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**RESPONDING TO INTERMARRIAGE:
PROVIDING SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE TO
CONSERVATIVE/MASORTI FAMILY MEMBERS AND
THEIR SYNAGOGUE LEADERSHIP**
A PROPOSAL OF THE FEDERATION OF JEWISH MEN'S CLUBS

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INTRODUCTION

The social reality of intermarriage touches increasing numbers of Jewish families and creates a special challenge for the Conservative Movement. Our intermarried children often want to remain involved in Jewish Life and raise Jewish children. They do not understand why their love for a partner who is not Jewish should exclude or restrict their Jewish participation or their acceptance in the Jewish community. In many cases, the non-Jewish partner, not coming from a religious background, is willing to have the children raised Jewish and is both curious and interested in Judaism him or herself. In these situations the parent, (*or grandparent, or other congregational member,*) faces perplexing questions of acceptance, accommodation, and educational involvement with their children and grandchildren.

How can a Conservative synagogue and the Conservative movement retain its existing membership, reach out to our intermarried children and to other seekers and still retain its commitment to tradition? How can the Conservative Synagogue offer guidance and support to its members who are confronted by the *growing* reality that everyone is a Jew-by-Choice and that intermarriage can no longer be looked at with disdain. These challenges and opportunities may be formulated as follows:

- Open a dialogue with synagogue leadership, both volunteer and professional, in order to create a supportive and challenging Jewish environment that supports and guides its member families.
- Develop an understanding and *modus operandi* for welcoming, integrating and challenging intermarried couples both intellectually and spiritually.
- Develop a methodology for reaching out and involving the supportive non-Jewish spouse.
- Train a member of the lay community to serve as a strategic partner with the rabbi.
- Institute a program that will attract seekers, young men and women 20-35, who have some Jewish ancestry.

These programmatic initiatives emerged as a result of the strategy initiated by the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs (FJMC) from 2001-2003. As a result, the initiative succeeded in training 32 volunteers "*Keruv* Consultants" between December, 2003 and April, 2005, each committed to establishing *Keruv* models in their synagogues. The FJMC has also brought 77 rabbis to meet over four rabbinic "think-tanks" to address these issues with their colleagues.

JULY 2001 TO JULY 2003

TESTING THE WATERS

The FJMC tested the waters at its biennial Convention in Toronto July 2001 with the publication of *Building the Faith: A Book of Inclusion for Dual-faith Families*. A major address and a number of hands-on workshops demonstrated that members of Conservative congregations were prepared to wrestle with the complicated issues posed by intermarriage. The book's publication and coverage in the Jewish press generated serious discussion within each of the major arms of the Conservative Movement. But it was the responses received from rabbis and lay leadership in the field, applauding our courage for tackling this complicated and important issue that convinced us of the community's readiness and need for the FJMC to develop a long-term strategy.

WORK COMPLETED

- February 2002: A Training Institute and pilot curriculum was developed and ten individuals were selected to be trained as *Keruv* volunteer Consultants. They were trained in how to introduce *Building the Faith* and its many programs, in a number of different venues. These volunteer consultants were asked to make presentations at two congregations within the next four months. In July 2002, the consultants met for a second weekend of training.
- FJMC leadership, with the support of congregational rabbis, initiated a process intended to identify future Volunteer Consultants with the goal of doubling the number of trained *Keruv* Volunteers.
- A follow-up training manual, *Let's Talk About It*, designed to provide additional programming and guidance for families affected or potentially affected by intermarriage, was conceived. Leaders from the major arms of the Conservative Movement were selected as readers. Essays were solicited and additional programs were field-tested.
- In conjunction with the release of *Let's Talk About It* in July of 2003, 6 hours of "Introduction To *Keruv* programming" was designed in order to introduce the 500-600 people representing more than 100 congregations who attended the FJMC Biennial Convention to the key issues and how they can be addressed in a congregational setting.
- Twenty rabbis attended the FJMC biannual convention to observe *Keruv* programming. Rabbis met with FJMC Executive Director Rabbi Charles Simon in a rabbis-only session to provide feedback. The overwhelming response received allowed the FJMC to continue the process and the *Keruv* initiative.

