

# Dovetail

A Journal by and for Jewish/Christian Families



## Life Patterns: Focus on Ritual

Lord Chesterfield wrote, "I kiss my son not because I love him, but in order that I may love him." A somewhat dry approach, but with a kernel of truth: behaving in a particular way can evoke the feelings the behavior ought to mirror. The Roman Catholic Church recognizes this phenomenon as an avenue of Grace: Never mind whether you feel like going to church or not; go to church regularly and the feeling will come.

I grew up in the 50s, with the Latin Tridentine mass some people still pine for. My mother used it as a sort of holy background to her private devotions, particularly the saying of the rosary. I used it, often enough, to show off that I knew the Latin. Then there were those who attended the 6:30 am mass, knowing that Father would rattle through the ritual and get them on their way to the golf links in 20 minutes flat.

My husband and I were married in 1963, on the cusp of the transition from the beatnik era to the onset of hippiedom. Ours was a mild suburban sort of counterculturalism, but one thing we were sure of: "ritual" was the equivalent of "empty formalism."

By the 1970s, we were at a college whose campus priest, a doctrinaire flower child, bade the congregation sit cross-legged on the carpeted floor for mass. I was uncomfortable with sitting, especially so informally, during the solemn moments of the Consecration. So when the time came, I quietly drew my legs under and rose to my knees. The priest

stopped the mass to lecture us (me) on how to be "spontaneous"!

Experiencing these extremes has made me a devout centrist. I love the traditional rituals of both my heritage and my husband's Jewish one. We both believe in shaping ritual to fit the needs and faith commitments of the congregation: when I'm lector (lay reader) at mass, I use gender inclusive language wherever that reflects the passage's intent; when my husband reads the "Woman of Valor" passage at Sabbath dinner, he incorporates praise for things I've achieved that week into the traditional list of virtues. On the other hand, we don't change textual meanings to fit what we wish they said.

Interfaith couples face a dual challenge in approaching ritual. The first is finding ways to mark life passages consonant with each tradition—or with one tradition,

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**What is an etrog?**

*In our last issue, we mentioned something that evidently puzzled some readers: the etrog. It's the ritually pure (non-hybrid) citron used by observant Jews in the Sukkot ritual: costly, fragrant, and nearly inedible.*

depending on how they've chosen to conduct their family's religious life—but ways that don't make either partner uncomfortable. The other is finding such rituals and allowing them to make both partners uncomfortable. That is, recognize that there are reasons for the inclusion of particular prayers and actions in traditional ceremonies, and reasons for participating in them that transcend merely recreating a nostalgic glow.

The German-Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig decided as a young man to convert to Christianity. Intending to build from Jewish tradition, he first attended a Yom Kippur service. He came out with a new vision of Judaism and its relationship to Christianity that removed any notion of converting, and that nourished him for the rest of his difficult and tragically short life.

**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 for 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.

The moral: Be careful when you engage in ritual. Something might Happen to you. 

*Mary Helene Rosenbaum*

With this issue we begin bringing you excerpts from the transcripts of the panels and workshops given at the April 3-5, 1998 conference, "Interfaith Families in the 1990s: New Trends, New Voices." The articles used here are drawn from the "Life Passages" panel on ritual and its place in the life of the dual-faith family. Remember as you read them that they were not composed as written pieces. Hint: read as you would listen—moving through the ideas and illustrations as whole units, not focusing on particular sentences. These are like epic poetry, rather than lyric!

Although the discussions were originally parts of unified panel discussions, we offer them here as separate articles for clarity and economy of space—a single session runs about 10,000 words. The printed transcripts will contain the full-length discussions in a form closer to that in which they occurred, with only extraneous or repetitious material edited out. See page 8 for transcript ordering information.

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**Dovetail** welcomes article submissions (query or completed manuscript), letters to the editor, and comments or suggestions. Send to M. H. Rosenbaum, Editor, at the above address.

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# The Conference: Opportunity for Beginnings

Dan and Abbe Josephs

**W**e were honored to be part of the first annual DI-IFR conference in April. It was exciting to be part of an historic event in the interfaith dialogue process between Jews and Christians. We knew that Mary Rosenbaum and DI-IFR would put on an interesting conference, but the conference was wonderful beyond our expectations. DI-IFR showed again at the conference, as it has many times in the past, what a valuable and helpful resource of information and support they continue to be for Jewish/Christian interfaith couples.

In addition to the people at DI-IFR, it was the participants who made the conference a success. We were pleased that conference attendees came from so many different backgrounds: clergy, therapists, teachers, and, of course, the interfaith couples. What was the first national meeting for Jewish/Christian interfaith couples turned out to be a significant step in the dialogue between Christians and Jews.

## Some Sessions

Dan was chair of the panel for the session "Legalities: Divorce/Annulment, Prenups, Estate Planning," and together we participated in "Founding and Running an Interfaith Dialog Group." Both sessions allowed us to gain insights from participants besides offering our own experiences and information.

The preparation for the session on legalities allowed Dan to look at such legal issues as prenuptial childraising agreements and living wills, which can be tough for interfaith couples to resolve.

"Founding and Running an Interfaith Dialog Group" allowed us to examine and review how we started and maintained our group over the years and the reasons for the group's success. This session also enabled us to learn from the Minnesota group and the Northern California group who shared the panel with us.

When not conducting sessions we attended as many of the other sessions as we could. There were so many interesting sessions, so, in order to experience more of the conference, we split up to attend the other sessions. Abbe attended the session on Sunday led by Mary and Ned Rosenbaum, "The Interfaith Household: Holidays, Food & Other Practicalities." This session offered lots of practical advice, thoughts and ideas. It was interesting to hear all of the experiences that Mary and Ned had as well as the suggestions from others at the session.

