

## How to Start Your Own Interfaith Couples Support Group

Something exciting and unprecedented is happening with regard to interfaith families—they are beginning to organize themselves into local groups. Over the last five years, we at Dovetail have been in contact with a significant number of independent groups around the country. From New Haven to San Francisco, Chicago to Tulsa, groups of Jewish/Christian families are gathering on a regular basis.

According to Egon Mayer, sociologist at Brooklyn College and director of the Jewish Outreach Institute, intermarried couples “need kindred spirits to share concerns about childrearing and the marriage itself.” With this larger goal before them, local interfaith groups form for different specific reasons. Some are created primarily for adults to explore questions of spirituality and culture. Some have their roots in the desire to create educational and social opportunities for the children of interfaith families. Some focus primarily on celebrating holidays and life-cycle events together; others have regular monthly meetings with discussions on a broad array of topics.

New and emerging interfaith groups can learn from the experiences of others. According to Jaida n’ha Sandra, an expert on salons (groups of people who regularly gather in living rooms or coffee shops to discuss a variety of topics, in the process forming a community of thinking, feeling individuals), a new group must be initiated by someone.

“It might be one person who has decided on his or her own..., it might be a core group of three to six organizers, or it might be 15 or 20 people drawn from a network of friends or a membership list who are working together to form the group. Whoever makes the initial decisions for a fledgling salon is bound to have a strong impact on its future leadership.” Sandra suggests that the original organizer(s) should have: lots of energy, social savvy, a large circle of friends and acquaintances, and a big living room. To that we would add some characteristics of our own: passion about the issues facing interfaith families, an open mind, and flexibility.

If one person initiates the group, it is important for that person to allow the group to emerge and develop on its own, with leadership gradually being shared by many or all members. If the group’s original organizer continues to control everything from meeting times to agendas to phone calls, she will find herself burned out, probably within a year. It is better to

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## Bulletin Board: Interfaith Support Around the Nation

**Dovetail's** Bulletin Board is a regular feature of this journal, designed to help interfaith couples find others in their area who are interested in sharing ideas and experiences. The Bulletin Board appears in alternating issues of **Dovetail**.

To be listed as a contact person for a new or existing group or to indicate that you are looking to join or form a group in your area, please send your information to:

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Dan is one of the founders and coordinators of the Chicago Jewish-Catholic Couples' Group, the largest ongoing group of interfaith families in the United States. You may contact him directly for a copy of the current Bulletin Board listings.

Please note: **Dovetail** does not interview or endorse any Bulletin Board entry.

### Dovetail's Staff

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share responsibility gradually among members of a core group. Sandra describes how her own core group emerged: "We had a brainstorming session, split the leadership of future activities among us, built a phone tree to share the calling chores, opened up the [group] to other friends, and made donations to cover supplies." Be ready for a long and sometimes difficult process of reaching consensus—it can take several such meetings to hash out all the details to everyone's satisfaction. "The domineering people disagree heatedly, the reserved people don't get heard at all, factions develop, or compromises that don't satisfy anybody are reached. No one is to blame: few of us have been trained in facilitating group process. On the other hand, if [groups] that start with this kind of whole-group communication can get through the beginning negotiations, they are less likely to run out of steam in the future. If they can survive their rocky

**Dovetail's** mission is to provide a channel of communication for interfaith couples, their parents, and their children. No matter what their specific choices regarding faith in their home and children, the more interfaith families can share their ideas, experiences, resources, and support, the more they can make peace in their homes and communities. Jewish and Christian perspectives can dovetail.

