



Advocating for attitudes, policies and programs that engage interfaith families in Jewish life and community

Survey on Reconstructionist Congregations’ Interfaith Inclusion Policies and Practices

Executive Summary

The Center for Radically Inclusive Judaism (CFRIJ), with the cooperation of Reconstructing Judaism, conducted a survey of Reconstructionist congregations’ interfaith inclusion policies and practices in April and May 2021. We thank Rabbi Maurice Harris, Reconstructing Judaism’s Associate Director for Thriving Communities and Israel Affairs Specialist, for his guidance and assistance with the project. Rabbi Harris invited the movement’s 97 synagogues and havurot to participate in the survey; 47, or 48%, did respond to the survey. Key findings include:

Recognition and Equal Treatment

- 23% of congregations said that they do not draw any distinctions in terms of leadership and governance, ritual participation, or otherwise, between Jews and partners from different faith backgrounds; 74% said they draw some distinctions.
- 70% of congregations celebrate partners from different faith backgrounds, for example by offering special blessings for them or their relatives at lifecycle events; 30% do not.

Membership and Leadership

- Eighty-nine percent of congregations count partners from different faith backgrounds as full voting members; 68% permit them to serve as Board members, 66% as officers other than President; 62% permit them to serve as chairs of some committees, 49% as chairs of all committees; 28% permit them to serve as President. Only 2% do not count partners from different faith backgrounds as full voting members or permit them to hold leadership positions.
- In 51% of congregations, members from different faith backgrounds currently serve as officers, board members or committee chairs (in 49% they do not); 40% have them serving as committee chairs, 30% as board members, 23% as officers other than President, and 2% as President.

Ritual Participation

- Fifty-five percent of congregations permit members from different faith backgrounds to lead the lighting of Shabbat and holiday candles by themselves; 36% permit them to do so with someone who is Jewish; 9% permit neither.
- Forty-nine percent of congregations permit members from different faith backgrounds to lead kiddush during services by themselves; 32% permit them to do so with someone who is Jewish; 19% permit neither.

- At their b'nai mitzvah services, 34% of congregations allow a parent from a different faith background to have, by themselves, an Aliyah/recite the blessings before and after the Torah is read; 47% allow such parents to join with a Jewish parent in an Aliyah/recite the Torah blessings; 17% allow such parents to stand quietly next to someone who is Jewish during an Aliyah and/or recite a prayer other than the Torah blessings from the bimah; 2% permit none of these forms of participation.
- In 68% of congregations, a Torah is passed during b'nai mitzvah services to the b'nai mitzvah child; in 69% of those, it is passed by relatives including relatives from different faith backgrounds, in 31%, only by Jewish relatives.
- Sixty-four percent of congregations do not have or control a section of a cemetery. Of the 36% that do have or control a section of a cemetery, 59% allow partners of a different faith to be buried beside their Jewish partner anywhere in the cemetery; 35% allow them to be buried beside each other in a section of the cemetery designated for interfaith families.

Dual Education

- Eighty-one percent of congregations have religious schools; of those, 55% allow children who are receiving formal religious education in another religion to attend their religious school; 45% do not.

Wedding Officiation

- In 87% of congregations, some or all of the clergy officiate at weddings of interfaith couples; the clergy in 64% of congregations will only officiate, while in 23% they will co-officiate as well as officiate; in 13% the clergy will do neither.
- Of the congregations where some or all of the clergy officiate at weddings of interfaith couples, 12% do so without conditions; 20% do with conditions (for example, if the family will be a Jewish family, if children will be raised as Jews, if Judaism will be the only religion in the home, if the partner from a different faith background has had some education about Judaism, etc.); 56% do so with guidelines in mind but without strictly applied conditions, allowing for some case-by-case discernment.
- In addition to the 23% of congregations whose clergy will co-officiate, another 43% had clergy who will allow some participation of clergy of different faiths. Of that total of 65% of congregations, the clergy in 61% will not co-officiate but will allow clergy of other faiths to offer a blessing; 13% will co-officiate without conditions; 23% will co-officiate if the clergy from other faiths agrees to religiously neutral content, for example, saying “God” and not “Jesus” in their prayers.
- Eighty-seven percent of congregations permit weddings of interfaith couples to take place in their worship space, 13% do not.

Messaging, Programming and Training

- On their websites: 79% of congregations regularly explain/translate Hebrew words and “insider phrases”; 45% include images of interfaith families incorporating Judaism in their lives; 38% have a section that addresses interfaith families; 36% publish their policies and practices with regard to interfaith families (in terms of leadership and governance, ritual participation, and lifecycle officiation); 23% have links that provide Jewish resources specifically for interfaith families.