RESULTS: 2002-2003

In 2002 and 2003, FJMC *Volunteer* Consultants made presentations at twelve synagogues. In order to further test the waters. These presentations were made in a variety of settings, including from the pulpit with follow up discussion; to synagogue Boards of Directors; congregational adult education classes; and individual Men's Clubs. In addition, the FJMC Executive Director served as a congregational scholar-in-residence in Toronto and in Houston in order to stimulate *Keruv* programming and to develop a better understanding of regional variations. In addition, a special required-seminar was arranged for the entire Ziegler Rabbinical School in Los Angeles at the University of Judaism, also led by the FJMC Executive Director.

THE TWO MOST NOTABLE SUCCESS STORIES OF STAGE I WERE:

- **Temple Israel, Sharon, MA**, (see enclosed brochure) which introduced a serious and challenging adult education program run entirely by lay leadership. A number of the topics discussed had never been raised in a Conservative congregation. The congregation has completed an evaluation of the impact of the programs and is currently in its third year of *Keruv* programming. The results of their experience will be shared with other consultants in the spring of 2005.
- **Congregation Beth Tikvah, Toronto, Ont.**
When discussing intermarriage in Toronto, one must understand it within the context of Canadian Jewry, where a large percentage of families are somewhat embarrassed to discuss the issue openly. On several occasions, following the publication of *Building the Faith*, the congregational rabbi expressed his support. His verbal support resulted in ten intermarried couples becoming attracted to the synagogue. These couples began to attend and participate in congregational events and expressed an interest in Jewish education for their children. As a result of this initial experience, an open publicized meeting took place in the home of one of our *Volunteer* Consultants. The rabbi guided and prepared the Consultant but chose not to attend the meeting. The group met regularly for a year and is currently involved in its third year of activity.

STAGE II: JULY 2003 – JULY 2005
PLACING/INSTALLING KERUV CONSULTANTS
IN CONSERVATIVE CONGREGATIONS

FJMC established a goal to create pilot keruv projects in up to twenty-four Conservative synagogues. The goals for Stage 2 are listed below together with the dates during which they were met.

SUMMER 2003

- To publish the training manual entitled *Let's Talk About It* and distribute it to as many rabbis and lay leaders as possible within the 800 Conservative synagogues. **completed**

JULY 2004

- To actively pursue funding for the project through private donations and grants to insure activities in 2005. **completed**
- To bring together a limited number of rabbis (24) to a seminar that will train them to work with their members who have intermarriage in their families. *Rabbis were selected on the basis of having evinced interest in this population in the past, being conceptual thinkers and being from geographically different locales. This cross section provided rabbis with a needed forum and a sense of mission.* One seminar took place in Los Angeles in December 03. A second in Baltimore March '04. A third in North Miami, Florida October 04 and a Fourth has been scheduled in Berkley, California in April of 2005. The agenda for each seminar is built upon the previous ones and continues to evolve. **completed**
- To increase the number of trained *Keruv* volunteers to at least 24 in order to establish 24 pilot projects over a two year period. **completed**
- To sensitize and train the rabbinical leadership of these designated congregations to work with the *Keruv* consultant to develop welcoming strategies and supportive programming. **ongoing**
- To produce a Rabbinic Guide to working with intermarried families for the Conservative/Masorti Movement. **in progress**
- To develop a special website that will highlight success models and guide congregational leaders through the process of reaching-out to its population. **In progress**
- To have *volunteer* consultants present at major '04-'06 Conservative Movement conventions in order to teach and motivate. (United Synagogue, Rabbinical Assembly, and Women's League for Conservative Judaism) **in progress**