Dan attended "Choosing Your Children's Religion: A Methodology in Five Parts" that Rabbi Dr. Arthur Blecher gave, and found Rabbi Blecher to be very helpful and supportive. Rabbi Blecher's guidelines and suggestions on raising children in an interfaith environment reaffirmed ideas we have had for some time about religious education of children. Rabbi Blecher outlined the decision-making process in raising children religiously in an organized, yet thought-provoking, manner.

Our friend (and DI-IFR board member), Rabbi Allen Secher, led an interesting and helpful discussion, "Life Passages: Baptism, Circumcision, Bar/t Mitzvah, Confirmation."

*Dan and Abbe Josephs cofounded and have helped lead the Chicago Jewish Catholic Couples' Group since 1988. This group now has approximately 550 couples. They have been quite active in the interfaith area beyond coordinating the Chicago interfaith group, including writing articles for **Dovetail** and speaking to religious conferences and groups about their interfaith life and the Jewish Catholic Couples' Group. Dan is in charge of the **Bulletin Board** page in **Dovetail**. They have been interviewed numerous times by television, radio, magazines, and newspapers. In addition Dan and Abbe run pre-Cana workshops in the archdiocese of Chicago. Dan is an estate planning and probate attorney with the law firm of Richter, Jaros & Robinson in Oak Brook, Illinois. Abbe is an automation engineer for Raytheon. They have been married for 15 years and live in Oak Park, Illinois.*

### **Other Insights**

We especially enjoyed the informal discussions between sessions and at meals. They seemed as valuable as the sessions themselves. We were able to talk, exchange ideas and information, and give support to each other. It was as if we formed an interfaith support group among the couples at the national conference for the weekend.

It was enjoyable to meet some wonderful couples and clergy. We were reminded how blessed we are to have such supportive and wise clergy as Rabbi Allen Secher and our two Catholic priests (Father Cusick and Father Pietrzak) who are chaplains to the Chicago group. The conference also reminded us how courageous Rabbi Allen and the clergy whom we met are. It was heartening and impressive to meet so many other clergy who are willing to reach out to us, help and support us, guide us, and listen to us.

It was also enjoyable to exchange ideas with other groups, the Minneapolis group and the Northern California group in particular. For example, with a group as large as ours, we forget how valuable small-group discussions are, such as those in the Minneapolis group.

### **Building on the Experience**

The conference as a whole reminded us of when we began our group in Chicago. We met couples who were just so happy to find each other, and share ideas and support. We remembered just appreciating the opportunity to meet other couples in the same situation. Our small, early

meetings revolved around giving each other support and telling our stories. At the conference some of the same discussions occurred.

It was especially informative and touching to meet so many other interfaith couples from across the country that do not have a group to attend or do not encounter other interfaith couples on a frequent basis. Many people at the conference praised the Chicago group, but those of you who do not have a group in your area or who do not have clergy to support you, you are the ones who deserve admiration. We would like to continue what we started at the conference—the networking with each other, the sharing of information and supporting each other. We would love to be able to help other groups to organize, grow, expand, and/or restart and to help interfaith couples find each other.

The conference should not be just a moment in time for interfaith couples to come together, but rather the beginning of a process through which interfaith couples can connect on all levels, through group formation and informally. We would like to aid that process, to help individuals find each other and form groups.

Our e-mail address is JosephsDA@aol.com. Our phone number is (708) 660-9503. Our address is 1175 S. Euclid Ave., Oak Park, Illinois, 60304.

The energy and the spirituality evident at this wonderful conference must be kept alive and needs to grow throughout the country. We look forward to being a part of that process. 

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# The Uses and Meaning of Ritual in Our Lives

Noah Saunders

**W**e've found ourselves at the end of the 20th century with very few reference points or touchstones in our lives. Our ancestors were fortunate because they had communities, where people knew one another. These days, community is difficult to find and even more difficult to live in. We as individuals must create our community.

By losing our community—as our ancestors knew it—so too have we lost our points of reference as a society. So, what is ritual? Ritual is a point of reference: a way of taking events in our everyday lives, and bringing some structure to them.

## What Brought Me to This Point

In the summer of 1989, there was the worst loss of property caused by forest fire in the history of Colorado. My wife, Nancy, and I lost everything. We had five minutes to get out of the house. Now, material goods can be replaced. But what we lost for a while were our points of reference. All of a sudden, we didn't have that photograph in the hallway: we didn't have a hallway, let alone the photograph. We lost whatever that photograph had been able to prompt in our memories and in our souls. We lost all point of reference.

The second thing that happened to influence me was this: The rabbinical council of Colorado issued a ruling forbidding member rabbis, cantors, or any other synagogue officials to participate in interfaith marriages. Before that edict, many Colorado rabbis had warmly and lovingly stood shoulder to shoulder with Catholic priests and ministers of

Protestant religions in interfaith ceremonies. With one stroke of the pen, no longer could anybody who wished to be married to someone outside the Jewish faith in Colorado—nor, within months, any state adjacent to Colorado: New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Montana—even talk to a rabbi [who subscribed to the council's strictures] about it in any civilized, let alone compassionate, manner.

I was brought up by a first-generation Sicilian-American Catholic father whose family only spoke Italian and by a first-generation Rumanian-American Jewish mother whose family only spoke Yiddish. I attended an almost Orthodox synagogue in northern New Jersey. And, throughout my early life, I also spent all Catholic holidays with my father's Italian family in Long Island.