- Forty percent of communities offer programs that address issues that relate particularly to interfaith couples; 26% have had speakers about issues facing interfaith families in Jewish communities and Jewish life; 11% have an affinity group for interfaith families; 4% have a committee that specifically addresses interfaith families; 51% do not have these groups or programs.
- Seventy-nine percent of congregations advertise outside of their community that they welcome interfaith families; 21% do not. The mission statements of 60% of congregations refer to their approach to interfaith family inclusion; those of 40% do not.
- Six percent of congregations provide trainings for their professional staff on how to serve the specific needs of interfaith families; 11% provide such trainings for their lay leaders; 87% do not provide such trainings.
- Thirty-six percent have done a community organizing or listening campaign specifically involving interfaith families to better understand their needs and how their community can serve them; 64% have not.

Report

Methodology

The Center for Radically Inclusive Judaism (CFRIJ), with the cooperation of Reconstructing Judaism, conducted a survey of Reconstructionist congregations’ interfaith inclusion policies and practices in April and May 2021. We thank Rabbi Maurice Harris, Reconstructing Judaism’s Associate Director for Thriving Communities and Israel Affairs Specialist, for his guidance and assistance with the project. Rabbi Harris invited the movement’s 97 synagogues and havurot to participate in the survey; 47, or 48%, did respond to the survey. A list of the congregations that responded is attached as Exhibit 1.

The responding congregations compare in size, in terms of number of members, to Reconstructionist congregations as a whole, as follows:

Size of congregation (members)	% of 97 RJ congregations	% of 47 survey responses
70 or less	33%	26%
71-150	27%	21%
151-300	25%	34%
301-450	9%	15%
451 or more	6%	4%

The survey asked questions about leadership and governance; ritual participation; dual education; lifecycle officiation; messaging, programming and training; full inclusion; and recognition and equal treatment. Each section of questions included an open-ended question in which respondents could explain or comment on their answers.

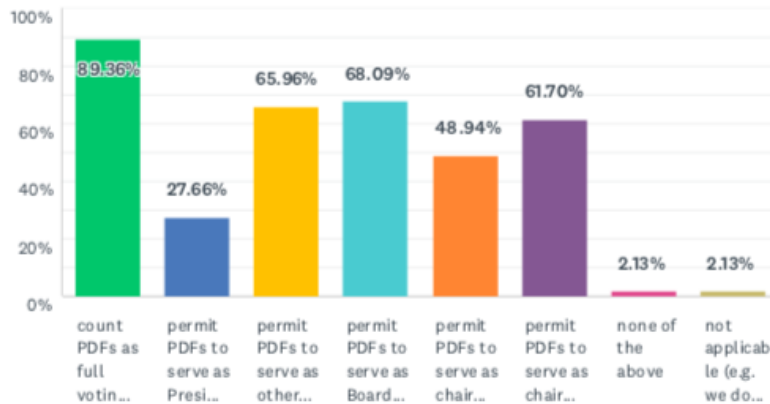
Membership and Leadership Roles

Forty-seven congregations answered a question about bylaws; only one said it did not have bylaws. Of the respondents, 89% count partners from different faith traditions as full voting

members; 68% permit them to serve as Board members; 66% permit them to serve as officers other than President; 62% permit them to serve as chairs of some and 49% of all committees; 28% permit them to serve as President; 2% do not count them as full voting members or permit them to hold leadership positions.

Q1 In our synagogue/havurah bylaws (please check all that apply):

Answered: 47 Skipped: 0

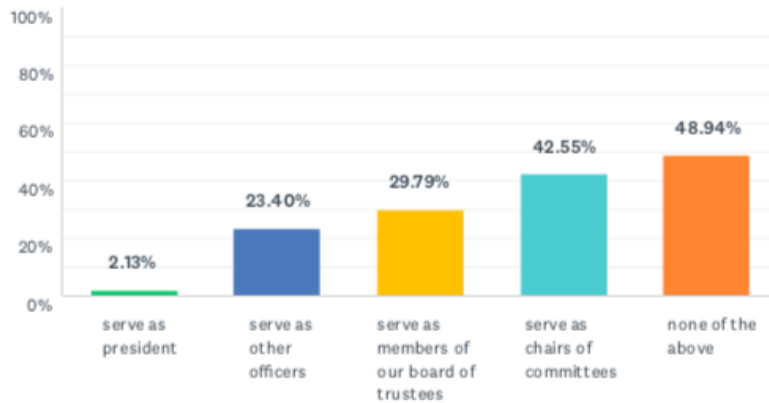


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	COUNT
count PDFs as full voting members	89.36%	42
permit PDFs to serve as President	27.66%	13
permit PDFs to serve as other officers	65.96%	31
permit PDFs to serve as Board members	68.09%	32
permit PDFs to serve as chairs of all committees	48.94%	23
permit PDFs to serve as chairs of some committees	61.70%	29
none of the above	2.13%	1
not applicable (e.g. we do not have bylaws)	2.13%	1

Twenty-four congregations (51%) indicated that members from different faith backgrounds currently serve as officers, board members or committee chairs (in 49%, they do not); 40% have them serving as board members, 43% as chairs of committees, 30% as board members, 23% as officers other than president, and 2% (representing one congregation) as president.

