

Keruv
fjmc Tools for Your Shuls

קרוב

A project of the FJMC

Suggestions for Increasing Engagement

Fall 2014 Issue No. 1

What is FJMC Keruv? In Our Own Words...

The FJMC Keruv Initiative is about Welcoming, Accepting, and creating Jewish families. It is a journey of understanding how the various pieces of the puzzle fits together. The more we learn, the more our efforts are modified and change. This initiative composed of volunteer men and women is available to rabbis and synagogues who wish to work with us. Some congregations have affiliated FJMC clubs. Others don't.

We have been engaged in this process since 1998. More than 250 Rabbis and recently Cantors have participated in our 24-hour clergy think tanks. Approximately 200 lay people have attended our 2-3-day lay training seminars. Keruv is related to but not connected with conversion. Keruv is concerned with what we believe is the most pressing issue in the 21st Century for North American Jewry. This is our passion.

The KERUV Initiative is FJMC's gift to the Conservative Movement. This is the first newsletter designed to provide congregational decision makers with tools to increase welcoming, expand consciousness, and assist you to strengthen your communities.

Charles Simon, November 2014

Dear Dr. Phil

[This is a congregational tool: These columns were conceived and carried out by Phil Snyder at Tifereth Israel Synagogue in San Diego and were inserted in the the monthly bulletin. At the onset, Phil and his Rabbi wrote the questions and answers. Then it took off! People submitted real questions and requested real advise This column placed intermarriage issues in the minds of congregants. This is an easy way to personalize your communities'. Two examples follow:]

Dear Dr. Phil,

We are thinking of becoming members of Tifereth Israel. As an interfaith family how will we be made to feel comfortable at your shul?

Prospective Member

Dear Prospective Member,

You will be welcomed with open arms at our shul. At Tifereth we follow the following passage from the bible. "The stranger who dwells with you should be like one of your citizens; love him like yourself for you were strangers in the land of Egypt". From our rabbi, staff and board we want you to know that you will be treated as family. Our Keruv group is a great place to come and meet other intermarried couples many of them have been members for years.

Dear Dr. Phil,

My daughter-in-law's family came to our Sukkah. I have never attended any of their celebrations and am totally uncomfortable with Christmas and Easter. I now feel I should attend their next Christmas celebration. How can I find peace with this issue?

Uncomfortable Jewish Mother

Dear Jewish Mother,

No one can tell you how to feel about Christian celebrations. Many Jews are uncomfortable attending non-Jewish religious celebrations. Since they came out of respect for your traditions it should now be easier to attend theirs for the sake of family harmony. You will make your daughter and her family very happy to have you there.

Congregant's Stories: Another Tool

[Lonely at Chanukah by Alex Romano](#)



Among of the many Jewish laws, one says that you should never remind the Convert of his status lest he be made to feel like an outsider. For me, as a convert to Judaism, the December holiday season is filled with reminders that I am different. I see Christmas decorations as a reminder of my childhood experiences growing up Christian. And when I see Jewish decorations in public spaces and in my workplace, it appears to be nothing more than a token gesture put in place for my "benefit" as one of the small number of Jewish employees.

All of these decorations are part of the much larger American Jewish experience that I am part of, but it comes to make me feel like a minority within a minority. I know I am not alone, but it can feel very lonely.

A few years ago - before we joined Temple Aliyah - a family scheduled their son's Bar Mitzvah to occur on Christmas day. Without realizing what it sounded like to my ears, they said "What else do a bunch of Jews have to do on Christmas other than go out for Chinese food and a movie?" While I agreed with this for the Jewish community in general, I felt quite different - we spend Christmas day with my family exchanging gifts and celebrating family time. The scheduling of this Bar Mitzvah forced us, or so it felt, to choose between being Jewish and being a part of my family.

While this family had only the best intentions, their viewpoint did not consider the impact of their word on families, like mine, who are not completely Jewish. You see, while we have a fully Jewish household following my conversion, we are still a multi-faceted interfaith family. And in today's American Jewish experience, we are approaching the point where interfaith families will equal number of completely Jewish families. And in communities like ours, we may have already crossed that threshold.

Our words have the ability to make others feel wonderful and they can hurt those around us. I recall hearing about a child in Religious school who was told by his teacher "Jews don't have Christmas trees". The child was devastated to hear this and I completely understand his/her feeling. My family had a Christmas tree for many years, even when my children were attending Religious school, before conversion felt right for me. And, my wife's Jewish grandparents decorated their house with a white-flocked tree with blue ornaments as their expressions of their assimilated Jewish identity.

My prayer for this holiday season is that we all consider the people who will hear our words before they leave our lips. And that we brace ourselves for the well-meaning words that may come our way, that are not intended to hurt. I have come to accept wishes of "Merry Christmas" from my co-workers as readily as "Happy Hanukkah" or even just "Happy Holidays" as an attempt to wish that my holiday celebration, whatever that may be, should be wonderful. I wish the same to you.

Happy Holidays,
Alex Romano

FJMC Keruv Program

The FJMC Keruv initiative is based on a lay/professional partnership. FJMC brings together groups of rabbis and most recently Cantors to learn and to think about the issues that are occurring in their communities and within their member families. With the help of academics who study the dynamics of intermarriage, participants are challenged to examine how they respond to synagogue members and their children when intermarriages occur.

Rabbis and Congregational Presidents are invited to recommend a man and a woman to be trained as FJMC Keruv consultants. During the course of a weekend of training, these volunteers are taught to partner with their clergy and to provide strategic support to their fellow congregants. In addition these Keruv consultants are provided with a support network including an on-line Library, and an annual weekend of additional training. Since one size cannot fit all each rabbi/lay team develops their own plan to address community needs.

More Tools:

[The FJMC's Keruv/Understanding Intermarriage pages, click here](#)

[Creating a Welcoming Website, click here](#)

[The FJMC's Keruv On Line Resource Library, click here](#)

<p style="text-align: center;">For Additional Information</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Harvey Braunstein, Keruv Coordinator <u>Keruv@fjmc.org</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rabbi Charles Simon, Exec Dir FJMC <u>RabbiSimon@fjmc.org</u></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">New Book</p> <p style="text-align: center;">"Engaging the Non-Jewish Spouse: Strategies for Clergy and Lay Leadership"</p> <p style="text-align: center;">by Rabbi Charles Simon, and available at the <u>FJMC Store</u></p>
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