Believing that there are no definitive answers to the questions facing interfaith families, **Dovetail** strives to be open to all ideas and opinions. Editorial content attempts to balance and respect the perspectives of both Jewish and Christian partners in interfaith marriages, as well as the diverse perspectives of parents and children of interfaith couples. Inclusion in **Dovetail** does not imply endorsement. **Dovetail** accepts a thoughtful and constructive discussion of all related issues in the Letters to the Editor section, and reserves the right to reply.

start, they have proven their intention to continue dealing with the problems and joys of being together." (Utne Reader, July/August 1993, pp. 53-55)

One of **Dovetail's** primary reasons for existence is to help facilitate interaction and information-sharing between groups of interfaith couples. Our Bulletin Board, which appears in every other issue of the journal (see sidebar this page), offers our readers the opportunity to find a local group or to enter into a dialogue with a group in another part of the country. If you want to start a group for interfaith families, or want to learn more from existing groups, we encourage you to take advantage of this resource. And don't forget to let us know of your progress, so we can include it in a future issue of **Dovetail**. 

*Joan C. Hawxhurst*

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**Dovetail** welcomes article submissions (query or completed manuscript), letters to the editor, and comments or suggestions. Send to Joan C. Hawxhurst, Editor, at the above address. We look forward to hearing from you.

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# The Chicago Jewish-Catholic Couples' Dialogue Group

by Dan and Abbe Josephs

It has finally happened. You have met the man of your dreams. You go to dinner with your parents and tell them all about him. Then comes the fateful question: Is he Jewish? No, he's Catholic. Your parents are sure he's nice, but they know you could find a man you "have more in common with" at the next Jewish singles dance.

You have been married for two years. Your parents have been understanding and supportive of your decision to respect each other's faiths and to continue to practice those faiths. Now, however, you are going to have a baby, and everyone is telling you the same thing: You have to pick one faith or the child will be "confused." No one knows where this pronouncement came from, but everyone is sure it is true.

Do these situations sound familiar? You are not alone.

## How It Began

When we were engaged, over 14 years ago, neither one of us wanted to convert; we valued our respective faiths. We wanted religion to be prominent in our wedding ceremony. We made it through the wedding process, due in part to the wonderful help and support of Father John Cusick of the Chicago Archdiocese, who also helped us find a rabbi to co-officiate.

A few years later, we asked Father John if there was a support group we could join. Father John did not know of any, but had just met another interfaith couple (David and Patty Kovacs), and he said, "Let's start one." The five of us, along with the late Father Dan Montalbano,

founded the Jewish-Catholic Couples' Dialogue Group and held the first meeting with ten couples in Father Montalbano's rectory. That was nine years ago.

The group now has a mailing list of over 500. Our members range from couples who are dating to those who have been married over 25 years.

There are many ways to find couples. One approach is to talk to the clergy at your church and/or temple. Contact other churches and synagogues in your area. Try advertising in the local paper and in church and temple bulletins—people who see these advertisements may refer interfaith couples to you.

## Reasons for Success

We have been fortunate to have the support of wonderful clergy. In addition to Fathers Cusick and Montalbano, we have been blessed with Rabbi Allen Secher of Makom Shalom Congregation and Father Bernie Pietrzak of the Archdiocese of Chicago. Also, the ecumenical office of the archdiocese has lent much support. Clergy are at most of our meetings. They either conduct meetings about religious topics, or they act in an advisory role.

Couples have told us it is reassuring to have the clergy from their respective faiths at the meetings; couples realize they do not need to abandon their faiths in an interfaith relationship. (Several years ago our group went through a period when no rabbi was associated with us. In response to a survey, our members noted this as a concern.) Try to seek out clergy who are willing to attend meetings regularly, or who are

*Dan and Abbe Josephs are two of the founders and coordinators of the Chicago Jewish-Catholic Couples' Dialogue Group. Dan, who is Catholic, is an attorney practicing in Illinois with the law firm of Richter, Jaros & Robinson. Abbe, who is Jewish, is a computer engineer with Natural Gas Pipeline Company of America.*

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**Does your own local interfaith support group produce a newsletter or periodic mailing for its members?**

**If so, please consider adding Dovetail to your mailing list. We are creating an archive of newsletters published by local interfaith groups. Please send your materials to Dovetail, ATTN: Local Newsletter Collection. Your publications will help others interested in starting their own groups in other parts of the country. Thanks!**

willing to give you occasional support by speaking to the group or serving as mentors.