Q3 We currently have members of a different faith background who (please check all that apply):

Answered: 47 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
serve as president	2.13%	1
serve as other officers	23.40%	11
serve as members of our board of trustees	29.79%	14
serve as chairs of committees	42.55%	20
none of the above	48.94%	23

There were 26 responses to an open-ended question asking for explanations of the answers about leadership and governance.

- Five congregations indicated they were or hoped to soon re-evaluate their inclusivity policies/update their by-laws.
- One congregation’s by-laws require that 51% of the board be Jewish; another requires two-thirds “in order to maintain the Jewish identity of the institution.”
- One congregation’s by-laws do not permit members from different faith backgrounds to vote on rabbi selection, ritual matters, or amending the by-laws.
- One congregation has a membership category for those who are not Jewish or partnered with a Jew. One congregation’s by-laws permit the board to waive the requirement that members be Jewish or family members on a case-by-case basis.
- One comment said: “Our by-laws are a bit different in that they don’t ‘permit’ but they ‘do not exclude.’ A non-Jewish person can be a full member, and a full member can serve.”

Ritual Participation

Twenty-six congregations (55%) permit members of different faith backgrounds to lead the lighting of Shabbat and holiday candles by themselves; 17 (36%) permit them to do so with someone who is Jewish; 4 (9%) permit neither.

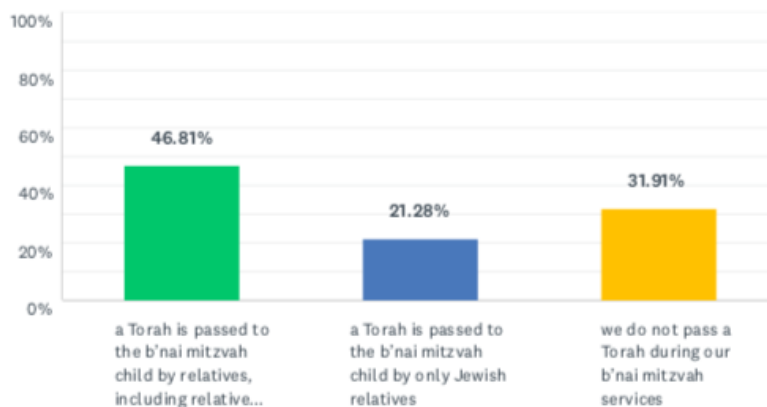
Twenty-three congregations (49%) permit members of different faith backgrounds to lead kiddush during services by themselves; 15 (32%) permit them to do so with someone who is Jewish; 9 (19%) permit neither.

At their b'nai mitzvah services, 16 congregations (34%) allow a parent from a different faith background to have, by themselves, an Aliyah/recite the blessings before and after the Torah is read; 22 congregations (47%) allow such parents to join with a Jewish parent in an Aliyah/recite the Torah blessings; 8 congregations (17%) allow such parents to stand quietly next to someone who is Jewish during an Aliyah and/or recite a prayer other than the Torah blessings from the bimah; 1 congregation (2%) permit none of these forms of participation.

In addition, in 68% of congregations a Torah is passed during b'nai mitzvah services to the b'nai mitzvah child; in 69% of those, it is passed by relatives including relatives from different faith backgrounds, but by only Jewish relatives in 31%.

Q8 During our b'nai mitzvah services:

Answered: 47 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
a Torah is passed to the b'nai mitzvah child by relatives, including relatives from different faith backgrounds	46.81% 22
a Torah is passed to the b'nai mitzvah child by only Jewish relatives	21.28% 10
we do not pass a Torah during our b'nai mitzvah services	31.91% 15

Twenty-nine congregations (62%) celebrate conversions during regular worship services; 18 (38%) do not.

Thirty congregations (64%) do not have or control a section of a cemetery. Of the 17 (36%) that do have or control a section of a cemetery, 10 (59%) allow partners of a different faith to be buried beside their Jewish partner anywhere in the cemetery; 6 (35%) allow them to be buried beside each other in a section of the cemetery designated for interfaith families; 1 (6%) has a cemetery or section where such burials can be anywhere, and another where they can be in a designated area.

There were nineteen open-ended comments to the ritual participation questions. One said that their congregation’s written restriction to Jews only for candle lighting and kiddush was changing to greater inclusivity in practice. Six comments referred to cemeteries; one congregation is thinking about their policy, one is working on buying plots where interfaith couples could be buried.

