

Dear Friend,

December 2007 was the best month we've ever had at InterfaithFamily.com, with great publicity for our December Holidays survey, our highest monthly website traffic ever and a significant new grant for social networking. January 2008 brought a 50% increase in requests to our [Jewish Clergy Officiation Referral Service](#), and the launch of our first [video contest](#). We're about to launch a new password protected, "for clergy only" section of our [Resource Center for Jewish Clergy](#)--and we're co-sponsoring a conference for New England area rabbis in May.

We hope you enjoy this Update on our eventful four months, and as always, we welcome your feedback, comments and advice.

Organizational Highlights

1. Board Activity

In January our Board approved our statement of vision, mission, and goal:

Our Vision: People in interfaith relationships are welcomed and embraced by Jewish communities and contribute to Judaism's enduring strength and continuity.

Our Mission: To empower people in interfaith relationships--individuals, couples, families and their children--to engage in Jewish life and make Jewish choices, and to encourage Jewish communities to welcome them.

Our Goal: To be a pre-eminent and innovative leader in helping people in interfaith relationships to learn about and connect with welcoming and open Jewish communities.

We are in the process of developing a three-year strategic plan, and are working on a Board development process for consideration at our May Board meeting.

Two of our founding Board members, Batya Olsen and Ken Grandberg, as well as Jonathan Wornick, have stepped down from the Board. We are extremely grateful to each of them for their many contributions to our early growth--and we are pleased to have their continued involvement on our Advisory Board.

2. Staff Growth

We are pleased to welcome Ruth Abrams as IFF's new online editor--and our seventh full time staff member. Ruth has a Ph.D. in comparative history, has taught Jewish history at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and done editing for the journal POLIN at Brandeis University. Ruth will expand and grow our editorial content, and help us create new holiday- and life-cycle-specific educational resources, as our users have requested.

We send our very best wishes to our Chief Operating Officer, Heather Martin, who is at home on maternity leave with her second son, Asher John Martin, born Feb. 19.



Asher Martin, the newest addition to the IFF family

Education Activities

1. Content Resources

On January 15, we launched our first [video contest](#), with a \$2,500 grand prize! We're looking for wedding videos, humor, interviews, anything dealing with interfaith relationships issues. In the next four months, we're also planning to launch a video blog from Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben, author of several great books for interfaith couples and families.

You may have noticed that we no longer publish a bi-weekly Web Magazine. As of mid-October, we started publishing content on a daily basis. During Thanksgiving week, we published a series of articles on Jewish food; in December, prior to Christmas, we published a series of articles on a Jewish perspective on Jesus; and in February, we partnered with our friends at [JBooks.com](#), to publish a week's worth of articles on interfaith literature.

February 2008

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Connections Activities

1. Jewish Clergy Officiation Referral Service



From July, when Rabbi Lev Baesh joined our staff, through December, Lev responded to 442 requests for help finding a rabbi or cantor to officiate at weddings of interfaith couples, an average of 74 a month. In January alone, he responded to 121! There is clearly a great demand for our help.

Lev continues to add to the about 150 rabbis and cantors to whom we make referrals. Interested clergy should take our [Jewish clergy survey](#).

2. Connections In Your Area

Twenty-three organizations joined our [Connections In Your Area](#) system between Nov. 1 and Feb. 15, bringing the total to 457, from more than 120 communities across North America.

3. Discussions

We've noticed increased activity with more postings and back and forth on our [discussion boards](#), and readership of the boards has more than tripled from last spring, to reach over 9,400 page views in January 2008 alone. As of February, comments on articles will now appear on the discussion boards as well.



4. Social Networking

We are thrilled to report that in December a private family foundation made an outright grant of \$82,500 that will enable us to design and implement a social networking platform, as well as a matching challenge grant for \$67,210 over two years for the hiring of a social networking coordinator. Our social network will enable us to help the significant number of our users who tell us they want to connect with other people in interfaith relationships online and/or in person.



Now an interfaith couple having a baby, for example, will be able to find on and through our website not only content resources (personal stories by other couples about their experiences, our guide to welcoming baby ceremonies, etc.), a local Jewish organization that is running a program on choosing a religious identity for children, and a mohel who works with interfaith couples, but also other couples facing the same issue, both online and in person in their local area.

Moreover, the social networking platform will provide program providers and groups with an easy-to-use system for scheduling activities, communicating with program participants, and sharing resources. It will allow alumni of programs (and program providers) to stay in touch with each other. And it will facilitate the creation of new online groups--virtual havurahs--and the in-person gatherings that will follow.

It will also greatly enhance the user experience on the website, as users' comments and input will be more deeply integrated into determining what content to feature, and users will be able to learn more about their fellow users.