Our clergy have helped us to be authentic to our faiths. It may also be easier for you to gain the support of clergy if your group does not adulterate your respective religious beliefs and traditions. Our group does not try to create a new religion or blend and dilute Christianity or Judaism.

Our success is also greatly due to our philosophy of not favoring either Judaism or Christianity. This prevents one partner feeling left out or estranged. You may not find this neutrality possible because of support you receive from religious organizations or clergy. In those situations, be careful at least to make sure the other faith is respected and recognized. Our philosophy helps the individuals remain practicing Catholics, Jews, or Protestants to the extent that they wish to do so.

### **How We Operate**

We formed in the beginning to function as a support group and to discuss an array of basic issues that were troubling us, unlike other groups that form to address one issue, i.e. the religious education of children. Four of the topics we deal with most frequently are children, weddings, holidays, and families/in-laws. We have had talks on other issues such as the Holocaust and assimilation, Holy Week, the High Holy Days, and the history of early Christianity. A family religious school for children has just completed its fourth year. In addition, three times a year we hold meetings exclusively on weddings. We have

recently started a group for young married couples with children.

Remember to provide a forum for open discussion and support. People find value in hearing how other couples deal with the interfaith issues they are facing. Social events are also important because they allow the couples to share experiences and ideas. We celebrate Passover together every year. Also, our group provides community support to couples whose families may be out of town and who otherwise would have no one with whom to spend holidays.

Our monthly meeting averages 50 to 110 people. Your group may not need to meet once a month, but you should keep in touch with your membership. We send out a bimonthly newsletter. We believe it is important for couples to know the group is there for them as they pass through the various stages and rites of passage of life.

Our approach is not for every interfaith couple. Do not try to create a group to deal with every need or every philosophy.

We regard our work as a ministry. Such a ministry requires dedication, hard work, care, energy, patience, and time. But there are also rewards. One of the joys is to see people walk out of a meeting more relaxed than when they walked in. The Jewish-Catholic Couples' Dialogue Group has become a primary part of our lives.

Good luck. Please call or write if you need help or have questions. 

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# Building a Group for Interfaith Families: The New Haven, Connecticut Group

by Christina Giebisch-Mohrer

*Editor's note: Ms. Giebisch-Mohrer first wrote parts of this article for issues 1:3 and 1:4 of **Dovetail** five years ago. Since the New Haven group was one of the first in the country, we asked her to revisit its founding and to tell us what has happened since her original articles.*

**S**even years ago I read Lee Gruzen's book, *Raising Your Jewish-Christian Child*, and was inspired by her description of religious instruction for interfaith children led by a rabbi and a minister. I had a three-year-old daughter and had been involved with an outreach program run by the New Haven Jewish Community Center. Though its programs were informative, they left me dissatisfied. I wanted a group in which families worked together to find meaningful ways of integrating two religious traditions, one that valued each couple's search to express, practice, and teach their children what they believed was essential to their understanding of themselves as Jews and Christians. Such a group did not exist in New Haven.

## In the Beginning

Initially the focus of our meetings was on our struggle for self-definition. We all wanted to understand better what our own faiths meant to us and to our spouses. We also decided not to start at that point a more formal program of instruction for our children, who were predominantly of preschool age. Reflection on our individual spiritual journeys felt like important work to be done—work that would directly benefit our children.

After several months, when we felt cohesive as a group, we invited a Christian clergyperson and a learned Jew to help deepen our discussions: Kate Latimer and Becky Seashore. Kate is associate pastor at the Congregational Church connected to Yale University and the New Haven community. Becky, raised in an interfaith family, has come to identify herself as Jewish, and practices Judaism. She also works for Hillel on the Yale campus.

The role of these two women in our group was fluid. Initially we looked to them primarily as teachers—helping us understand baffling concepts, difficult religious language, and poorly understood historical contexts. With time they came more and more to speak from their own experiences. Their presence was invaluable.