With respect to Aliyot, one said, “Because the wording of the blessings includes references to being part of the Jewish people to whom the Torah was originally given, only the adult Jewish members of the family recite the blessing.” Another said, “We have few to no non-Jewish members who seek to participate in services. We have had only one family request that a non-Jewish family member have an Aliyah.”

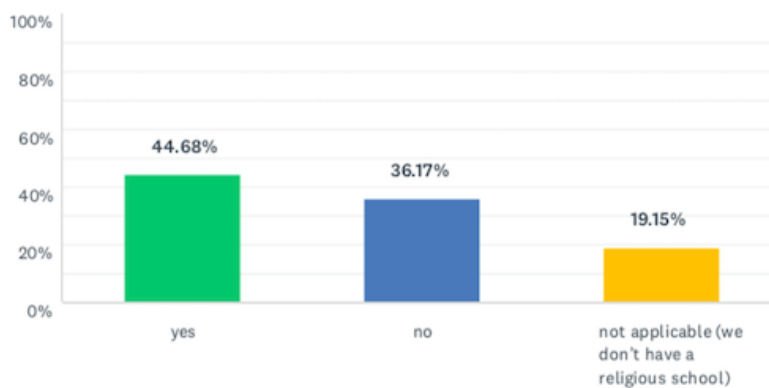
With respect to b’nai mitzvah services, one said, “We are especially attentive to the non-Jewish parent/family members during a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. We let them know how important they are in the Jewish life of their child. We make a special blessing for non-Jewish parents and grandparents that highlights their respect of and support for Jewish traditions.” Another said about passing the Torah: “The other-background parent stands with the Jewish parent, but only the Jewish parent physically passes the Torah. We verbally honor the other parent’s role in supporting the transmission of Torah.”

Dual Education

Thirty-eight congregations (81%) have religious schools; of those, 21 (55%) allow children who are receiving formal religious education in another religion to attend their religious school; 17 (45%) do not.

Q12 Do you allow children to attend your religious school who are simultaneously receiving formal religious education in another religion?

Answered: 47 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
yes	44.68%	21
no	36.17%	17
not applicable (we don't have a religious school)	19.15%	9

One open-ended comment on dual education said “they are allowed to be educated in two religions, but in order to enter the b’nai mitzvah process they have to be fully committed to Judaism. The policy has a lot of nuances.”

Lifecycle Officiation

In 41 congregations (87%), some or all of the clergy officiate at weddings of interfaith couples; the clergy in 30 congregations (64%) will only officiate, while in 11 (23%) they will co-officiate as well as officiate; in 6 congregations (13%) the clergy will do neither.

Please note that the responses to questions about clergy who co-officiate at weddings are not necessarily reflective of the practices of members of the RRA. Some of the clergy who serve Reconstructionist communities are rabbis from other denominations, and in many cases the people who completed the survey are not clergy themselves and may have different understandings of the meaning of co-officiation.

Of the 41 congregations’ clergy who officiate at weddings of interfaith couples, 5 (12%) do so without conditions; 8 (20%) do with conditions (for example, if the family will be a Jewish family, if children will be raised as Jews, if Judaism will be the only religion in the home, if the partner from a different faith background has had some education about Judaism, etc.); 23 (56%) do so with guidelines in mind but without strictly applied conditions, allowing for some case-by-case discernment; 1 (2%) response was without conditions/with guidelines; 4 (10%) responses were with conditions/with guidelines.

Of the 31 congregations’ clergy who will either co-officiate at weddings of interfaith couples with clergy of another faith or allow clergy of other faiths to offer a blessing, 19 (61%) will not co-officiate but will allow clergy of other faiths to offer a blessing; 4 (13%) will co-officiate without conditions; 7 (23%) will co-officiate if the clergy from other faiths agrees to religiously neutral content, for example, saying “God” and not “Jesus” in their prayers. One respondent (3%) said they do not co-officiate but allow a blessing and that they co-officiate if the other clergy agrees to neutral language.

Forty-one congregations (87%) permit weddings of interfaith couples to take place in their worship space, 6 (13%) do not.

Open-ended comments included:

- “Our rabbi does not ‘officially’ perform interfaith marriages but is open to considering on a case-by-case basis.”
- “Rabbi hasn’t been asked to officiate at an interfaith wedding of one of our members and hasn’t made any decision about how she would handle that if asked.”
- “Not sure if rabbi would co-officiate. We haven’t had to discuss this situation.”
- “Both [officiants] are unwilling to provide a ceremony to satisfy other family than the couple themselves.”
- “We are very attentive to the parents of the non-Jewish partner. I meet by phone with them to offer ways to participate and to reassure them that they will not be treated as outsiders as their own son or daughter’s wedding.”