- To develop ongoing evaluation procedures to monitor rabbis and consultants in order to assist them to deal with the challenges they will encounter. **On-going**

RESULTS: 2003- APRIL 2004

Twenty-nine rabbis participated in *Keruv* Think Tanks and an additional twenty have already expressed a desire to attend future functions. Nineteen *volunteer* consultants have been trained and have been partnered with *their rabbis*. Awareness of the FJMC *Keruv* program has increased as a result of coverage received in the Jewish press, synagogue bulletins, and cable television

THE THREE MOST NOTABLE SUCCESS STORIES IN STAGE II WERE:

- **Shomrei Torah Synagogue West Hills, CA**
A six-session program, building on the Sharon, MA experience, was initiated. The group added a special session that involved the rabbi. This model is currently being used in two additional congregations in Southern California. The program continues to develop. Results will be shared with other consultants in March 2005.
- **Shaarey Zedek, Southfield , MI**
As a result of the Los Angeles Rabbinic Think Tank, the rabbi successfully positioned himself as a supportive individual interested in establishing relationships with members' intermarried children. In addition, progress is developing in extending this message to the supportive non-Jewish spouses within the congregation
- **Congregation Beth Tikvah, Toronto, Ont.**
Completed its second year of *keruv* programming, the congregation has successfully re-positioned its rabbi as a caring and interested person who is willing to meet mixed couples. As a result the initial group of ten young families that had begun attending services has more than tripled in number. All of their children have been enrolled in religious schools and when necessary are being prepared for conversion. In addition after six meetings during the year, the *keruv* committee is now considering adopting the model for synagogue programming developed in Sharon, MA.

SEPTEMBER 2004-JULY 2005

OVERVIEW

- Continue ongoing training of *Volunteer* Consultants **completed**
- Initiate *Keruv* programming and strategy in all synagogues with existing *Volunteer* Consultants **on going**
- Prepare *Volunteer* Consultants to present different modules at Convention 2005 to representatives of more than 150 congregations **completed**
- Sponsor 2 Rabbinic Think Tanks and 3 *Keruv* Volunteer Consultant Training Seminars **completed**

- Increase awareness in the Jewish press, through the *Keruv* website **in progress**
- Develop program material for integration of supportive non-Jewish spouse, parenting grand-parenting module and young adults with Jewish ancestry. **completed**
- To conduct a rabbinic think tank devoted to synagogue policy and our changing population **completed**
- Conduct ongoing evaluation **ongoing**

SEPTEMBER 2005-JULY 2006

OVERVIEW

- Continue ongoing training of *Keruv* Volunteer Consultants
- Initiate *Keruv* programming and strategy in all synagogues with existing *Keruv* Consultants
- Sponsor 3 Rabbinic Think Tanks and 3 *Keruv* Volunteer Consultant Training Seminars
- Increase awareness in the Jewish press, through the *Keruv* website
- Initiate at least one regional seminar for rabbis and lay leadership **scheduled**
- Initiate at least one Regional *keruv* Volunteer consultant Seminar **scheduled**
- Conduct ongoing evaluation
- Publish Pamphlet devoted to the Role of the Supportive non-Jewish Spouse and the Conservative Movement **completed**

TRAINING OF CONSULTANTS AND RABBIS

The 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 budgets are based on the FJMC hosting 3 Rabbinic Training sessions and 3 volunteer consultant-training seminars. This is an increase from prior years. In addition the budgets include one 3-day training seminar for all volunteer consultants each year. The projected maximum number of rabbis to be sensitized to this program is anticipated to grow from 75 in the Spring of 2005 to 130 in 2005-2006 to 202 by May 2007. The maximum number of pilots operating is expected to increase from 24 in May 2005 to 48 in May 2006 to 72 in May 2007 at which time the program will be in need of an overall evaluation.

