

JOINT INTERMARRIAGE WORKING GROUP REPORT - DEC 2025

Introduction

Intermarriage has been a topic of discussion for the Jewish people since its very inception. That continues today. Many Jewish homes in North America are formed in which one person is formally Jewish, and their partner is not. The Conservative/Masorti Movement has addressed this topic at various points. Most recently in 2024, the Rabbinical Assembly (RA) published a [report by its Standards Working Group](#). This was followed by this current effort, a joint Intermarriage Working Group (IWG) with members of the RA, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ), and Cantors Assembly (CA).

The group noted that the RA is a global organization and that decisions about intermarried engagement have ramifications globally. The IWG included a rabbinic representative from Israel, and among its focus group conversations was a group of rabbis from outside North America. We expect that this will not only be a conversation within the US or North America but also a global one.

The IWG spent almost a year learning about our movement's approach to intermarrying couples. It conducted a broad survey sent to over 100,000 people, which resulted in over 1,200 responses. It commissioned thirteen informal position papers from historians, social scientists, and rabbis. And it conducted nearly forty individual and group interviews to learn directly about the experience of people in our communities.

This report shares the themes and next steps that emerged from the working group, which operated based on consensus rather than unanimity. An especially powerful aspect of our work was the "Quick Thoughts Questionnaire" (QTQ), in which respondents shared poignant experiences from their lives or within their families, along with a wide variety of opinions on what our Movement's approach should be. The members of the IWG heard those experiences and opinions deeply, and we hope that the findings that follow lift up those powerful responses.

This report has two sections. The first reflects on four Emerging Themes from our research. The second is a set of four Next Steps that our movement should take to engage intermarrying couples more fully.

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Four Emerging Themes and Values

The Need to Move from Disapproval to Engagement

The IWG began its work by reviewing the history of our movement's approach to intermarriage. The rising rate of intermarriage was a source of concern and anxiety in the early- and mid-twentieth century. In 1973, that concern culminated in a "[Standard of Practice](#)" approved by the members of the RA.

The standard of practice had three effects that, in the current context, feel contrary to our movement's core values, interests, and goals:

1. It expressed disapproval of intermarriage itself, rather than focusing on our goal of individuals seeing the value and meaning of mitzvot and Jewish commitment, and thinking about how that should be expressed through the creation of a Jewish home with a supportive and loving partner who shares those commitments.
2. Our movement believes in an evolving halakhah, but the standard of practice froze conversations for five decades, even as the surrounding culture in North America and other parts of the world demanded new approaches to engage Jews and their families.
3. The standard reflected an approach to clergy authority that turned out not to be helpful. It assumed that disapproval and shame by clergy (which then set the tone for communal attitudes) would discourage intermarriage. However, every study shows that Jews continued to intermarry despite rabbinic disapproval, and were pushed away from our communities rather than being engaged.

We therefore assert the following underlying values (#2 through 4) as essential to our movement's ability to move forward in engaging intermarried couples and families. We encourage the boards of USCJ, RA, and CA to consider how to prioritize these initiatives and conversations.

Four Emerging Themes and Values

The Need to Emphasize the Value Proposition of Jewish Living

I want to see a more inclusive community that provides continuing education and guidance for everyone, not just about intermarriage but about Jewish life.

If clergy offer their blessing to intermarried couples, they need to also provide them support on their journey towards building a Jewish/non Jewish home and Jewish kids and staying married. Right now, I know non-Jews in my community who are better educated Jewishly than their Jewish acquaintances, and those uneducated Jews by birth are not welcoming, kind or accepting. Lots of people choose to convert later—and more would if the Conservative movement provided more education, support and guidance for everyone.

- Survey Respondent

We must engage and guide parents, children, and individuals, together and on their own, to discuss the process of finding a life partner. That process may result in endogamy, but its primary goal is to empower the individual to articulate for themselves the kind of Jewish life they seek to lead. If they seek a partner, their goal would be to find a partner aligned with that vision of Jewish life. We believe that Jewish practices and values live most powerfully not in the hopes, dreams, and expectations of those around the partnering individual, but rather within the individual and between them and their potential partner as they think through the future life they might build together.

Four Emerging Themes and Values

The Value of Our Movement's Expansive, Creative, and Relevant Halakhah

Halakhah is the process of applying the wisdom of our tradition to the conditions of modern life. It is a force for meaning and connection, meant to realize the promise of our best selves, build communities, and connect with the Jewish people. Halakhah is a curriculum for living, and we call upon our movement to use our most creative and wise approaches to provide authentic and relevant solutions for living Jewishly in these contemporary times.