So in 1989 it happened that, first, I had no physical point of reference any longer after the fire. But sometimes, when everything else is lost that you thought was your life, then much more of your life is exposed.

Then came my learning [of the rabbinical dictum]. This was also disturbing. Here I was, a child of an interfaith home, feeling healthy psychologically and spiritually, married to a wonderful woman brought up in a Norwegian Lutheran home, and we have a very loving 15-year relationship. I wondered, "If the rabbis have pulled out, what's left?" I started asking around. It turned out the rabbis were not setting the pace in this regard; some Protestant churches had been in the forefront. Some officials had been saying, "If you're not a member of my congregation, I won't marry you."

*Noah Saunders is an ordained lay clergyman who develops and officiates at custom wedding ceremonies for interfaith and intercultural couples, including those who are no longer formally affiliated with a church or synagogue. His services encompass baby-naming ceremonies and memorial services. Noah also serves businesses, non-profits, and government agencies as adviser and management consultant.*

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personal commitment to fostering interfaith marriage.

This disturbed me greatly, so I started researching and learning about the rhythms and patterns of life, and particularly about marriage. I discovered that, according to the Talmud, a rabbi has never been required as an officiant at a wedding. Traditionally, Jewish people are considered to be marrying one another in the eyes of God. All you need is the couple, and two witnesses who are not related to one another or to the couple.

### **What I Did About It**

When I found out that I was not necessarily going to be confused with a rabbi by officiating at weddings, and that I would not be violating Jewish custom, after rigorous research I began to make myself available to mixed couples. I wanted to respect their beliefs, and to build a bridge between them. This wasn't some great mission or agenda on my part. It was my heartfelt response to a much larger issue: that we don't know where to go anymore to celebrate and ritualize the meaningful parts of our lives.

We talk about rituals of birth, and rituals of death. We talk about rituals of passage, such as graduation, bar and bat mitzvah, communion ... any number of other religious and social rituals. What makes these rituals distinct and crucial is that they are engaged in mindfully, with purpose, and with structure.

As an example, let's take naming a child. A new soul has been brought into our lives, and questions begin to arise. "What are we trying to do here? Let's see. ... Now we have a child, we've wanted this, this is a dream

come true. How did our child get here? Well, our parents had us. So, our parents need to be involved in this; even if they can't get here for the naming ritual."

I've done baby-naming ceremonies where the phone is brought in to the room so long-distance grandparents can hear what's going on, and can talk to the baby. That shows us, for one thing, that we didn't just get deposited here without a history. History of family, history of religion, history of community: we are the product of what has come before. Those ties cannot be manufactured or dissipated. They can be disregarded, and sometimes we choose to do that. But the idea is to understand the flow of life, both what brought us here, and that this child is our future.

So that ritual of having a baby-naming ceremony is not merely to throw a name onto the kid. It's to bring together all the pieces of our life, that brings us to that moment, and to honor it. And to have grace and love in that moment so that the entire event, the entire ritual, gives us a point of reference, and reminds us of our connections with one another.

That is why ritual is so critical, because it brings us back into ourselves, and not in a self-consuming way, but in a way that allows us then to reach out and to understand the connections outside of ourselves that complete the rest of our lives, that complete who we are. The point of ritual is to honor mindfully exactly what's going on and to recognize, to acknowledge, and to cherish the connections that are integral elements of our lives. 

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# Hebrew or Holy Water:

## Healing Rituals Across Religious Lines

by Dr. Catherine Grandsard

**F**rance is an overwhelmingly Catholic country, but very anticlerical, so they have made their society as secular as possible. For example, in schools, you are not allowed to display any sign, any object, that would show that you have a religious affiliation. So you can't go wearing a yarmulke, you can't go with an Islamic headscarf, or with a cross; you just have to hide it. But you can hide a cross; it's harder to hide a yarmulke, or a scarf.

So the French are allergic to anything that is remotely religious in public life, even though the majority is of Catholic origin, and often, you don't have to go too far back in generations to find practicing Catholics. Also, many non-practicing, even non-believing, Catholics baptize their children, are married in the church, and are buried in a Catholic ceremony.

Now, the Jews in France are a very small minority. It's the largest Jewish community in Europe, but it's still very small, between 550 and 600 thousand people, perhaps one percent of the population. (It's hard to make estimates because in France when you do a population census, you're not allowed to ask anybody what their religious background is.) So we have a small Jewish population, half of which is made up of Sephardic Jews from North Africa, because the Jewish populations in Arab countries left, for the most part, in the several decades following the creation of Israel. Thus when Algeria was de-colonized and became independent, a lot of Algerian Jews came to France, as did Jews from Morocco and Tunisia. So we have a very heterogeneous Jewish popula-

tion: half Ashkenazi [European], low-profile, assimilated, "don't-say-you're-Jewish"; and then the Sephardic population, which is much more traditionalist and much more religiously active. One result of their arrival in France is that you now find kosher meat stores, which virtually didn't exist before that. So, Jewish life has become much more visible than it was before then. Nevertheless, there is a very high rate of intermarriage, about 47 percent.

You also have to realize that most of the synagogues are Orthodox; there's only one Conservative congregation in all of France, and only three Reform, so everybody else is Orthodox. Sephardi or Ashkenazi, that's where the differences are: we have Sephardic rituals, and Ashkenazic rituals. Also, many people are secular most of the year except for Yom Kippur. They're called the Kippur Jews. But when they go, it's to Orthodox synagogues.

