



Interfaith Inclusion in Our Communities

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.” (Alper & Cooperman, 2021)

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.

COMMUNITY OF BELONGING ASSESSMENT & WORKBOOK

The **Community of Belonging Assessment & Workbook** 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 and an idea checklist: a vision of the community you strive to be. We recommend communities complete the entire assessment, including the section that specifically pertains to interfaith inclusion. [Fill out this short form to download the Community of Belonging Assessment & Workbook.](#) The assessment is a first step in a process towards full interfaith inclusion in your community.

What is meant by “Interfaith Inclusion”?

Interfaith inclusion means that our language and behaviors reflect our gratitude and love for each person who has sought their place of belonging within the Jewish community. It means that we work to create a culture of belonging where Jewish-adjacent family members feel at home.

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

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

Interfaith inclusion means leaving behind assumptions in our speech and behavior that every member of a household or family is Jewish, extended family identify as Jews, and our community members were raised exclusively with Judaism.

Interfaith inclusion means we assume our community is composed of many interfaith families who have chosen to make our community their spiritual home. We must ensure that the perspectives of members of interfaith families - including Jewish-adjacent partners - are represented in the decisions made by our leadership. We are guided by a principle of the Disability Rights Movement: “Nothing about us without us.”

For some Reform communities, interfaith inclusion might also mean sponsoring 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 but are 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.

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GOVERNANCE

Conversations around interfaith inclusion and communal governance typically concern eligibility for membership, voting rights, board service, and the presidency.

The general trend is towards expanding eligibility for leadership positions. Some communities limit the positions of ritual committee chair (or a similar role) and president to members who identify as Jews. Some communities are silent on the topic. Some explicitly state that they have no such restrictions.

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

Ritual Participation

Conversations around interfaith inclusion and ritual often center around the honor of reciting the Torah blessings and leading the community in prayers which include language like “us” and “our.” Decisions around ritual participation are usually determined by the spiritual leadership of the community (namely, the rabbi and/or cantor) in conversation with the ritual or religious practices committee or other lay leaders.

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

Some communities pair those members who do not identify as Jews with Jewish family members to recite blessings. Some communities designate select readings and prayers to be led by those individuals. Some communities have no limitations on participation. Some communities publish explicit policies outlining their approach and practices while 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.

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