

## CONGREGATION B'NAI JACOB WELCOMES INTERFAITH HOUSEHOLDS

Congregation B'nai Jacob, an egalitarian and inclusive Synagogue, recognizes the increasing diversity of the North American Jewish community. At Congregation B'nai Jacob, we respect the right of every person to make autonomous religious decisions. Our community welcomes non-Jewish spouses or partners as an engaged part of the B'nai Jacob family; Judaism has a wealth of resources to help you confront life's challenges and celebrate life's joys. We partner with all who join us in creating homes rich in Jewish tradition and in raising children as learned and committed Jews. Whether you are seeking personal connection or you just want to help your family's development, we are here for you.

Here are some of the opportunities we offer:

- Education - Adult learning classes to help you gain a comfortable understanding of our worship services and Jewish traditions.
- Involvement - Participate in volunteer projects, educational activities and committees.
- Full access to and assistance from our Rabbi - If needed or requested, our Rabbi will meet and talk with you and also place her interfaith connections at your service if you wish to speak with clergy of another faith.
- Participation - Join in the religious school activities and life-cycle events of your family members.

Congregation B'nai Jacob welcomes non-Jewish spouses and partners to be active in Synagogue life to the extent permissible under *halachah* (Jewish law). Congregation B'nai Jacob, like most covenant-based religious institutions, wants to be welcoming to all. At the same time, Conservative Judaism believes certain privileges and responsibilities are available only to those who born into or converted to Judaism.

When delineating participation of non-Jewish spouses or partners in Synagogue life, there are two areas of differentiation between Jewish members and non-Jewish members:

### **Governance:**

- All adults within a membership unit can vote at congregation meetings. Non-Jewish spouses or partners may actively participate on all B'nai Jacob committees and can serve as Chair of the following committees:

Advertising  
Audit  
House and Grounds  
Hakol  
Major Gifts  
Oneg Shabbat  
Publicity  
Scholarship  
Tree of Life  
Visitation  
Ways and Means

- The following committees can only be chaired by Jewish congregants:

Adult Education  
Cemetery  
Education  
High Holidays  
Kitchen

Memorial Plaques  
Religious Life

Membership, Social Action and USY can be co-chaired by a Jewish and a non-Jewish member.

### **Board Composition**

Jewish members must always comprise the majority of the members of the Board.

### **Executive Committee**

To be elected to and/or hold an office on the Executive Committee, the person must be a Jewish congregant.

### **Religious/Ritual:**

- Many special opportunities exist for non-Jewish spouses or partners to participate in important family life-cycle events such as a bris, bar- or bat-mitzvah or wedding. Non-Jews may also lead specific non-religious prayers in English during Shabbat services. At the same time, CBJ observes *halachic* constraints. For example, in accordance with *halachah*, non-Jews may not count toward a *minyan*, may not lead “Jewish specific” prayers or blessings and may not have Torah- related honors.

## **Life-Cycle Events**

### ***Bris/Baby Naming:***

- Our Rabbi will officiate a *bris* or baby naming ceremony if the parents intend to raise the child in a Jewish home *and* if they are not also having a non-Jewish religious ceremony for the child. If the mother is not Jewish or if the baby is adopted, the baby must visit the *mikveh* for conversion before the naming may take place. Our Rabbi can help guide you through the *mikveh* ritual.
- Both parents may stand at the Torah for the Torah blessing (*aliyah*) but only the Jewish parent may say the blessing.

### **Bar/Bat Mitzvah:**

- All children of interfaith families may attend our Religious School. If a child’s mother is not Jewish, or if the child was adopted, the parents should arrange to have the child immerse in a mikveh as soon as possible upon beginning religious school.
- During the bar/bat mitzvah service, non-Jewish family members and friends may lead specific non-religious prayers in English.
- Non-Jewish parents may not open the ark or handle the Torah during the service.
- Both parents may stand at the Torah for the Torah blessing (*aliyah*) but only the Jewish parent may say the blessing.

### **Aufruf:**

- If there is intent to create a Jewish home, an interfaith couple may celebrate their upcoming wedding with an Aufruf.
- Only the Jewish partner may be called to the Torah to say the Torah blessing (*aliyah*).
- We welcome both the Jewish and the non-Jewish partner to the *bimah* for a blessing from the Rabbi.

### **Marriage:**

- Our Rabbi may not conduct the wedding ceremony of an interfaith couple as Congregation B’nai Jacob is affiliated with the Conservative Movement and observes *halachah*. The Jewish wedding

creates a contractual relationship under Jewish law through the *ketubah* (marriage contract), and Jewish law has no authority over non-Jews.

- Even though our Rabbi may not perform an interfaith wedding or attend an interfaith wedding ceremony, CBJ offers support. Our Rabbi provides counseling support for the couple as well as for the extended families to help work through religious and spiritual issues. Our Rabbi also provides couples source material to work out their wedding ceremonies representing the aspirations of both parties. If the couple intends to create a Jewish home, our Rabbi can refer the couple to a rabbi who will officiate an interfaith wedding.

### **End of Life:**

- Our Rabbi offers support and counsel for the members of interfaith families when they must face their own impending death or that of a loved one. At Congregation B'nai Jacob, we understand interfaith families often have unique questions regarding end of life issues. Our Rabbi is available to answer your questions and to provide information about local funeral homes and cemeteries.
- Our Rabbi is available to be involved in a non-denominational funeral and/or memorial service for non-Jewish members of the congregation at the request of the deceased or their family. These services may take place at a funeral home or at the graveside. Our cemetery includes a traditional section for Jews and a non-traditional section where all members of interfaith families may be buried. Please see the section on Cemetery Rules for more information about our cemetery. A funeral service may only be held in the B'nai Jacob sanctuary for Jewish members of the congregation.
- Members of the Jewish faith are obligated to observe Jewish mourning rituals including Shiva and reciting the Mourners' *Kaddish*. While not obligated to do so, non-Jewish family members may choose to observe the same mourning rituals regardless of the religion of the deceased. Our Rabbi provides support to family members in mourning and is available to lead *shiva minyans*.
- Our Rabbi may not officiate at a funeral service when the family of a non-Jewish congregant decides to follow the funeral and mourning rituals of another religion.

## **RESOURCES FOR INTERFAITH HOUSEHOLDS**

### **1. As a non-Jewish partner or spouse, who should I contact if I would like to discuss the activities I can participate in at B'nai Jacob?**

Our Rabbi is pleased to discuss any questions that you have.

### **2. Can you recommend any books, websites or local or national organizations that provide helpful information to interfaith households?**

Our Rabbi is pleased to direct you to additional resources related to your specific interests. The following is an initial list of resources which provides a good starting point.

Although we identify these organizations as a resource for learning, information and opinions found on external web sites may not represent the views of Congregation B'nai Jacob or its members.

United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism  
Interfaith Family  
The Jewish Outreach Institute  
The Mothers Circle (JCC) for non-Jewish moms  
Rabbinic Center for Research & Counseling

[www.uscj.org](http://www.uscj.org)  
[www.interfaithfamily.com](http://www.interfaithfamily.com)  
[www.joi.org](http://www.joi.org)  
[www.themotherscircle.org](http://www.themotherscircle.org)  
[www.rcrconline.org](http://www.rcrconline.org)