### Implications of Mixing Rituals

What we've arrived at is the notion that people can meet each other, mix and have babies. The problem is with objects, the problem is, with rituals, the problem is with myth. Those are very hard to mix. And although Judeo-Christian tradition stems from the same source, when you actually look at things, objects, [for instance] the *TaNaCh* [Hebrew acronym for Torah, Prophets, and Writings that constitute scripture for Jews]—this is not the same thing as "The Bible" in the Christian sense. Originally it's the same text, the Old Testament or Hebrew Scripture, but in therapeutic terms, when you go to a rabbi who's

*Dr. Catherine Grandsard is a clinical psychologist who works in an outpatient clinic for substance abusers and their families in Paris. Her current research topic is "The Psychology and Psychopathology of Adult Children of Jewish-Christian Interfaith Families."*

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a healer—and there are such rabbis in France, as there are in Israel, and many in New York—he will treat you with Hebrew letters, because the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are objects or entities in their own right, they are things. Actually, they are more than things, they are beings, they're thought of as alive. Whereas Christian healers—in the past 20 years they have tripled or quadrupled in number—won't use Hebrew letters, they'll use Jesus Christ, and they'll use the cross, they'll use holy water, salt.

Now, we're clinicians, and we work with people who have problems, concrete problems. They're not intellectual speculation. When you have someone in front of you who's not doing well, you have to do something. And the question that I am addressing in my research is that when I'm faced with a person from an intermarriage which is my case, what will I use to treat her? Will I use holy water, or will I use Hebrew letters? 

CONFERENCE '98 VIDEOTAPES

Video I, a two-tape set, features:

- Cokie and Steve Roberts keynote address, "Living in a Two-Faith Family." Cokie and Steven Roberts are nationally renowned journalists and broadcast commentators whose 30-year interfaith marriage came to public attention when their contribution to the book *Letters to Our Children* was recently excerpted in *USA Sunday*.
- "Understanding and Misunderstanding: How History Affects Relationships" by Dr. Eugene Fisher director of Catholic-Jewish Relations, National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. He has published eighteen books and monographs, and over 200 articles in major religious journals. In 1981, Dr. Fisher was appointed Consultor to the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations With the Jews by Pope John Paul II. He is one of nine Consultors world wide and the only American. In 1985, he was named to the International Vatican-Jewish Liaison Committee, representing the Holy See.
- "Protestants and Prophecy: Common Ground for Interfaith Couples," by Rev. Dr. Bruce Robbins, General Secretary of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns of The United Methodist Church. He holds an M. Div. from Union Theological Seminary (NY) and a Ph.D. in Church History from Southern Methodist University. Dr. Robbins serves on

the Executive Board and General Assembly of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. A specialist in Christian-Jewish relations, he coauthored the book *Jews and Christians: A Dialogue Service about Prayer* with Rabbi Leon Klenicki.

• "How do Intermarried Couples Bear Witness to the Holocaust?" by Rabbi Dr. Edward Zerin, who has written eight books, the most recent of which is *How to Explain Judaism to Your Non-Jewish Neighbor*. In addition, Dr. Zerin, whose Ph.D. from USC was partly in New Testament, has served as Jewish consultant on 45 Catholic textbooks. He and his wife are licensed therapists who run the Westlake (CA) Center for Marriage and Family Counseling.

• "Presentation of Father Dan Montalbano Award for Promoting Interfaith Understanding" by DI-IFR board member and Good Company president Rabbi Allen Secher, a leader of the Chicago Interfaith Couples Dialogue Group, for Rabbi Samuel Silver. His work with the Stamford-Darien Council of Churches and Synagogues and the Stamford-Darien Ministers League, and such publications as *Explaining Judaism to Jews and Christians*, as well as the pioneering *Mixed Marriage Between Jew and Christian*, made him the obvious choice for this award.

The Video I set can be purchased for \$29.95. Video II is the Steve and Cokie Roberts talk only, and costs \$25.95. To order tapes, call 800-530-1596, fax 502-549-3543, or send a check to DI-IFR, 775 Simon Greenwell Ln., Boston, KY 40107.

# Questions of Ritual: A Conversation

**A** LLEN SECHER: I'm a rabbi; my mother saw to it. I perform intermarriages. I'm one of only six in Chicago.

Say a couple is about to get married, and they go to the Jewish home and the Jewish mother says, "I understand there are some things from Pesach that happen in Easter. What are they, Kelly?" She means it well. And Kelly looks at her and says, "Gee, I ... I ... I think ... think Jesus had something ... Jesus had matzoh, or something somewhere, yeah, something like that and—ooh! Look at that bird out the window." Now it's Christmas time, and they go to Kelly's home. And Kelly's mom says, "Listen, Bernstein, tell me about the Jewish Christmas, *Cha-nookah*." She means well. And Bernstein says, "Well, yeah, we light candles, and we get lots of presents and—ooh! Look at that bird: that's the same bird we saw at Passover."

We are creatures of ritual, and not only of our own, but of our parents' rituals. While a Jewish mother waits for her child's wedding to begin, she has a visual sight-line: the huppah. ... Every time that she was involved in the ritual of going to a wedding—going to the Shapiro wedding, and the Bernstein wedding, the very first thing she saw was that huppah.

... The topic is ritual: what do we do? How do we do it?

MAN: ... [H]as anybody noticed a difference between children who are exposed to both sets of rituals, both traditions, in the home setting, as opposed to kids who grow up with a weaker introduction, because of parents who don't pay as much

attention to it, or versus those where the decision is made to expose them to only one ... ?

