

JOINT INTERMARRIAGE WORKING GROUP FAQs

The Conservative/Masorti movement is continuing to move from disapproval to engagement with families where one partner is Jewish, and the other is not. We aim to empower these couples to lead more meaningful Jewish lives and build Jewish homes, while acknowledging and aiming to heal the hurt and alienation that our past approach has caused.

Guided by two years of listening, research, pastoral reflection, and broad community input, our Movement's Intermarriage Working Group (IWG) has issued a report that provides a practical roadmap with specific steps to strengthen Jewish life, families, and communities. We recognize that our future depends on welcoming people where they are and grounding our decisions about intermarriage in inclusion, personal relationships with clergy, and authentic *halakhic* process.

What is the IWG's mission and why is it issuing its report now?

The IWG was convened in 2024 by the Rabbinical Assembly (RA), United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ), and the Cantors Assembly (CA) to explore issues and views surrounding intermarriage in the Conservative/Masorti Movement. The IWG's mission was to listen deeply, study widely, and develop practical, pastoral, and *halakhic* recommendations that strengthen Jewish life, families, and communities.

In 2023-24, the RA's Standards Working Group (SWG) spent nearly a year seeking to understand the role and impact of the RA's standards, particularly around intermarriage and interfaith couples. In January 2024, it offered a series of recommendations and next steps, largely for our communities in North America. The group recommended establishing a Movement-wide working group to explore additional, specific opportunities for engaging interfaith families and working in meaningful ways across the movement.

Who sat on the IWG?

Co-chaired by RA Board Member Rabbi Aaron Brusso and USCJ Board Member Shirley Davidoff, the Working Group brought together a broad, global cross-section of our Movement, including rabbis, cantors, educators, lay leaders, and representatives from communities across North America, Israel, and other regions.

Group Members

USCJ:

Shirley Davidoff, Dallas, TX
Ned Gladstein, West Caldwell, NJ
Norman Kahn, Toronto, ON
Eliot Meadow, Charlotte, NC
Andy Schaer, Pittsburgh, PA
Dana Winer, Austin, TX

Rabbinical Assembly

Rabbi Aaron Brusso, Mt. Kisco, NY
Rabbi D'ror Chankin-Gould, Chicago, IL
Rabbi Lauren Henderson, Sandy Springs, GA
Rabbi Jay Kornsgold, East Windsor, NJ
Rabbi Peretz Rodman, Jerusalem, Israel

Cantors Assembly

Cantor Judy Dubin Aranoff, Valley Village, CA
Cantor Joanna Dulkan, Minnetonka, MN

Executive Leadership & Staff

Rabbi Jacob Blumenthal, Gaithersburg, MD
Wendy Bolm, Appleton, WI
Andi Edwardson, Kansas City, MO
Rabbi Ashira Konigsburg, New York, NY
Dr. Keren McGinity, Boston, MA (*through June 2025*)

How did the Intermarriage Working Group conduct its research?

The IWG spent nearly a year listening and learning through a broad survey and Quick Thoughts Questionnaire sent to more than 100,000 people (with over 1,200 responses), individual and group interviews, and informal papers from historians, social scientists, and rabbis. It also gathered global input and drew deeply on the powerful personal stories shared through the survey. This combination of data, lived experience, and *halakhic* reflection shaped the report's conclusions.

What are the report's key findings?

The IWG's research showed that there are a wide variety of voices when it comes to how best to understand *halakhah*, and the various strategies we might use to engage intermarried and intermarrying couples. The report identifies four emerging themes and values, as well as four next steps, which stem from the need to continue transitioning from disapproval to engagement.

Four Emerging Themes and Values

1. The Need to Move from Disapproval to Engagement
2. The Need to Emphasize the Value Proposition of Jewish Living
3. The Value of Our Movement's Expansive, Creative, and Relevant *Halakhah*
4. Authority of Clergy Is Derived from Relationship

Four Next Steps

1. Acknowledging and Healing Hurt (*Teshuva*)
2. Exploring specific roles clergy can play before, on, and after the wedding day, including ritual options to welcome and bless couples committed to building Jewish homes.
3. Making conversion accessible, personal, and grounded in dignity.
4. Reframing the conversation on intermarriage through a new curriculum

What role can Conservative/Masorti rabbis play around weddings where one partner is Jewish, and one is not?