We believe that our halakhic process already contains the necessary ingredients to address the needs of our constituents. Its grounding in Torah, rabbinic texts, and our tradition give it an integrity to present solutions and opportunities for our lives. We commit to a relationship with halakhah that recognizes that boundaries shift depending on circumstances and are not always a reason to say “no”; halakhah can also provide an opportunity to be inclusive and say “yes.”

Four Emerging Themes and Values

Authority of Clergy is Derived from Relationship

*"When I received rabbinic ordination... I was committed to officiating only at weddings between two Jews – for me the logic that both would see themselves as inside the framework in which they were marrying was important. And then I found that out in the world, **when I refused to officiate at the weddings of people I cared about, I caused harm** (yes, even when I connected them with other rabbis and offered them resources, etc.) – my logic was not theirs, and they experienced my rejection personally, and as a rejection of their relationship, and of their place in the Jewish people."*

- Survey Respondent

In this era, our clergy build communities through relationships of mutual trust, love, and pastoral care. Those relationships are infused with Jewish teaching and wisdom. Bringing together knowledge and relationships allows our clergy to engage our constituents in building vibrant and joyful Jewish lives, homes, and communities.

Within the possibilities and boundaries defined by a creative and continually evolving halakhah, our clergy have a variety of rituals, tools, and teachings to engage people of all backgrounds to deepen their commitment to Jewish living and family life.

We seek to trust clergy and community members to invite each other into conversations of shared responsibility for the tradition and one another. We hope to shift postures away from pre-determined policy positions, coercion, and challenging authority, and towards this shared responsibility.

With these considerations in mind, the committee has identified four areas that require specific attention and investment when it comes to engaging intermarrying and intermarried couples and families.

Four Next Steps

Acknowledging and Healing Hurt (Teshuvah)

In the more than 1,200 responses to our survey queries, we heard many times that decades-old movement messages intended to withhold “approval,” attempting to “dissuade,” actively “discouraging,” and even applying social “sanction” towards dating and marrying people of other backgrounds were painful.

“I really, really love and respect my dad, and I am in constant struggle when it comes to affiliating to a movement that officially holds that his involvement in my life was a mistake, or proof that my mother was not committed enough to her Jewish identity – or mine.” - Survey Respondent

“For the first 25 years of our marriage...I was made to feel most unwelcome, so I disaffiliated from denominational Judaism for that time. When the mood of the congregations changed, I renewed my involvement.” - Survey Respondent

Sham’anu. We heard you. We acknowledge that our movement’s historical stance has resulted in hurt, alienation, and disconnection from our community. We deeply apologize. We are committed to addressing the harm caused by our past categorical disapproval of multi-heritage and interfaith marriages and repairing these relationships. This statement is the beginning of such a process.

We regret that, for many, this acknowledgment comes too late. In the spirit of *Teshuvah* (repentance), we accept responsibility for the pain we have caused.

We celebrate the meaningful contributions of Jewish-adjacent partners and spouses, and the children of such unions, in the work of creating and sustaining Conservative/Masorti Jewish households. We recognize that moving beyond the binary approval/disapproval paradigm makes spaces for conversation and relationship-building. And instead of critiquing relationship choices, we can return to the basics of empowering our members to live rich Jewish lives and providing the tools needed by our diverse families. Here, we plant the seeds of healing, courage, conviction, acceptance, and embrace.

Key Shifts:

- Shift from critiquing relationship choices to empowering members to live rich Jewish lives in diverse families
- Embrace those who want to be part of our Jewish families and communities

Tactics:

- Appropriately share the personal testimonies from the QTQs to shift the conversation towards healing
- RA, CA, USCJ work internally to understand the harm caused and develop their own institutional processes of repair
 - Professional organizations create recommendations for embracing Jewish-adjacent family members who affiliate with our movement
 - Review/revision of congregational membership rules and policies, dissemination of resources
 - Review/revision of organizational and employee policies regarding interdating/intermarriage
- Create resources for local clergy/congregations
 - Develop a script for one-on-one sharing of painful stories and a format for a public forum
 - Review/revision of bima roles, acknowledgment in Jewish lifecycle events

Create rituals of repair that clergy can use within their communities

Four Next Steps

Marriage Rituals

We seek to collect and disseminate a menu of ritual options to welcome, bless, and affirm couples with one Jewish partner and one partner who, while not formally Jewish, is firmly committed to co-creating an exclusively Jewish household. This includes opportunities to bless the couple, *independent of the traditionally prescribed Jewish wedding ceremony*, in the synagogue or elsewhere, before, on the day of, and after the wedding date.

With the understanding that the standard of religious practice was created in part as a statement of disapproval of certain relationships and that we are shifting away from messages of disapproval, we ask that the CJLS provide further clarification of the Standard of Rabbinic Practice.