MAN 2 [RABBI]: I'm not on the panel, but ... I have been in an interfaith marriage. And the idea of letting the child decide when the child gets old enough, and not doing anything, is suicide. Suicide for your faith, suicide for your child's faith. ... I have a 21-year-old son who is searching, because he doesn't know what he is, he doesn't know one or the other. ... I do interfaith marriages, I have justification for doing them, not halachically, but midrashically. I counsel people very frankly, do not do this business of teaching both. The child is confused enough growing up. ... Now you're in an interfaith marriage, how are you going to raise the child?

MAN: Catholic.

MAN 2 [RABBI]: You're going to raise the child Catholic? How are you going to feel about that?

MAN: I have no problem with that.

MAN 2 [RABBI] In other words, you are happy with the death of your faith.

MAN: What? No. ...

MAN 2 [RABBI]: So you are satisfied with deicide for your side. ... [general hubbub erupts.]

NED ROSENBAUM: ... I have to disagree with the previous speaker. Our *shtick*, my wife's and mine, was precisely to represent both religions as fully and capably as we could. And not only me in mine and she in hers, but both in both, which is a lot of work, and which is why people need

*Allen A. Secher is a rabbi who counsels the Chicago Interfaith Couples Dialogue Group, the country's largest, with over 500 couples. In addition to officiating at intermarriages all over the world and producing television documentaries that have garnered seven Emmy awards, he is a director of DI-IFR.*

to think about this before you do it. ... I don't think you can squeeze all of us into one mold. ... I don't think that the way you put it is particularly productive. ...

MAN 2 [RABBI]: No, no, I'd like to clarify that. It's not meant to be disruptive, but rather to be productive, because when I have talked with people about it, they have never really discussed the issue—

WOMAN: We discussed the issue—

MAN 2 [RABBI]: —until they've been [involved in the situation]. Most of the people I've talked to, when they come to me, they never really talk about the decision-making process, and whether they're really going to be happy with that decision. So whether we choose one or the other, I'm not going to be judgmental, that's all I meant. ...

WOMAN: ... I'm a Catholic but I'm from a very "Jewish" family. ... [F]rom an educational standpoint our child is going to be very educated in the Jewish faith ... and I really take offense at the notion of "killing Judaism" because [my husband] goes to temple a heck of a lot more now than before we met. [Applause.]

WOMAN 2: ... [H]ow do you make a choice like that for your child, when your families are asking you? It's a time when your baby has just been born, you haven't had a talk yet, but I would like to discuss decision-making at that time.

AS: ... [W]e have developed in Chicago a series of baby-namings. ... There is one baby-naming if you decide you're going to raise the child Catholic, a Catholic ceremony with the participation of the rabbi; ... it is

registered as a baptism in the Catholic churches of Chicago. That's A. B, there is a bris when the family has decided that they want to raise the child Jewish ... and the reform *moelim* [ritual circumcisers] in Chicago will do the bris provided the child's going to be raised Jewish; thus you can say, "*L'hach misoh, b'vritoh shel Abnavenu*" [to enter the child into the covenant of Abraham]. And then there is a third ceremony, with my doing the ceremony and the participation of the priest, but he does not say, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and The Holy Spirit," as he does in the Catholic ceremony with my participation. This third ceremony is where the child is being raised in both traditions. We cannot *L'hach misoh*, we cannot enter him into the covenant of Abraham. ... [N]or can we "I baptize you." We do a ceremony that talks about the role of water traditionally. And we do a naming, because we've discovered by the way, even when we do a baptism, the parents—the Goldberg family, say—wants a Hebrew name for the child. And there is no problem with that.

... [O]kay, it's communion time. Uh-oh. Now I guarantee you I could not come up with a Jewish answer to communion. I couldn't: there isn't. We don't do it. I mean, eating matzoh on Pesach is not Jewish communion. So we couldn't come up with it. But we did do a communion that was Catholic in nature, but was done with the basis of a seder ritual; we did it around the table. ...

[W]e are all creatures of needs. And that's where the needs come from: Your saying, "I gotta do this, I gotta do this." ▀

# Impressions of the Conference: An Overview

Lance Flitter

I recently had the pleasure of attending the "Interfaith Families in the 1990s" conference in Carlisle, PA. It was an exciting, educational, and enriching experience. In addition to learning a lot by attending panels and workshops I got to listen to some great speeches and meet new people.

My general impressions of the conference were of great preparation, enthusiasm, and commitment. The fact that many people spent a great deal of time organizing the conference showed. There were a few minor problems, as you would expect in any large undertaking. What was impressive was how few snafus there were, especially considering that this was the first conference of its kind. The conference flowed fairly smoothly and the few problems (with timing or cancellations) were dealt with efficiently. There were some nice organizational touches, such as that all the sessions and speeches were audio- or videotaped.

And, of course, one of the best aspects of the conference was the speakers and workshop leaders. There were many notable plenary speakers including Cokie and Steve Roberts, an advisor to the pope, a high-ranking member of the United Methodist Church, and a distinguished rabbi/psychologist. The panel and workshop leaders were an impressive array of leaders in the interfaith arena from around the nation and even from outside the country.

The sense of enthusiasm from the participants was quite evident. It didn't feel like most conferences I've attended. It felt more like an extended community than a confer-

ence, as if most people were really happy to be there. As you might expect with a topic as controversial as intermarriage, there were a few people with strong opinions that offended some participants. But these people were few and far between. Overall it was a very positive experience.

