund Case, publisher, InterfaithFamily.com. “Interfaith families may participate in Easter celebrations less often than Christmas because of Easter's more religious nature.”

A common perception about interfaith families is that because they often overlap, Easter and Passover can be challenging and unpleasant as family members struggle with identity crises, conflicting emotions, family guilt and differing religious demands. (An example of the latter: a

Catholic abstaining from eating meat on Good Friday might feel uncomfortable attending a seder, where brisket may be part of a traditional menu.) But the survey found that 43 percent of respondents said that neither Passover/Easter nor Hanukkah/Christmas is a source of conflict.

Because the two spring holidays often overlap, some in the Jewish community are concerned with religious “syncretism,” or blending of religions such as Chrismukkah, a neologism popularized by the Fox-TV drama, “The O.C.” Yet an important survey finding is that despite the fact that the holidays overlapped last year, of those that participate in Easter, most keep it and Passover separate, and even more do (87%) than keep Hanukkah and Christmas separate (69%), probably because of Easter's more religious nature. One respondent observed that “the only ‘blending’ we do is make the Easter dinner kosher for Passover because Easter has fallen during Passover the last few years. I guess that was successful since the Jewish guests could eat!”

“The Passover Predicament Survey provides insight into how interfaith families observe Passover and Easter, which rituals are important, and how they cope with potentially conflicting demands of the two holidays – and that will help other families navigate the demands of the season, along with other resources available on the InterfaithFamily.com website” Case said.

The survey found that a primary way interfaith families raising Jewish children resolve potential conflicts over the spring holidays is to treat Passover but not Easter as a religious holiday – despite Easter's more religious nature. Of interfaith families raising their children as Jews, more treat Passover as religious (43%) than treat Hanukkah as religious (23%) while 69 percent said their Easter celebrations were more secular than religious. (In comparison, in the December Dilemma Survey, 23 percent said their Hanukkah celebrations were more religious than secular, while 76 percent said their Christmas celebrations were more secular.)

“The Passover Predicament Survey is also important because it reinforces an important finding for the Jewish community,” Case added. “Interfaith families raising their children as Jews are dedicated to maintaining a strong Jewish identity by celebrating the Jewish holidays as religious holidays while observing Christian holidays, with non-Jewish family members, as cultural holidays. This is true even of Easter, which for believing Christians is very much a religious holiday. The distinction is important, and demonstrates the reason traditional elements of the Jewish community should support and welcome interfaith families into the community.”

Survey respondents explained that they participate in Passover and Easter celebrations as a way of sharing in, honoring, and respecting the traditions of both sides of their families. Comments included:

- “We’re sharing the holidays with family because we love them.”
- “Dad has always supported us and shared in our holidays and traditions in every way, and we support him in celebrating his.”

In an interesting finding for the Jewish community, many respondents commented that their participating in Easter celebrations did not adversely impact their children’s Jewish identity. Comments included:

- “Like eating Chinese food doesn’t make you Chinese.”

- “We explain that it is like going to someone’s birthday party; it’s not your party but you attend because they are your friend and you want to wish them well.”
- “Even as small kids they didn’t seem to have a problem with Dad having different traditions. They seemed to accept it as natural that people are different – ‘he’s from Ireland, and we’re not’; ‘he’s Catholic and we’re not.’ It just seems normal that the world is full of different people, different traditions and different beliefs.”

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.”

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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.