We will explore meaningful pastoral and ritual roles that our clergy can play before, on, and after the wedding day, offering guidance that helps couples build intentional Jewish homes.

While the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony remains a particularistic ritual expression for two Jewish partners, *halakhah* also provides opportunities for inclusion, not only boundaries, for others committed to Jewish life. Our goal is to welcome, bless, and support couples as they create Jewish families rooted in shared values.

The current RA's Standards of Rabbinic Practice remain in effect while we advance discussions with the RA's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards about rabbinic roles and rituals that support and empower individuals, couples, and families.

Our clergy's authority grows from relationships of trust, care, and shared responsibility – not coercion or disapproval. Their role is to guide individuals and families through Jewish teaching, wisdom, and pastoral support as they build meaningful Jewish lives.

What is your guidance for couples navigating the process of intermarriage?

Living a Jewish life leads to greater spiritual connection, meaning, and community. We want to help couples intentionally build the Jewish lives they want for themselves. Through pastoral guidance, education, and new curricula, we aim to support couples as they articulate shared values, commitments, and expectations for their Jewish homes. Our goal is to empower them to shape Jewish lives that feel authentic, joyful, and sustainable.

How do you respond to those who felt hurt or alienated by the Movement's past policies on intermarriage?

We heard clearly that many individuals and families felt dismissed, shamed, or excluded by earlier policies, and we acknowledge the pain this caused. We deeply apologize for the alienation our past stance created. In the spirit of *teshuvah*, we are committed to repairing these relationships and fostering a more compassionate and welcoming approach going forward.

How will you engage with individuals seeking conversion?

We affirm that conversion should be accessible, personal, spiritual, and grounded in dignity. Clear expectations, supportive learning environments, and reasonable timelines help prospective converts feel welcomed and connected to Jewish life. Our approach encourages pathways that honor each person's journey, while ensuring they feel fully embraced once they join the Jewish people.

What are the next steps to support these couples and families?

We are moving from study to action by dedicating resources to support this work in North America. The Movement will develop curricula to reframe conversations on intermarriage, deepen resources for education about Jewish life, and advance discussions with the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards on rabbinic roles and rituals before, on, and after the wedding day. This includes investing in people and resources to do the work.

These steps are part of a longer-term commitment to build structures that support meaningful engagement with intermarrying couples.

Is this just a step toward permitting Conservative/Masorti rabbis to officiate at intermarriages?

The traditional Jewish wedding ceremony remains a particularistic ritual expression for two Jewish partners.

At the same time, *halakhah* provides meaningful ways for clergy to welcome, bless, and support couples committed to building Jewish homes. We will explore specific roles clergy can play before, on, and after the wedding day. Our focus is on engagement, relationships, and pastoral care.

Isn't this just more talk instead of action?

This work requires deep listening, honest reflection, and acknowledgment of the pain that our past approaches have caused. The report outlines specific next steps, including new curricula, pastoral training, and *halakhic* discussions already underway — all designed to move quickly from study to implementation. Real change that strengthens Jewish life requires both thoughtful groundwork and committed follow-through, and we are committed to that.

Is the IWG trying to have it "both ways" with this approach?

Our approach aligns with the values of Conservative/Masorti Judaism, which, for more than a century, has blended fidelity to Jewish tradition with thoughtful responses to modernity. Moreover, our conversations and survey responses indicated a wide variety of views within our movement about how best to approach *halakah* and how to engage intermarried and intermarrying couples. Our values are rooted in the ideas that Judaism grows with us, that we're guided by process, and that there is beauty in the balance. Conservative/Masorti Judaism is filled with a wide range of experiences and ideas. We understand holding the tension between extremes as a choice and a worldview.

How is this different from the 2024 report from the RA's Standards Working Group?

This report builds on that earlier work, while offering additional frameworks and opportunities for engagement, such as seeking teshuvah and making conversion more accessible. It reflects the perspectives of lay leaders along with clergy, incorporating views from across the Movement.