For some people this was a first step in dealing with the issues surrounding interfaith marriage. For others this was just one more step on an already long voyage. However, for all, there was a sense of commitment to continuing the journey in a positive, productive way.

One of the many beneficial experiences at the conference for me was that I got to meet a lot of people—some whose names I knew or whose books I had read, and some who were completely new to me. Some were professionals, therapists, or clergy, with long experience in interfaith issues, and some were just intermarried or dating and looking for information. I am a member of an active interfaith group, the Interfaith Families Project of Greater Washington. I got to exchange information with members of other interfaith groups from around the country, and to see what other groups are doing, how they are answering the challenges faced by interfaith couples. I came back with valuable information to pass on to my group.

## Some Sessions

I attended four panel/workshops: "Life Passages" (parts one and two), "Choosing Your Child's Religion: A Methodology in Five Parts," and "Founding and Running an Inter-

*Lance Flitter is a computer scientist for the Navy living in Maryland near Washington, DC. He has been happily married to Kathryn for three years; their first child, baby Joshua, made his appearance in June. Lance is a member and on the Board of Directors of the Interfaith Families Project of Greater Washington (IFFP). He is interested in making contact with other interfaith groups around the country.*

*Anyone who is part of an interfaith group that would like to exchange information can call him at (301) 540-4865.*

*Information on IFFP can be found at <http://members.tripod.com/~IFFP/>*

faith Dialog Group.” The Life Passages sessions discussed the meaning and importance of rituals, steps for planning or developing your own rituals, and several examples of important life cycle rituals, such as baby naming, in an interfaith context.

Choosing Your Child’s Religion, A Methodology in Five Parts was an excellent session led by Rabbi Dr. Arthur Blecher, a nationally recognized authority on interfaith relationships and a member of the advisory board of Dovetail. His methodology was free of any cultural or religious bias, and instead was based on good parenting. It was refreshing to hear someone knowledgeable telling us that our children will not necessarily be confused just because of what faith tradition(s) we choose to bring them up in. Instead he focused on principles that will establish a strong identity for a child regardless of whether you choose to raise him with one religious background or two.

Founding and Running an Interfaith Dialog group was led by representatives of three different dialog groups from around the country. Each representative spoke for a time about how that particular group operated. There was discussion between the workshop leaders and the audience. During and after this session I had the opportunity to share information about my group and I arranged to keep an exchange of information going by exchanging point-of-contact information and putting members of each group on my group’s mailing list. Overall, all the panel sessions were informative and productive.

Unfortunately, I missed the keynote presentation by Cokie and Steve Roberts but I understand it was quite good. Most of the speeches I heard were enjoyable and informative. Some got a little esoteric but overall they were good. The most powerful speech was definitely the one by Rabbi Dr. Edward Zerlin. He spoke and gave a slide presentation about his experiences on a trip to Poland and specifically to Auschwitz. His presentation was titled, “How do Intermarried Couples Bear Witness to the Holocaust.” He concluded by talking about how, when you marry someone from another faith or culture, you marry into the history of that other culture, and intermarried couples should always remember that. It is important to know each other’s cultural history. There were also speeches on Jewish-Christian history and common ground for intermarried couples and there was an informal chat session Saturday evening where we got to hear from a few children of interfaith couples about their experiences.

“Interfaith Families in the 1990s: New Trends, New Voices” was a very worthwhile experience. I met new people, made contacts in the interfaith community and gained valuable information. In addition to the more tangible benefits I also gained some that were less tangible, an extended sense of community and an assurance that there were other people around the country who were facing similar challenges as those in my community. I’m looking forward to the next one. 

# Midwinter Rituals: Reviving the Spirit

As the hubbub and busy-ness of Hanukkah, Christmas, and New Year's mellow into the quieter midwinter months, interfaith families may find unique ways to celebrate. The midwinter months offer some prime holidays that address the post-December need for rejuvenation. They center on peace and love, respect for all people, and respect for the earth. Each can offer a chance to develop some new rituals and traditions for your family.

On January 15, the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., is a wonderful reminder of human potential. As a Civil Rights leader, minister, and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Dr. King was an exemplary human being, calling for peace among all people. Interfaith families can certainly appreciate his struggle to overcome social prejudice and lack of acceptance. His life was dedicated to showing that people can have differences and still live together in harmony. Because many working people have January 18 off to observe Dr. King's birthday, families may create rituals that involve community service or social justice action: a perfect opportunity to talk to children about diversity and about acceptance of people's differences.

Tu B'Shvat, a minor Jewish holiday with growing importance, coincides with February 1 this year. The holiday may have originated as a way of dating trees, and has always included a focus on the land of Israel. Although no formal rituals are mandated for this holiday, it has its own seder, which has become more popular in this country. As the New Year of the Trees, its celebration often includes special fruit platters, greens, and flowers on the table.

Your own interfaith family ritual might focus on trees and on planting seeds and bulbs for spring growth. Children could plant seeds in cups and talk about the importance of living things and plant life for our earth. It is a custom to donate money for the planting of trees in Israel or for other environmental protection projects.

Valentine's Day, on February 14, has become one of the most widely celebrated unofficial holidays. Its history is vague and contradictory, but it seems to be connected to the beheading of two Christian martyrs, both named Valentine, on February 14 (two different years) in the first century. An old legend says that birds choose their mates on February 14, and perhaps that is the origin of the hearts and flowers theme.