Finally, it was a priority for us to create an interfaith community with which our children could identify. We did this by coming together to celebrate holidays as whole families, as well as by gathering for fun social occasions. Both kinds of events helped our children to get to know one another and to realize that they were not alone in being part of an interfaith family.

## Structure of the Group

During our first year my husband Peter and I ran the meetings. We always got input from the group, but the actual agenda was in our hands. Later, we changed this format. The whole group now has one large planning session every six months, when we agree on topics and activities, choose dates for them, and have each family volunteer

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to facilitate one meeting. This sharing of responsibility has contributed significantly to our sense of cohesiveness.

We have managed to keep our costs to a minimum. We meet regularly in the fellowship room of a Congregational church. Twice a year we have gardened on its grounds to thank the church for use of the space.

Both Kate Latimer and Becky Seashore have volunteered their time. Outlay of money has been restricted to paying for food or craft supplies, or for baby-sitting at holiday celebrations. Our \$30 a year dues covers our expenses.

Discussion topics have included the High Holidays, with a focus on forgiveness from a Jewish and a Christian perspective; Christmas, Chanukah, and the creation of family rituals; the meaning and experience of Passover, Easter, and Communion; Baptism, Bris, and naming ceremonies; Jewish and Christian views of death and the afterlife; and the meaning and practice of the Sabbath. We have also had holiday celebrations with our children for Chanukah, Christmas, and Passover. During the summer we gather for a potluck on the beach.

We are always open to new members. However, we are also aware that integrating too many new people at one time could jeopardize the intimacy we have achieved. Thus, we have been careful about maintaining the size of our group, and not letting it grow too quickly.

## The Group Today

Seven years along, our interfaith group has grown and changed. In our early years, it was fueled by our passion to define who we were individually as Jews and Christians, and how we wanted to express this identity in our families. This passion has abated somewhat over time.

We have continued our member-facilitated adult discussion group, though we now meet less frequently than once a month. Kate Latimer and Becky Seashore no longer attend our monthly discussions. However, Kate continues to tell the Christmas story at our annual Chanukah-Christmas celebration.

Our Sunday School program, run by group member and teacher Debi Tenner, is beginning its fourth year. It meets bimonthly and uses a curriculum created by Debi herself—focusing alternately on Jewish and Christian holidays and themes. Last year the oldest pupil turned 13 and wrote his own "affirmations" ceremony, facilitated by Kate Latimer and Debi and Steve Tenner. This 14-year-old's sister is now seriously considering preparing for a Bat Mitzvah ceremony.

Though our sense of urgency has decreased somewhat, our group has fulfilled its original mission: to create a supportive environment for interfaith couples to explore their heritages safely and to grapple with how to raise their children. All of us, however, have grown individually and collectively as a result of having been members of our interfaith group. 

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# The Interfaith Families Project of Greater Washington DC: Where Are We Now?

by Randi Field

Over two years ago, our “founding mothers”—Stacey Katz, Irene Smith Landsman, Mary Joel Holin, and Laura Steinberg—nourished and gave birth to the Interfaith Families Project of Greater Washington, DC (IFFP). These four women, all partners in Jewish/Christian interfaith marriages, made a commitment to establish a community where interfaith families could celebrate their differences and learn from each other. What began as a small group has blossomed into a nurturing community consisting of over 40 families. As IFFP approaches its third year, we wanted to share how we’ve gotten this far.

## A Place to Learn

A central driving force for IFFP was the goal of creating an interfaith Sunday school. We wanted to share our historical and cultural heritages with our children and give them a place to belong with other children of interfaith families.

In its first year, IFFP had one Sunday school for all the children. Last year, IFFP doubled in size and had two Sunday school classes, one for the younger children and one for the older children. IFFP has continued to grow, and this year we will have three Sunday school classes—a first/second grade class, a third/fourth grade class, and a fifth/sixth/seventh grade class. All classes will be staffed by experienced religious educators who will teach Judaism and Christianity from a historical perspective, as well as the various holidays and how they are celebrated.