We are excited about this project and deeply grateful to the funder who is making it possible.

Advocacy Activities

1. Rabbinic Officiation Initiative

We are the only Jewish organization providing a cross-denominational resource to help clergy address and resolve the officiation question, and are pleased to report progress on two fronts.

In March, in time for the annual conference of the CCAR, the association of Reform rabbis, we will launch a password protected, "for clergy only" section of our website, with an inaugural offering of articles written *by rabbis for rabbis* on why they do or do not officiate at weddings of interfaith couples. We already have almost 600 rabbis and cantors who will have passwords; clergy who would like access should take our [Jewish clergy survey](#). We're going to mail a postcard about the new password-protected section to the nearly 2,000 CCAR members just before the conference, and we'll be exhibiting and hosting a late night reception at the conference.



Thanks to a generous grant from The Interfaith Project (TIP) at Temple Shir Tikvah in Winchester, Mass., we are co-sponsoring with TIP a conference for New England area rabbis and cantors on May 18, "Best Practices for Jewish Clergy Officiating at Weddings of Interfaith Couples." The gathering is for clergy across the movements who officiate, or who are interested in the question, and will focus on intake, ceremonies, and continuing relationships with couples. For more information, contact Rabbi Baesh at levb@interfaithfamily.com.

2. Resource Center for Program Providers

At the end of January we announced changes in the way InterfaithFamily.com works with outreach professionals. We created and plan to expand a "for Program Providers" section of our website, called the [Resource Center for Program Providers](#). We will focus on making resources available online for not only professionals, but also volunteer outreach and keruv committee members, and on facilitating connections among professionals and volunteers. The Resource Center is an evolution from our Professionals Advisory Circle, which will no longer operate.

3. Writing, Speaking Engagements, Appearances and Partnerships

We were exhibitors at the United Jewish Communities General Assembly in Nashville in November, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism biennial in Orlando in December and the Union for Reform Judaism biennial in San Diego in December.

I met and spoke with the Israeli Amitim of the Bronfman Youth Fellowship in Israel while they were in New York in December. Rabbi Baesh spoke at Temple Shir Shalom in Orlando in December, attended the Ohalah conference for



Renewal rabbis in January and has been invited to speak at Beth David Reform Congregation in Gladwyne, Pa., in April. Also, our managing editor, Micah Sachs, attended Kivun III, a conference for young Jewish professionals in New York in November.

Marketing

1. Press Mentions

We received [extensive publicity](#) for our 2007 December Holidays survey and tips for handling the holidays, including mentions in the *New York Times*, CNN.com, MSN.com, *Chicago Parent* and other publications. Micah wrote articles on the holidays for *Big Apple Parent*, (New York) *Parent Guide News* and (Boston) *Parents & Kids*. We were featured in a *Boston Globe* story about the generational shift in philanthropy, and in a *Baltimore Jewish Times* article about officiation.

As we reported in our last Update, the winter issue of *Reform Judaism* magazine featured a section on outreach that referred readers to InterfaithFamily.com for more first-person stories. At the URJ Biennial in December, hundreds of copies of a Discussion & Study Guide that reprinted the special outreach section were distributed.



Key Metrics

- **Website traffic:** We had more than 191,000 unique visitors to our website during 2007 and more than 28,500 in December alone, our best month ever. Our website traffic in the last quarter of 2007 was up 54% over the last quarter of 2006.
- **Bi-weekly email newsletter:** Our February 5 email newsletter went to 7,212 recipients. From November 1 through February 15 we added 314 new subscribers.
- **Organizations listed on Connections In Your Area:** Twenty-three organizations joined our [Connections In Your Area](#) system between Nov. 1 and Feb. 15, bringing the total to 457 from more than 120 communities across North America.
- **Requests for Jewish clergy officiation referrals:** 270 from Nov. 1 through Jan. 31.

If you don't receive our biweekly email newsletter highlighting our newest content and would like to do so, click [here](#).

Finances and Development

Our fundraising for 2007 was very successful. We raised more than \$870,000, which represents a 62% increase over 2006. Since October we received new funding of \$82,500 for the social network from a private family foundation that prefers to remain anonymous, \$10,000 from The Interfaith Project of Temple Shir Tikvah of Winchester, Mass., and a renewed and increased commitment for \$25,000 from the Jesse & Julie Rasch Foundation.

Thank You for Your Interest!

We appreciate your support and interest very much. We welcome your input and advice--please let us know what you think of our progress.

And please help us by forwarding this update to anyone who might be interested in our work.

[Send to a Friend](#)

With best regards,



Edmund C Case

Edmund C. Case, President and Publisher