

Interfaith Inclusion in Our Congregations & Communities

Reform Judaism stands for a Judaism that is inclusive and reflective of a wide range of identities. We accept the responsibility of dismantling oppression both inside and outside of our communities. We acknowledge that due to racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, sizeism, sexism, and other forms of oppression, our communities are not yet whole.

Interfaith families represent an important and significant segment of the Jewish community in North America. According to the most recent Pew Research Center report on Jewish Americans, “nearly half of all non-Orthodox Jews who are married say their spouse is not Jewish (47%).” Furthermore, “Intermarriage is more common among those who have married in recent years: Among Jewish respondents who got married since the beginning of 2010, 61% have a non-Jewish spouse, compared with 18% of Jews who got married before 1980. Intermarriage also is more common among Jews who are themselves the offspring of intermarried parents: Among married Jews who say they have one Jewish parent, 82% have a non-Jewish spouse.” (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/05/11/10-key-findings-about-jewish-americans/>)

Reform Judaism stands for the full inclusion and participation of interfaith partners and families in Jewish life. While attitudes have improved in recent decades, many interfaith couples still report feelings of exclusion in Reform Jewish settings.

Audacious Hospitality Community Assessment Tool

The Audacious Hospitality Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Community Assessment is a starting point for reflection, conversation, and action within your community. This assessment will help you build on your existing measures and aid in initiating new ones. Think of this as both a process, as well as an idea checklist: a vision of the type of community that you strive to be. We recommend communities complete the entire assessment, including the section specific to the lens of interfaith inclusion. [Fill out this short form to download the Community Assessment.](#) The assessment is a first step in a congregational process towards full interfaith inclusion.

What is meant by “Interfaith Inclusion”?

“Interfaith Inclusion” means that our language and behavior reflect our gratitude and our love for each person who has chosen to seek their place of deep belonging within the Jewish community. It means that we work to create a culture of belonging where Jewish-adjacent family members feel at home as much as Jewish members do.

“Interfaith Inclusion” means recognizing and affirming that individuals and families hold multiple, intersectional identities, and that each person is a whole self, and not “half-anything.”



“Interfaith Inclusion” means that we speak and act with the understanding that our synagogue community includes and reflects both many members of Jewish families who do not self-identify as Jews and many individuals who were raised outside of Judaism and have become Jewish through conversion and whose extended family members do not identify as Jews.

“Interfaith Inclusion” means leaving behind assumptions in our speech and behavior that every member of the household or family is Jewish, that members of the extended family include only Jews, and our community members were raised exclusively with Judaism.

“Interfaith Inclusion” means that we assume our congregation is composed of a significant number of interfaith families who have chosen the congregation as their spiritual and communal home, and that we ensure that the perspectives of members of interfaith families - both Jewish and “Jewish-adjacent” partners - are represented in the decisions made by congregational leadership. We are guided by a best principle learned from the Disabilities Rights’ Movement, “Nothing about us without us.”

For some Reform congregational communities, “Interfaith Inclusion” might also mean sponsoring programmatic activities and providing resources that address specific interests expressed by interfaith partners and families.

Language

Our language is imperfect. Most recently, the term “Jewish-adjacent” has been used to refer to individuals who do not self-identify as Jewish and are also members of a Jewish family, raising Jewish children, or partnered with a Jew. Some people who might be identified as “Jewish-adjacent” rally around the term and others find it objectionable. Whatever term we choose, whether “Jewish-adjacent”, “interfaith partner”, “multi-faith,” “non-Jew,” etc., each is problematic in its own way. Individuals have different preferences; our communities are most inclusive when we describe others in the ways they choose to describe themselves.

Congregational Governance

Conversations around interfaith inclusion and congregational governance typically concern eligibility for congregational membership (including voting rights), board service, and the synagogue presidency.

The general trend is towards expanding eligibility for leadership positions. Some congregations limit the positions of Ritual Committee Chair (or a similar role) and President to members who identify as Jews. Some congregations are silent on the topic. Some are explicit that they have no such restrictions.



Congregations that do not have Jewish-adjacent participants serving in leadership positions are strongly urged to provide ample opportunities for those perspectives to be heard by leadership so that those perspectives are represented in leadership decisions.

Ritual Participation in Congregational Communities

Conversations around interfaith inclusion and ritual often center around the honor of reciting the Torah blessings and leading the congregation in prayers which include language like “us” and “our.” Decisions around ritual participation are usually determined by the spiritual leadership of the congregation (your rabbi and/or cantor) in conversation with the Ritual or Religious Practices Committee or other lay leaders.

Every Reform congregation invites members of the Jewish families who do not self-identify as Jews to participate in Jewish worship in various ways as a participant. Congregations differ regarding whether and how those individuals may lead the congregation in prayer.

Some congregations pair those members who do not identify as Jews with Jewish family members to recite blessings. Some congregations designate select readings and prayers to be led by those individuals. Some congregations have no limitations on participation. Some congregations publish explicit policies outlining their approach and practices and others choose to address questions of ritual participation in private conversations between the clergy and those immediately affected.

Looking for additional insights?

Articles that specifically explore the Jewish lives of interfaith families can be found on ReformJudaism.org.