Our teachers do not teach the rigid dogma that many of us were taught.

Rather, Judaism and Christianity are taught from an objective point of view. The children are encouraged to ask the many “why” questions they bring to class and to discuss their dual faith identities.

Another goal of the Sunday school is to teach the children that it is truly better to give than to receive. To that end, the Sunday school curriculum will be tied to our community service program.

## Reaching Out

Our community service program has been another area of growth. This past year, IFFP families donated Christmas presents to refugee children and Easter baskets to families with HIV-AIDS. At a shelter for homeless women, we turned an arid patch of land into a colorful garden. At a shelter for women and children, we painted and spruced up rooms. We also did yard cleanup for elderly people who need assistance to live independently.

This year, we plan to increase our community involvement by helping the same organizations on a regular basis, including providing monthly meals at the women’s shelter. We also plan to have the children perform at nursing homes during the holidays, a difficult time for those who can’t be in their own homes.

## Ongoing Education for All

A new area for IFFP families has been our adult education group. Last year, many of us met while the children were in Sunday school and discovered our own thirst for spiritual growth. We had wonderful speakers, such as Rabbi Arthur

*Randi Field is a member of the board of IFFP. A writer and former attorney, she lives with her family in Silver Spring, Maryland.*

*Washington, DC area families who are interested in the Sunday school or other IFFP activities should contact Laura Steinberg at (301) 589-9280. IFFP is still accepting applications for its 1997-1998 Sunday school year.*

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Blecher and Father Lacey, who helped many of us sort out some common interfaith issues. Some of our own members gave a class on the historical Jesus, which proved quite enlightening for many Jewish partners. Many more adult classes are being planned for the coming year.

### Coming Together

IFFP has come together on a number of occasions during the year. In December, we had a potluck holiday party where everyone gathered and sang Chanukah and Christmas songs. We had a phenomenal turnout for our seder, with nearly one hundred in attendance. We also were invited to share a very special day with IFFP members Laura Steinberg and Peter Weiss as their daughter Alison Ruth celebrated her Coming of Age, the interfaith parallel to a Bat Mitzvah.

It was the first Coming of Age ceremony for many of us and the beginning of a wonderful new tradition for our community. 

### Important Announcement: Call for Nominations

*The Dovetail Institute for Interfaith Family Resources will present its first **Father Dan Montalbano Award for Promoting Interfaith Understanding** at its national conference, "Interfaith Families in the 1990s: New Trends, New Voices," April 3-5, 1998, hosted by the Clarke Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Contemporary Issues at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Your nominee can be a scholar, clergy person, lay person, or someone in public life. Please send the name of the nominee with a description of why you think the person deserves this award (not more than two pages), and any documentation if applicable (news clippings, etc.), along with your own name, address, and phone number, to Mary Rosenbaum, Executive Director, DI-IFR, POB 1110, Carlisle, PA 17013-6110, by February 15, 1998.*

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# Alan M. Dershowitz's "The Vanishing American Jew"

a review by Wendy G. Sheridan

If one were to look up the word "provocative," one shouldn't be surprised to find Alan Dershowitz's picture there. The well-known Harvard professor, author, and O. J. Simpson "Dream Team" participant has penned a new book (1997, Little, Brown and Company, \$24.95) that is absolutely provocative, and with good reason. Dershowitz's goal is nothing less than to provide a wake-up call for American Jewry by asking, how can we survive our success? His premise is that Judaism has traditionally defined itself by a sense of victimization, but in the absence of persecution, who are we?

A large part of the book is devoted to describing the decline of anti-Semitism worldwide, which may seem too rosy to many readers (a criticism he anticipates but also dismisses). He asserts that, in America, anti-Semites have become powerless and marginalized, and no longer wield the undue influence they once did. Even as someone from a younger generation, and not having experienced any overt anti-Semitism, this reviewer is still, at heart, uncomfortable with some of these assertions. But that is part of his point: what does it mean to be Jewish if there are no SS troops goose-stepping down your block at the moment? What makes someone a Jew? What makes it worthwhile to be a Jew? What should we pass down to our children instead of fear and paranoia? Indeed, he challenges modern Jews to come up with a positive self-view, one that will compete and succeed on its own in the "marketplace of ideas" because of its inherent worth, not because of attack from external enemies.