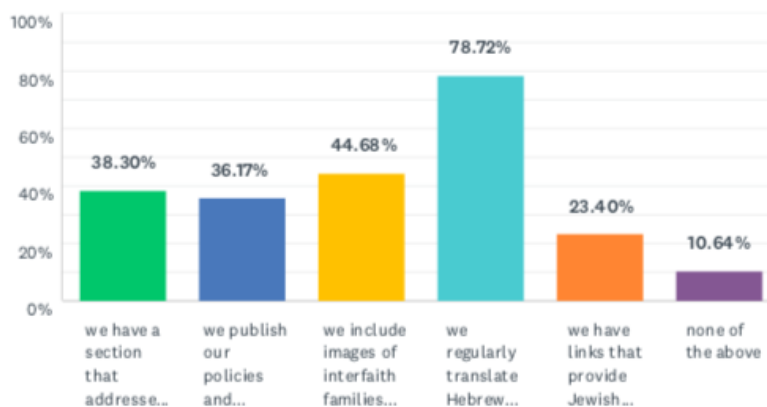
Messaging, Programming and Training

On their websites:

- 79% of congregations regularly explain/translate Hebrew words and “insider phrases”
- 45% include images of interfaith families incorporating Judaism in their lives
- 38% have a section that addresses interfaith families
- 36% publish their policies and practices with regard to interfaith families (in terms of leadership and governance, ritual participation, and lifecycle officiation)
- 23% have links that provide Jewish resources specifically for interfaith families

Q18 On our website (please check all that apply):

Answered: 47 Skipped: 0

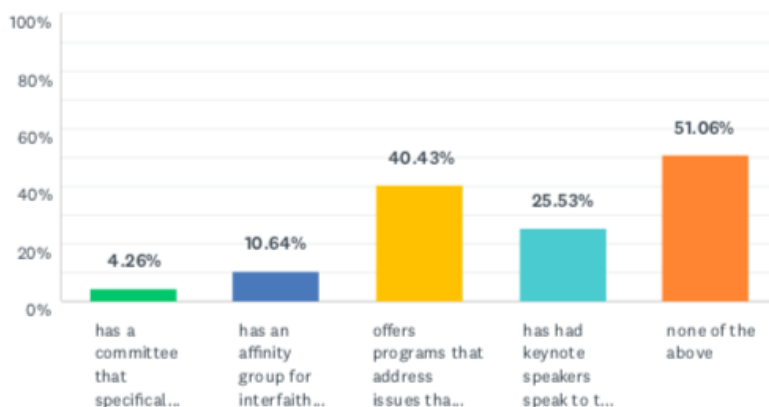


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
we have a section that addresses interfaith families.	38.30% 18
we publish our policies and practices with regard to interfaith families (in terms of leadership and governance, ritual participation, and lifecycle officiation)	36.17% 17
we include images of interfaith families incorporating Judaism in their lives	44.68% 21
we regularly translate Hebrew words and "insider phrases" (e.g. Yahrzeit, Bubbe, Chag Sameach, etc.)	78.72% 37
we have links that provide Jewish resources specifically for interfaith families	23.40% 11
none of the above	10.64% 5

Forty percent of communities offer programs that address issues that relate particularly to interfaith couples; 26% have had speakers about issues facing interfaith families in Jewish communities and Jewish life; 11% have an affinity group for interfaith families; 4% have a committee that specifically addresses interfaith families; 51% do not have these groups or programs.

Q19 Our synagogue/havurah (please check all that apply):

Answered: 47 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
has a committee that specifically addresses engaging interfaith families	4.26% 2
has an affinity group for interfaith families	10.64% 5
offers programs that address issues that relate particularly to interfaith families	40.43% 19
has had keynote speakers speak to the entire congregation about issues facing interfaith families in Jewish congregations and Jewish life	25.53% 12
none of the above	51.06% 24

Seventy-nine percent of congregations advertise outside of their community that they welcome interfaith families; 21% do not.

Six percent of congregations provide trainings for their professional staff on how to serve the specific needs of interfaith families; 11% provide such trainings for their lay leaders; 87% do not provide such trainings.

Thirty-six percent have done a community organizing or listening campaign specifically involving interfaith families to better understand their needs and how their community can serve them; 64% have not.

The mission statements of 60% of congregations refer to their approach to interfaith family inclusion; those of 40% do not.

In open-ended comments, four congregations indicated that they did not offer training for staff or lay leaders because they are small, but in the words of one, that did not indicate a “lack of welcoming sensitivity.” One said “Because we have so many interfaith households, we have not needed to do trainings. It’s usually a non-issue.” With respect to affinity groups, one said, “The interfaith families have not yet expressed an interest in an affinity group, we have informally asked.”