Key Shifts

- Desire to welcome, bless, and affirm intermarrying couples who are committed to solely Jewish practice
- Openly looking at rituals and alternative ceremonies that engage intermarrying couples and their families
- Encouraging the CJLS to further interpret the Standard of Rabbinic Practice and marriage paradigms

Tactics:

- Further develop and publish rituals for before and after a wedding ceremony that would engage intermarrying couples and their families, with the endorsement of the CJLS
- Work with the CJLS to:
 - Clearly define the ambiguous words “officiation” and “weddings” as they apply in this context
 - Consider explicit creative mechanisms for clergy participation, such as sharing blessings, words of encouragement, or song during the wedding
 - Clarify whether other paradigms of marriage besides *kiddushin* that the CJLS has already developed and approved might apply in the case of the union of a Jew with someone who is of another background.

Working group members asked that it be reported that there was not unanimity on this issue.

Four Next Steps

Conversion

"No one asked us what we expected to do about our differences or how we planned to rear our children; had they asked we would have told them we meant to raise our children Jewish, as we have done. A supportive reaction would have avoided my husband's detachment and would have given me space to make an earlier conversion. The reaction we got was insulting and alienating to both of us. I advise looking for ways to avoid insult and alienation." - Survey Respondent

We recognize there are many pathways to Jewish identity. We honor a prospective convert's commitment by offering accelerated, accessible, and personalized pathways to inclusion in Am Yisrael. Conversion students deserve the dignity of clarity in timelines and process, as well as the full embrace of the community once their journey is complete. We recognize the delicate balance between ensuring that non-Jewish partners are aware of the option to convert while avoiding undue pressure.

Key Shifts

- From dissuasion and requiring a lengthy, intensive process to encouragement and creative facilitation
- Honoring the different paths of prospective converts, recognizing that for some individuals, the decision to convert may take more time and a more circuitous path

Tactics:

- Help congregations encourage and welcome people who are interested in becoming Jewish
- Ask the RA conversion committee to develop pastoral approaches to conversations about people's identities and halakhic status, and create more accessible and creative pathways to closing gaps between identities and status
- Ensure an appropriate path to formal affirmation for those who already identify as part of the Jewish people

To increase the number of people choosing Judaism by curating and creating resources and curricula, making conversion more accessible within our movement

Four Next Steps

Reframing the Conversation on Inter marriage: A Curriculum

"So what I needed then, was structural support for observance outside a traditional family structure, to not just pay lip service to 'inclusion,' but rather to facilitate keeping a Jewish home and lifestyle without the benefit of Jewish family." - Survey Respondent

There is a need for a curriculum that explores what Jewish marriage means broadly (i.e, values, commitments, covenant, continuity, sacred partnership, and communal responsibility). Why does Jewish marriage matter? How can all couples engage with these values in meaningful ways? What does it mean to create a Jewish home?

Similarly, clergy students and practicing clergy will learn about the experiences of mixed heritage couples and families. A central focus would be on best practices for how to meet each couple uniquely and offer them the gifts of Jewish wisdom that directly speak to their lives.

Clergy and couples/families co-create pathways that are authentic to who they are and who they want to be in the Jewish community. The curriculum helps them plan a wedding, create a Jewish home, educate their families of origin, and supports them while they make important decisions about growing their family if desired.

Key Shifts

- Starting point is to accept people where they are and not to judge their choices
- Leadership formalizes a curriculum that addresses in a holistic way that while endogamy is a desirable goal, it is not the only path to participating in a committed Jewish life
- Move away from assumptions around identities to explicit education around shared values
- Responsibility applies to everyone – not just to intermarrying couples but to their whole community
- Shifting from the assumption that endogamy is sufficient for building Jewish homes to helping couples be articulate and explicit about shared expectations

Tactics:

- Creating resources about Judaism for people of other faith backgrounds and their extended families
- Training for clergy in pastoral care and the changing nature of rabbinic authority
- Resources/training for families where someone is engaged in an interfaith relationship
- Training for individuals in how to think about partnership, marriage and what it means in Jewish tradition
- Training for communities in how to support individuals and couples in creating a Jewish household and enhancing the Jewish journey of both partners

Conclusion

A core principle of the Conservative/Masorti Movement is that Jewish law and practice evolve in each era to meet the needs of communities in different parts of the world.

The IWG's work helped us learn about the current context of intermarriage in our families and communities, noting the consequences of our past approaches, and the different needs in communities in North America and globally. We hope that these recommendations direct USCJ, RA and CA to focus their efforts on meaningful next steps to continue on the path towards inclusion and engagement of intermarrying couples and their families.