Of particular value is his extensive discussion of the "messiness" that has always been Judaism, despite what some purists may want to think. Using classic jokes and illuminating anecdotes, Dershowitz shows how Jews have always argued and discussed many aspects of an issue, even with God (!), which is one of the many traits that have made Jews and Judaism so vibrant and resilient throughout time. The Jewish tent is big enough to include those who believe in God and those who don't, and Dershowitz insists that it is time for both kinds of Jews, especially in America, to think about their future and what they want for it, and that now is the time to act to achieve those goals.

Intermarriage is, of course, a primary topic in this book, one which has a direct bearing on the fate of American Jewry, and which will undoubtedly be of particular interest to *Dovetail* readers. For all of the above reasons, I strongly recommend Dershowitz's book. Liking or hating it is essentially irrelevant; it should make you think. Dershowitz has done a public service by crystallizing these issues and wrestling with (but not necessarily solving) them. His contention is that if we all do a little wrestling with these topics now, the Judaism we pass on to our children will be that much stronger for our redefinition of it and, therefore, our rededication to it. ♣

*Wendy Sheridan lives in Ardmore, Oklahoma, is the Jewish partner in an interfaith marriage, and is secretary-treasurer of Temple Emeth, Oklahoma's oldest Jewish congregation.*

## Intermarriage by Leah A. Greene

*150 years ago  
rebecca gratz  
famous jewish beauty  
loved a man of  
different faith  
she never married*

*80 years ago  
father's cousin  
married a protestant  
dead to his parents  
they said kaddish  
sat shiva  
never saw him again*

*60 years ago  
a nosy neighbor  
told my mother  
al sindico drove  
me home from school  
in his red convertible  
forbidden to see him again  
i missed that snappy red car*

*intermarriage  
more acceptable now  
our son's wife  
agreed before marriage  
the children would be raised  
as jews  
they go to sunday school  
learn jewish history  
and hebrew  
celebrate jewish holidays  
with family*

*each have asked  
how it was decided  
they would be jewish  
"how" is easy  
more important  
is "why"*

Leah A. Greene is a retired social worker, age 77, married for 57 years, mother of three, grandmother of four.

## Kids' Page

by Patty Kovacs

# Including Children in Your Interfaith Group

It seems not so long ago, right? You were seriously dating, and often asking: What will we do *about* the children? Now that child holds tightly onto your hand and the question takes a different spin: What are we going to do *with* the children?

I draw your attention to that little preposition *with*. Building a spiritual life for your interfaith children is a family journey. The course is often uncharted, so remain flexible, curious, and open as you navigate and accommodate to its vagaries.

Perhaps interfaith families can learn from bi-lingual homes. As when learning to speak another language, the process of learning two religious language and symbol systems cannot be achieved sporadically. Furthermore, would you expect your child to learn to speak a language that you have not uttered since high school?

In a support group you will have an opportunity to meet adults and their offspring in various stages of growth. This naturally evolves into a way of showing your child that he or she is not alone: other families too are living in bi-cultural, bi-religious homes.

In starting a new group, relax, dive in, but begin slowly and patiently. The motto for families should be: Let's just get the kids together. Look at the age distribution of the children and plan accordingly.

**0-4 years old:** Oh, just let them play! This is the age of pure egocentrism. Formal schooling and activities are usually a waste of your time. Form a baby-sitting co-op for meeting times. Who knows? This may even evolve into a support network for

those "date-nights" you and your husband need!

**5-7 years old:** Keep activities short, active, varied, and fun. You can plan activities around the holidays, the Golden Rule, basic Bible stories or characters. Read the story, sing a song, make an art project, share a snack, and play!