One said that the About page of their website says that they are a welcoming community that strives to be “radically inclusive. Our membership includes interfaith families ... and people who do not come from Jewish backgrounds who find connection and resonance with what we do.”

They added, “We’re grateful to this survey for offering some new ideas and we look forward to RJ’s resources on the topic.”

Finally, one said, “Our congregation does not have formal committees for meeting the needs of interfaith families. Rather, we have in depth personalized outreach to all our members at least annually. The majority of our families are interfaith. We try to emphasize during these outreach calls that [our congregation] welcomes ALL members of their family and to ask for their feedback about our efforts to be welcoming. Many interfaith families have told us that they joined our congregation because we were the most welcoming congregation in the region for interfaith families.”

Recognition and Equal Treatment

Seventy percent of congregations celebrate partners from different faith backgrounds, for example by offering special blessings for them or their relatives at holidays or lifecycle events; 30% do not.

Seventy-four percent of congregations said that they draw some distinctions in terms of leadership and governance, ritual participation, and otherwise, between Jews and partners from different faith backgrounds; 23% said they did not draw any distinctions. One congregation (2%) selected both answers.

Of the eleven congregations that said they do not draw any distinctions, ten allow a partner from a different faith background to have an Aliyah by themselves; eleven allow them to be an officer, but only nine a board member, and only seven, President.

There were several open-ended responses that indicated a maximally inclusive approach:

- “It is all over our literature that we are inclusive.... The inclusion of people of different faiths in the governance of the congregation was established by 1981. The ‘last frontier’ toward complete inclusion concerned ritual practice. When the change in our bylaws was proposed 6 years ago offering full inclusion, it was passed unanimously. In this case ‘law’ reflected ‘practice.’ There was tacit inclusion before the bylaws change.”
- “We give equal access vs. a special blessing.”

Other responses indicated a more nuanced approach:

- “We have at times had exploratory committees come up with a policy re: specifying roles that are appropriate for non-Jews to hold, with the conclusion being that brachot that include ‘asher kidshanu b’mitzvotav...’ should be said by Jews only. In practice, this is not the case. In practice we for the most part do not differentiate between Jews and non-Jews in our congregation.”
- “We only count Jews for a minyan, although, we’ve made exceptions when the number is close.”
- [By a congregation that allows partners from different faith backgrounds to have an Aliyah with someone who is Jewish] “There are conversations with families before life cycle events on how family members are going to participate. We don’t make any distinctions during the events – they all seem seamless.”

Two comments expressed a more restrictive approach:

- “I believe ritual is valuable and transformative because it names what is true. I do not think it makes sense to ask someone who does not identify with Judaism to bless the Torah proclaiming they are Jewish and accept Torah.”
- “Our overarching ritual guideline is being ‘real and true.’ For example we think it’s real and true that folk who aren’t Jewish are important members of our community. We think it’s not real and true for such a person to affirm that God gave them the Torah or that they have the Jewish relationship to the Torah.”

Full Inclusion

The survey included two open-ended questions – what are some things your congregation does to create a sense of inclusion of interfaith families, and what are some things you would like to do differently.

Some of the responses described an overall approach of inclusivity:

- “Members of interfaith families take visible leadership roles in governance and ritual, including members who do not identify as Jewish. Our family education program is geared for interfaith families. We try to articulate being a community of people drawn to each other and to our style of spiritual journey without doing any traditional Jewish gatekeeping.”
- “Ritual inclusion, readings and prayers that reflect different faiths and backgrounds, public leadership roles, school inclusion, space for people to talk about other faith celebrations.”
- “We name the fact that interfaith families are welcome and present. We encourage students in Hebrew school to speak about their different heritages. We give the interfaith parents equal treatment in lifecycle events. We have had families speak about being interfaith at special synagogue events called ‘tishes.’ We make sure interfaith families are included in our in-home Shabbat dinners. We honor all family traditions, including those with Christmas trees hosting congregational events in December.”
- “We have specific things on our website that address welcoming interfaith families. We translate all terms in Hebrew and only recite prayers in our siddur that have transliteration. We have done religious school programming on interfaith families and identity, we actively acknowledge that non-Jews are members and celebrated, we have offered adult education - i.e. "Jew-ish" a program that had language encouraging interfaith members to participate, our clergy officiate interfaith weddings, we have non-Jewish committee and board members.”

Some responses emphasized careful use of language:

- “We acknowledge their presence and are intentional about language and prompt for discussion and connection that talks about one’s relationships to Jews and Jewishness without assuming everyone is Jewish.”
- “Our service leaders. are cautious about ‘we’ language when it comes to observing certain traditions or not observing others (i.e. we name that some of our members may celebrate Christmas in their home, may wish a happy Easter to those who celebrate, avoid saying things about how ‘we don’t’ or ‘Jews don’t’ do this or that.)
- “Use language like ‘people who love Jews’ rather than ‘non-Jews’.”