While the card shops and florists are operating on overdrive on this holiday, interfaith families might create new rituals that really center around love. This would be an ideal day to try to find ways to share your family's story of love and acceptance with others who might benefit from your experience. Visit someone who might be lonely and without "a Valentine." At home, use this day to reflect on personal stories, recalling the ways we have chosen love and loving actions in our lives.

However interfaith families develop personal rituals, the challenge to find creative ways to celebrate together seems to remain constant. But, this challenge can also allow interfaith families to seek out inclusive celebrations focusing on what they consider most important. After all, who can argue with peace, love, and ecology? 

**Holidays  
and  
Happenings**  
by Loretta Fox

Loretta Fox is a consultant to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia with a Master of Arts in Theology from St. Charles Seminary, a Certificate in Mental Health and Aging, and a Certificate in Catholic Social Ministry. While focusing on her roles as full-time mom of Abby and another child due in July, and as the Catholic partner in a Jewish/Christian marriage, she continues her consulting work for several companies, including the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

# Bulletin Board

## Interfaith Support Around the Nation

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

Dan Josephs  
1175 S. Euclid Avenue, Oak Park IL 60304  
Home phone: (708) 660-9503  
Fax: (630) 574-8089  
E-Mail: JosephsDA@aol.com

Dan is one of the founders and coordinators of the Chicago Jewish-Catholic Couples' Group. We look forward to hearing from you.

PLEASE NOTE: Dovetail does not interview or endorse any entry listed here.

### Arizona, Phoenix area\*

Interested in joining an interfaith group.  
Contact: Warren Nechtman  
(602)- 980-4484

### California, San Francisco Bay Area\*

Existing interfaith group.  
Contact: Alicia Torre  
(415) 591-9434

### California, San Francisco Bay Area\*

Interfaith Connection  
Groups for interfaith couples.  
Contact: Rosanne Levitt, Director  
(415) 292-1252

### Colorado, Denver\*

Interested in forming an interfaith group.  
Contact: Karen McCarthy and Dan Kowal  
(303) 439-7750

### Connecticut, New Haven\*

Existing interfaith group.  
Contact: Christina Giebisch-Mohrer  
(203) 287-9110

### District of Columbia, Greater Washington \*

Interfaith Families Project  
Existing interfaith group.  
Contact: Laura Steinberg  
(301) 589-9280

### District of Columbia, Greater Washington

Bethesda Jewish Congregation  
Jewish congregation welcomes interfaith families.  
Contact: Maran Beth Gluckstein, Exec. Director  
(301) 469-8636

### Illinois, Chicago metropolitan area\*

Jewish-Catholic Couples Dialogue Group  
Existing interfaith group.  
Contact: Abbe and Dan Josephs  
(708) 660-9503  
or Patty and David Kovacs (773) 275-5689

### Kentucky, Louisville\*

Interested in forming an interfaith group.  
Contact: Carolyn Humphrey & Fred Gross  
(502) 423-8583

### Louisiana, New Orleans

Outreach programs on interfaith issues.  
Contact: Courtney Nathan, Jewish Family Service, (504) 831-8475

### Maryland, Baltimore

Jewish Outreach Network Programs  
Groups, workshops, and counseling for interfaith families, parents, and converts, including interfaith discussion support group.  
Contact: Beth Land Hecht, Director  
(410) 466-9200, ext. 381

### Maryland, Rockville

Interfaith Outreach Program, JCC of Greater Washington, DC  
Introduces interfaith families to Jewish life and offers workshops, classes, and programs dealing with interfaith issues.  
Contact: Lisa Shaper, Director  
(301) 881-0100, ext. 6782

### Massachusetts, Amherst\*

Existing interfaith group.  
Contact: Janet Lehan Bloom  
(413) 253-3685

### Massachusetts, Boston\*

Developing a network of interfaith families.  
Contact: Adina Davidson and Joel Nitzberg  
(617) 776-3235

### Michigan, Huntington Woods

Group called "Celebrating Differences"  
Contact: Miriam S. Jerris, Jewish Humanist leader, (800) 696-0380

### Minnesota, Minneapolis\*

Twin Cities Support Group  
Existing interfaith group.  
Contact: Joan Cleary and Jerry Helfand  
(612) 698-7987

### New Jersey, Hasbrouck Heights

Temple Beth Elohim  
Congregation welcomes Jews and non-Jews.  
Contact: Rabbi Fredric S. Dworkin  
(201) 744-3304

### New Jersey, South Jersey/Philadelphia area\*

Bifaithful Families & Children Network  
Group currently not active.  
Contact: Miriam Gilbert, (609) 753-1173

\* denotes a group not sponsored by a religious institution.

### New Jersey, Whippany

United Jewish Federation  
Interfaith families educational program and support/discussion groups.  
Contact: Lynne Wolfe (973) 884-4800 ext. 192

### New York, Long Island

Long Island Havurah (Fellowship) for Humanistic Judaism  
Existing group stresses intercultural strengths.  
Contact: Leonard Cherlin, (516) 889-8337

### New York, New York

Temple of Universal Judaism  
Participation is open to all.  
Contact: Rabbi Charles Lippman  
(212) 535-0187

### New York, Rochester

Interfaith Connection, Jewish Community Center  
Contact: Michele Ruda Leve, C.S.W.  
(716) 461-2000, ext. 232

### New York, Rockland County\*

Interested in forming an interfaith group.  
Contact: Eric and Elizabeth Kohlmeier  
(914) 639-9380

### Ohio, Cincinnati\*

Interested in joining an interfaith group.  
Contact: Christine M. Segal, (513) 793-2866