**8-11 years old:** These are the prime ages for modeling, imitation, and engagement. Children at this age want to mimic the parents, and in turn receive their approval. Activities around Bible heroes, making choices, and communal celebrations are appropriate.

**12 and up:** The child's cognitive skills are slowly growing toward formal reasoning ability. The frustration of this period comes in the child's move away from the parents as the primary source of spiritual information. This is the time for community service projects and wrestling, in facilitated discussions, over emerging interpersonal ethical dilemmas.

Observing and nurturing the spiritual life of a child is an honor and an obligation. It helps to have companions on the journey. Find other families and link minds and hearts. They too will serve as your child's links to the Transcendent Power. Do it soon, for it will not be so long before you will be asking: What are we going to do *without* the kids? ■

Patty Kovacs is currently a candidate for a Master's degree in Counseling at Northeastern Illinois University. She recently received a Catechetical Ministries Recognition Award from Chicago's Archdiocesan Office of Religious Education. She and her husband David are involved in Chicago's Jewish-Catholic Dialogue Group and its Family Religious School.

## Love's Labors . . . Lite

Labor Day was first celebrated in 1882, in honor, of course, of laborers. I often wonder whether homemakers—especially those in two-faith families—are meant to be included.

The first Monday in September was chosen because it falls about halfway between the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving, so it seemed like a good time to have another secular holiday. The trouble is, those who celebrate Jewish holidays emphatically do not feel the need for another event just when the High Holidays usually come barreling out of the calendar.

As I've said elsewhere, the danger the dual-faith family runs is exhaustion: Labor Day picnic, Rosh Hashanah feast, Yom Kippur pre-fast and fast-breaking meals, building and decorating the sukkah and inviting people to eat in it with you, getting together the Halloween costumes and buying a supply of trick-proof treats . . . and if you wait till the Thanksgiving leftovers are gone before thinking about Christmas and Chanukah, you've left it too late.

My advice? Keep your eye on the important points—don't try to do every little detail perfectly, producing from-scratch tricolor angel food cake for Labor Day and stitching designer decorations for the sukkah. And delegate, delegate, delegate. The kids love Jell-o; let them make it for the picnic (kosher gelatin if you like). Apple slices dipped in honey is the traditional dessert for Rosh Hashanah, and it really doesn't need cookies to go with it. Your spouse can make construction paper chains while watching television: voila,

decorations for the sukkah. If no one in your house has religious objections to Halloween, buy (don't make) costumes and a bowlful of candy miniatures, and help the kids carve a pumpkin: the whole house doesn't need to be decorated. When Thanksgiving rears its gobbly head, get your in-laws to invite you over; volunteer to bring the wine and cider.

As for those important points, if you're the Jewish partner you can enjoy the interplay of Yom Kippur and Advent motifs. If you're the Christian partner, and you've never gone to High Holiday services, you're missing one of the spiritual windfalls of a dual-faith family. The sense of power and mystery even in a mostly English Reform service is phenomenal. And the repetitions of the long, dry Yom Kippur cycle eventually begin to serve the function of a mantra: day-to-day concerns fade away as the petitions and confessions occupy the front part of the brain, and the spirit can sink down into the core of meaning and arise refreshed to the clarion call of the shofar.

It's just the thing to set you up to make it through Thanksgiving, Chanukah, Christmas, New Year's . . . you don't *have* to have an open-house party, do you? . . . without losing your mind, or even your equilibrium, while lightening love's labors. 

## Holidays and Happenings

by Mary Heléne Rosenbaum

Mary Heléne Pottker Rosenbaum is the award-winning co-author of **Celebrating Our Differences: Living Two Faiths in One Marriage**. She has been published in a number of religious and secular magazines and newspapers. An active member of St. Patrick Catholic Church in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where she has been a lector for twenty-five years, she has also served as executive director for Congregation Beth Tikvah. She is the associate editor of **Dovetail**.

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