Some responses focused on explicit statements and other inclusive actions:

- “We see God’s face in everyone: Jews by birth, Jews by choice, interfaith families; ...”
- “We acknowledge that most of us lived in homes with a mix of traditions. We do not question anyone about their background.”
- “As the rabbi, I have taught Torah about the power and importance of interfaith families in our tradition.”
- “We emphasize that we are and always have been welcoming and inclusive of interfaith families: many of our past presidents, officers and leaders are in interfaith families.”
- “Bless parents of interfaith family at b'nei mitzvah specifically naming the parent from another faith tradition's importance in supporting the child's Jewish learning and identity and their embrace of Judaism if appropriate.”
- “We have a ‘buddy system’ ... if new members are interested in an interfaith buddy, we often connect them with several long time members who can answer questions about our interfaith welcome.”
- “Include interfaith life in our religious school curriculum.”

Responses to the question about what congregations could do differently included “recruit non-Jewish members to serve on the board” and “Perhaps we should advertise more outside the Jewish community to reach interfaith families who might not know we exist.” Others included:

- “I would like to see us have an affinity group of non-Jews in our community to learn about Jewishness and Judaism, allyship, and how to support a Jewish partner/kids, as well as a way of making sure they can support one another in investing in their own inclusion. Additionally, I wonder about creating liturgy that is specific for non-Jews to say that speaks to their relationship with Judaism and Jewish community.”
- “Outreach to non-Jewish members of the synagogue to engage them in congregational life and connect them with other members of the community in the same (or sometimes greater) way than to Jewish members of the congregation - as non-Jewish members of our community (especially newer ones) may either have limited experience as members of a synagogue/Jewish community, or be uncertain of the level to which they are welcome. We could do more to make sure this is clear.”
- “I think we could be more explicit and appreciative of non-Jewish partners raising Jewish children. We could have more speakers and/or special events targeted to those families (though our interfaith families have expressed joy at being integrated and have resisted separate events so far).”

Finally, one said, about things to do differently, “None at this time. We like who we are and how we approach our worship, inclusion, and sense of family.”

Discussion

This survey is modeled on the Center’s December 2019 [Survey on Reform Synagogue Interfaith Inclusion Policies and Practices](#) and December 2020 [Survey on Emerging Spiritual Communities’ Interfaith Inclusion Policies and Practices](#). As stated in the reports on those surveys:

Interpretation of the significance of the data yielded by this survey depends to a large extent on the interpreter's perspective with respect to inclusion of interfaith families. The same data can be stated in ways that emphasize permission or restriction; for example, 40% of congregations permit X, or, 60% of congregations do not permit X. In turn, whether or not it is appropriate or advisable to permit or not permit X depends on one's fundamental views: about Judaism – whether it is a system for those who *are* Jewish or also those who *do* Jewish; about the relative importance of maintaining boundaries, on the one hand, and engaging interfaith families in Jewish life, on the other; and about whether restriction or permission will lead to interfaith family engagement.

In terms of membership and leadership, 89% of Reconstructionist congregations count partners from different faith backgrounds as voting members, 68% permit them to serve as board members and 66% as some officers; 30% have partners from different faith backgrounds serving as board members and 23% as officers.

In terms of ritual participation, 91% of Reconstructionist congregations permit members from different faith backgrounds to lead the lighting of Shabbat and holiday candles during services; 81% allow a parent from a different faith background to have an Aliyah/recite the blessings before and after the Torah is read.

In the Center's view, full inclusion of partners from different faith backgrounds requires that they be considered and treated as equal to their Jewish partners. From that perspective, a key measure of inclusion is whether a partner from a different faith background is allowed to participate or lead a ritual by themselves, as opposed to with someone who is Jewish. In this regard, 55% of Reconstructionist congregations allow such partners to lead the lighting of Shabbat and holiday candles during services by themselves; 34% allow such partners to have an Aliyah by themselves. An important related finding is that 23% of Reconstructionist congregations say that they do not draw any distinctions in terms of leadership and governance, ritual participation, and otherwise, between Jews and partners from different faith backgrounds.

It appears fair to say that about one-quarter to one-third of Reconstructionist congregations take a full or maximally inclusive approach towards interfaith families and partners from different faith backgrounds. Some of the open-ended responses express this approach: "We give equal access vs. a special blessing"; "Members of interfaith families take visible leadership roles in governance and ritual, including members who do not identify as Jewish.... We try to articulate being a community of people drawn to each other and to our style of spiritual journey without doing any traditional Jewish gatekeeping."