New developments include the creation of a rabbinic Policy think tank to address issues occurring in synagogues, the structure of an expanded volunteer committee to insure seminar planning, curriculum development, and on going supervision of volunteer consultants and an Implementation Manual for rabbis. Additional funds are being sought to enable volunteer consultants to make site visits on a regular basis and to plan two follow up training seminars for existing consultants to receive additional training on the east and west coasts. In the event that funding is lacking, the 3rd rabbinic seminar and consultant training will be dropped in that order.

CLARIFICATION OF THE FJMC *KERUV* PROGRAM

THE RABBINIC THINK TANK STRATEGY

FJMC's Rabbinic *Keruv* Think Tanks bring together rabbis from different locales for an intensive seminar devoted to the various issues emerging as interfaith marriage increases in our communities (see attached sample agenda). Those rabbis who express interest, and who have developed new ideas and thoughts to bring to the discussion, are requested to submit written material for future seminars and to present them to a group of peers. In this way, FJMC is creating a constantly developing faculty of presenters.

As a result of the three rabbinic meetings that took place in 2003-2004 a *Keruv* "faculty" has begun to emerge that will continue to grow. In addition, local press and conversations amongst colleagues has created awareness and a desire to participate. Finally, the Rabbinic Think Tanks provide the opportunity to sufficiently motivate the rabbi to select an individual to be trained as a *Keruv* consultant, if the rabbi has not already done so. The FJMC envisions this process continuing for the next several years.

THE ROLE OF THE *KERUV* VOLUNTEER CONSULTANT

The role of an FJMC *Keruv* Volunteer Consultant is an evolving one that demands the consultant acquire additional skills each step of the way. As the

FJMC's conception of how to introduce *Keruv* into a congregation develops so too does the role of the consultant. At this juncture, it is safe to assume that a consultant will require 2 to 3 years of training in order to succeed on a congregational level. Volunteer consultants commit to an initial 3-day training program followed by a weekend of training and follow-up six months later. *Keruv* consultants are provided with a *keruv* mentor. As the number of consultants grows, a series of one-day seminars will take place amongst 5-10 consultants in order to provide them with up to date information and techniques. FJMC plans on instituting two regional meetings during 2005 - 2006 period.

STEP ONE: ESTABLISHING THE PLAYING FIELD.

The Goals of the initial FJMC training program for first year consultants are eight-fold:

1. To establish a strong relationship with the rabbi
2. To assist the rabbi in positioning him/herself within the congregation regarding *Keruv*
3. To understand the Conservative Movement's halachic positions and concerns regarding *Keruv*
4. To understand the limitations of being a *Keruv* Volunteer Consultant
5. To develop an understanding of the types of programmatic initiatives that can be instituted
6. To introduce the congregation to the overall *Keruv* program
7. To begin the programming process
8. To utilize the *Keruv* initiative as a vehicle to further involve the Men's Club in synagogue life.

(Please see attached sample agenda of a *Keruv* Volunteer Consultant Training Seminar)

STEP TWO: ASSESSING THE PLAYING FIELD

The second meeting of *Keruv* Volunteer Consultants requires that Consultants:

1. Be brought together to share their initial successes
2. Discuss monitoring and expanding *Keruv* programming in their synagogue.
3. Develop additional skills in order to further develop the program in the synagogue in the second or third year, such as:
 - a. An understanding of the necessary language synagogue leadership needs to employ if they wish to:
 - i. Reach out to children of their members who intermarried
 - ii. Reach out to children of intermarried and non-affiliated
 - iii. Reach out to couples where one party is a supportive non-Jewish spouse.
 - b. An understanding of the issues that each congregation will have to address if they decide to reach out to any of the above.
 - c. An understanding of different program models currently being developed to introduce *Keruv* programming.