### Ohio, Columbus

Gateways: The Jewish Interfaith Connection  
Groups and programs for grandparents, parents, interfaith couples, and families.  
Contact: Nancy Heiden, Project Director  
(614) 231-2731

### Ohio, Dayton

Jewish Interfaith Network  
Interfaith group.  
Contact: Tonda Learner, (937) 439-4313

### Pennsylvania, Philadelphia Area

Jewish Converts & Interfaith Network  
Support groups for grandparents, parents, interfaith couples, converts, and children.  
Contact: Lena Romanoff, Director  
(610) 664-8112

### Tennessee, Memphis\*

Interfaith group.  
Contact: Jan and David Kaplan  
(901) 767-4267

### Wisconsin, Milwaukee

Interfaith Connection, JCC of Milwaukee  
Existing interfaith group.  
Contact: Joyce Gutzke, Interfaith Coordinator  
(414) 967-8218 (continued on page 15)

(continued from page 14)

Bulletin Addendum:  
Hamden, Connecticut  
Congregation Mishkan Israel  
Contact: Rabbi Sonya Starr  
203-288-3877

*"Stepping Stones ... to a Jewish Me* is a proven, successful program which confronts and grapples with the idea of Jewish identification for interfaith families. This two-year program of classes and workshops is designed for parents and children of unaffiliated interfaith families who want to learn more about their Jewish heritage. A hands-on, experiential series will introduce the children to elements of Judaism such as holidays, history, life-cycle events, culture, religious symbols, and the literature, art, and legends of the Jewish people. Parents enter into relevant discussions on similar topics. The first Stepping Stone program this year is open to the public."

***This issue of Dovetail  
is dedicated  
to the memory of  
Father Edward Flannery.***

From *Dovetail* adviser Dr. Eugene Fisher:

It is with sadness that I learned of the passing of Fr. Edward H. Flannery, my predecessor as director for Catholic-Jewish relations for the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs from 1967 to 1976. He was one of the pioneers of Catholic-Jewish dialogue. His book, *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-three Centuries of Anti-Semitism* (Paulist Press), was written at the time of the Second Vatican Council and has been continuously in print ever since then.

When I first met Father Flannery in 1973 at the National Workshop for Catholic-Jewish Relations (later, "Christian-Jewish Relations") he was already well-known for having blazed the trail that my own life's work was to follow. I must admit that I met him with some awe not only at his accomplishments but at the deep sense of spiritual "centeredness" one sensed in him. It was a feeling that never passed away. Truly, there was a touch of greatness about him. It was a touch that was needed, I know. The Second Vatican Council's declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, could not have

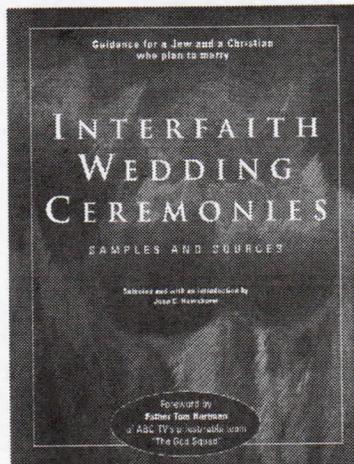
been implemented as well as it has without Fr. Flannery's inspired guidance in those early, crucial years. We who work in the field today owe him more than we can ever express. At the Third National Workshop in 1977 in Detroit we gave him the first award given by the Workshops. He was to receive many more richly deserved awards over the years.

Perhaps the best way for us to remember Fr. Flannery is by continuing his efforts to bring together in reconciliation the Catholic Church and the Jewish People, who at the time he began his vocation in this work had been estranged, by and large, for many centuries. Here in America, as Fr. Flannery used to say, we have a unique opportunity to move forward the process of healing since we enjoy the world's largest Jewish community alongside a healthy Catholic community.

May his name be a blessing for us all!

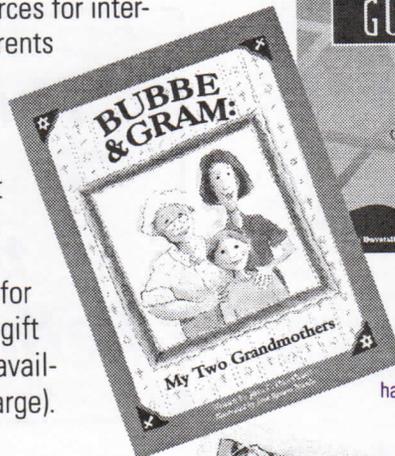
Dr. Eugene J. Fisher  
Associate Director  
Secretariat for Ecumenical and  
Interreligious Affairs  
National Conference of Catholic  
Bishops

## Resources for Interfaith Families from Dovetail Publishing

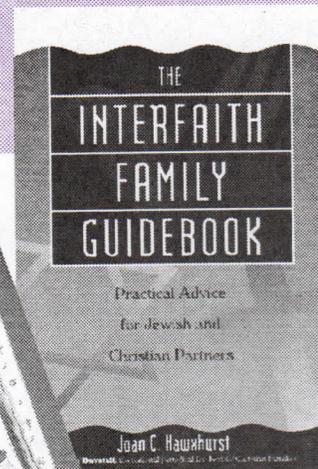


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**Bubbe & Gram**, winner of a 1997 Benjamin Franklin Silver Medal Award for excellence in independent publishing, and winner of the 1998 Helen Keating Ott Award for Outstanding Contribution to Children's Literature from the Church and Synagogue Library Association, includes simple explanations of both Jewish and Christian holidays and traditions.



# Dovetail

A Journal by and for Jewish/Christian Families

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