However, it also appears fair to say that about two-thirds to three-quarters of Reconstructionist congregations are maintaining boundaries around ritual participation by partners from different faith backgrounds: 47% allow such partners to have an Aliyah only with someone who is Jewish, and another 17% do not allow such partners to say the Torah blessings, but instead another prayer, or to stand quietly on the bimah. Some of the open-ended responses express this approach: "[W]e think it's real and true that folk who aren't Jewish are important members of our community. We think it's not real and true for such a person to affirm that God gave them the Torah or that they have the Jewish relationship to the Torah."

In terms of wedding officiation practices, 87% of Reconstructionist congregations' clergy will officiate for interfaith couples, while 23% will co-officiate. It is important to note that another 40% of Reconstructionist congregations' clergy, who said they did not co-officiate, will allow clergy of other faiths to offer a blessing.

In terms of messaging, programming and training practices, 36% of Reconstructionist congregations publicize their policies and practices with regard to interfaith families (in terms of leadership and governance, ritual participation, and lifecycle officiation) on their websites; 40% offer programs that address issues that relate specifically to interfaith families; 11% have an affinity group for interfaith families; 79% advertise outside of their communities that they welcome interfaith families; between 6% and 11% provide trainings for their professional or lay leaders on how to serve the needs of interfaith families.

The open-ended responses describe pragmatic steps that Reconstructionist congregations are taking to be more inclusive, including creating liturgy, care with language, "buddy" systems, and including interfaith life in religious school curriculum. One summarized:

"We name the fact that interfaith families are welcome and present. We encourage students in Hebrew school to speak about their different heritages. We give the interfaith parents equal treatment in lifecycle events. We have had families speak about being interfaith at special synagogue events called 'tishes.' We make sure interfaith families are included in our in-home Shabbat dinners. We honor all family traditions, including those with Christmas trees hosting congregational events in December."

It appears that 10% of Reconstructionist congregations are in the process of or contemplating revising their policies with respect to inclusion of interfaith families. The Center hopes that the survey results will be helpful to all Reconstructionist congregations as they continue to address that issue.

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The Center will provide a link and a password to the underlying survey data, upon request; if you are interested, please send an email requesting access to info@cfrij.com.

Exhibit 1 – Participating Congregations

University Synagogue	Irvine	CA
Congregation Ner Shalom	Cotati	CA
Congregation Beth Evergreen	Evergreen	CO
Temple Bnai Israel	Willimantic	CT
Congregation Bet Haverim	Atlanta	GA
Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation	Evanston	IL
Sinagoga Ner Tamid del Sud	Serrastretta	Italy
Temple Hillel B'nai Torah	West Roxbury	MA
Shir Hadash	Newton	MA
Congregation Dorshei Tzedek	Newton	MA
Congregation Agudas Achim	Attleboro	MA
Columbia Jewish Congregation	Columbia	MD
Congregation T'chayah	Metro Detroit	MI
Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Congregation	Ann Arbor	MI
Mayim Rabim Congregation	Minneapolis	MN
Temple Israel of Duluth	Duluth	MN
Kehillah Synagogue	Chapel Hill	NC
Havurat Tikvah	Charlotte	NC
Temple B'nai Abraham	Bordenton	NJ
Congregation Kehilat Shalom	Belle Mead	NJ
Congregation Shir Shalom	Buffalo	NY
SAJ-Judaism that Stands for All	New York	NY
Kehillath Shalom Synagogue	Cold Spring Harbor	NY

Reconstructionist Synagogue of the North Shore	Plandome	NY
West End Synagogue	New York City	NY
Bet Am Shalom Synagogue	White Plains	NY
Kehilat Sukkat Shalom	Columbus	OH
Kneseth Israel Temple	Wooster	OH
Or Haneshamah	Ottawa	Ontario, Canada
Havurah Shalom	Portland	OR
Temple Beth Israel of Eugene	Eugene	OR
Temple Beth Shalom	Salem	OR
Temple Emek Shalom	Ashland	OR
Congregation Beth Israel	Media	PA
Kehilat Hanahar	New Hope	PA
Congregation Dor Hadash	Pittsburgh	PA
Leyv Ha-Ir	Philadelphia	PA
Or Hadash: a Reconstructionist Congregation	Fort Washington	PA
Mishkan Shalom	Philadelphia	PA
Congregation Am Haskalah	Bethlehem	PA
Dorshei Emet	Montreal	Quebec, Canada
Chavurah B'Yachad	Salt Lake City	UT
Kol Ami Northern Virginia Reconstructionist Community	Arlington	VA
Temple Beth Hatfiloh	Olympia	WA
Kadima Reconstructionist Community	Seattle	WA
Congregation Shaarei Shamayim	Madison	WI
Shir Hadash	Milwaukee	WI