THE RABBINIC POLICY THINK TANK

The initial FJMC strategy called for a series of programmatic initiatives that would provide support and guidance to families with non-Jewish family members and a series of suggested, field-tested approaches for integrating the supportive non-Jewish spouse. Issues of synagogue policy and of Jewish Law as defined by the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Conservative Movement were cautiously avoided during the first 18 months of the current phase of the project. The concept of a rabbinic policy think tank was not part of the FJMC 's original thinking. The attempts to avoid issues of synagogue policy failed. Rabbis upon their own volition needed to talk to other rabbis about issues of membership, religious participation and burial. The demand was so great, that a session was devoted to policy issues in the third rabbinic think tank and two members of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards were invited to present. The subsequent feedback from rabbis demonstrated a need to pursue policy issues in a more systematic manner. It is for this reason that an item has been included in the budget designed to bring together selected rabbis in North America to develop strategies for further developing this agenda.

THE IMPACT OF THE KERUV PROGRAMMING ON THE SYNAGOGUE

Keruv programming in its first two years conveys a strong message to congregants that the synagogue and its rabbi are concerned with their members' needs. In addition, it conveys a message to members and to the community at large that the synagogue is receptive to people who are at different points on the metaphorical ladder.

PRESENTING KERUV PROGRAMMING TO CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP AN OVERVIEW:

Year one: Establishing the need

Working together, the Volunteer Consultant and rabbi can depending upon their focus and the position of the congregation employ the following strategies:

1. Establish a day of study in order to position the rabbi to reach out to the congregation
2. Establish a series of workshops (following the Temple Israel, Sharon MA model) of 4-6 sessions, offered in members' homes, each devoted to a different topic. At the end of these sessions, the rabbi, Consultant and key synagogue leaders will determine next steps
3. Initiate steps to establish the rabbi as the person in the community who is sensitive to families experiencing intermarriage and to intermarried couples themselves.
4. In the event that the rabbi is well positioned the rabbi/consultant team might also choose to institute an outreach program for seekers
5. Actively begin addressing the supportive non-Jewish spouse population

Year two: Follow-up:

Working together, the Volunteer Consultant and rabbi will:

1. Expand the program, modifying the first year's program as per the needs of the congregation
2. Implement specific strategies relating to supportive non-Jewish spouses and /or grandparents.
3. Institute mentor programs

Additional possibilities: As a result of a year of programming, the rabbi and Volunteer Consultant will have the opportunity to understand the relationship between *Keruv* and synagogue policy, taking into account issues such as burial, membership and volunteer status of non-Jewish spouses.

Year three: Reaching-out within the community

After testing the waters and having introduced the congregation to *Keruv* programming, the members of the congregation will become aware that their synagogue's leadership's wants to meet the needs of their changing families. Synagogues will then be able to implement mentoring programs where congregants mentor other congregants who are grappling with the issue of interfaith marriage.

Overall strategy:

The FJMC keruv strategy has been designed to allow a rabbi/consultant team to work from their place of comfort and strength. We envision this as a gradual non-confrontational process that will impact on the way the community perceives itself and the potential community perceives the synagogue. It is our assumption *that* "like attracts like". Parents and grandparents who find guidance and support in their synagogue will encourage their friends to take advantage of the synagogue's services. Mixed couples that are socially integrated and feel part of the community will similarly attract other like them. Finally rabbis who understand their role more clearly *vis a vis* our changing demographics will be more effective as pastors and teachers.

Conclusion: FJMC next steps.

The evolution of the *Keruv* Consultant and the FJMC *Keruv* Program has far-reaching implications. It has the potential to change the nature and structure of the FJMC as well as its member congregations. The FJMC envisions the empowering of the laity as the end-result of the *Keruv* process. One of the final tasks of a *Keruv* Mentor is to be transformed into someone who can institute mentorship programs on the congregational level. As the FJMC concludes its first years of developing rabbinic and lay partners, the issues surrounding mentorship and the necessary materials and training programs will need to be developed.

It is clear to me that the FJMC Keruv Program has far-reaching implications for building Men's Clubs and for assisting congregations to reposition themselves to meet the needs of future populations.

Respectfully Submitted,

**Rabbi Charles Simon,
Executive Director**