

Keruv – The FJMC Way

By Rabbi Wayne Allen

Rabbis are often perceived in ways that are far different than they are. But for many synagogue members, Rabbis are often perceived as they are seen. That means for many congregants, rabbis are merely religious functionaries who perform the necessary and expected rituals at life cycle events and prayer services. For others, rabbis are preachy know-it-alls who, as one colleague described it, “stand six feet above contradiction.” In many instances, rabbis are perceived to be more authoritarian than authoritative. But in either case, rabbis are held to be judgmental; after all they do represent a legal tradition with well-defined boundaries and strong principles of right and wrong. None of these perceptions leads easily to making the rabbi seem approachable even when they want to be.

The reluctance to confide in the rabbi or to seek the rabbi’s counsel is especially strong when the issue involved is inter-

dating and intermarriage. Congregants have enough trouble dealing with their own ambivalence – reviling intermarriage but wanting to avoid alienating their children. They don’t want the rabbi lecturing them or scolding them as they anticipate the rabbi would. Consequently, at the very time congregants most need the rabbi’s help, they are least likely to seek it out. Even if rabbis were to advertise their openness, that itself would be insufficient to overcome the impulse to shy away.

What rabbis need are good publicists, people who themselves have been helped who can go out and convince others that the rabbi really cares, empathizes, listens effectively, and can often provide sage advice that produces positive results. The facilitators for the Federation of Jewish Men’s Clubs outreach programme to intermarrieds can be just the kind of publicists rabbis need. To be sure, this is not the role that was initially conceived or intended, but this has been the practical result.

My experience confirms that mem-

bers whose personal agonies remained secret out of fear or shame were able to confide in our facilitator in the context of the programme we offer, *Married Out But Not Opted Out*. Our facilitator was able to draw out of the participants the feelings that they had long suppressed and encouraged them to seek my help. He became my advocate and recruiter. The trust our facilitator engendered and the comfort they had in discussing their issues with him was key. He was a peer, not a judge; a fellow traveler who had gone down the same road. That enabled him to suggest rabbinic intervention that was often – but still not always – sought.

The trained facilitator has become an image-changer. I have been assisted greatly in my pastoral duties because I have a new image in the eyes of congregants who were heretofore resigned to suffer in silence. To those who have been served by our facilitator, the rabbi has become a welcome ally in dealing with the problems related to intermarriage.

Light Up The World

MERCAZ USA President, Rabbi Vernon H. Kurtz, recently announced that voter registration for the World Zionist Congress election is scheduled for the fall 2005, while the election will be held mid-winter or early spring 2006. This election will determine the make-up of the 145 person American delegation and Canadian delegation to the 35th World Zionist Congress that will be held in Jerusalem on June 19-22, 2006.

For a better tomorrow, we need **YOUR HELP** by playing a significant role in helping MERCAZ USA and MERCAZ Canada increase mem-

bership for the forthcoming election. We urge all synagogue board members, committee chairs, and other synagogue leaders to become MEMBERS. We also encourage each congregational board to approve a dues CHECK-OFF SYSTEM so that *all* synagogue members have the opportunity to become MERCAZ USA members.

Lending support to the Conservative/Masorti community is the KEY to our SUCCESS and your MEMBERSHIP is the CORNERSTONE of our efforts to STRENGTHEN OUR VOICE in the international decision making process of world Jewry, the

World Zionist Organization, and the Jewish Agency for Israel.

We Need **Your Help** To Formulate A Better Future For The **World-wide** Conservative/Masorti Movement.

Here We Stand With **Your Help** Making Our Piece Of The World A Little Bit Better.

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