PROPOSAL FOR THE
MERKIN OUTREACH INSTITUTE

TEMPLE BETH EL
CHARLOTEE, NORTH CAROLINA

BACKGROUND

Temple Beth El in Charlotte, North Carolina, has 1130 member families, at least 25% of whom are interfaith families and another 5%+ include a Jew-by-choice. Each year we have approximately 20-30 students who choose to enter our conversion program. Some of the prospective Jews-by-choice are partners in interfaith relationships, while others are single or non-Jewish families who are seeking a spiritual path and have found Judaism to be a potential home.

Charlotte is an extremely religious city with upwards of 400 churches and only three synagogues. As a Reform congregation we have the reputation of being the most welcoming toward non-Jews, prospective Jews and interfaith couples. We actively engage in Outreach – in bringing those who married outside the faith into the fold of Jewish life rather than excluding them.

Our clergy officiate at interfaith marriages if the couple sees the wedding as the beginning of their Jewish home and family. It is our hope that our warm embrace will help the non-Jew always to feel welcome within our congregational walls.

We currently offer an Introduction to Judaism class once a year for ten weeks in the summer. Each year we have 50 participants.

PROGRAMMATIC INITIATIVES FOR THE MERKIN INSTITUTE

Hiring of Outreach Director – The Outreach Director would be responsible for the following:
• Creating a mentoring program for prospective converts
• Working with the Interfaith and Outreach Committee to develop and support programming
• Periodically surveying interfaith couples to assess needs
• Meeting with conversion students to support them in their journey
• Writing articles on the topic of Outreach in our monthly bulletin
• Designing Outreach brochure
• Facilitating Introduction to Judaism Class and Support Groups

Creation of a Pamphlet Describing the Process of Conversion at Temple Beth El -
It is our goal to create a pamphlet describing the conversion process at Temple Beth El that will be visible to all who enter our building. It will be entitled, "Have you ever thought about being Jewish?"
Expansion of Introduction to Judaism Courses – Given the required availability of funds, we would like to extend our current Introduction to Judaism course from 10 to 12 weeks and offer it three times a year.

Support Groups for Conversion Students – Anyone involved in the conversion program would be invited to attend a support group to deal with interpersonal issues four times a year.

Individual Connections – Many of our conversion students begin the process but then stop attending classes, services and meetings with clergy. The hiring of an Outreach Director would enable us to follow up with these students. The Outreach Director would meet with every prospective Jew-by-choice to start the process and explain the program. The Director would then connect with each student four times a year to ensure that we are meeting his or her needs and offering the best program possible.

Mentoring Program – Our prospective Jews-by-choice will be matched with a Jewishly committed family that will invite them to their homes and help them to learn experientially about leading a Jewish life. The mentor might be an individual who converted many years before and can help the prospective Jew-by-choice through the process.

Research Study of Interfaith marriages performed by Beth El Clergy – We would like to do a follow-up study of all the interfaith weddings that have been performed at Temple Beth El over the past ten years. We have a sense that the majority of couples have indeed become active in synagogue life and are celebrating rich Jewish lives. The results of this study will enable us to demonstrate that a welcoming approach to interfaith couples leads to the creation of more Jews. The study will help us better design programs towards this goal.

Outreach Shabbat – Create a special Outreach Shabbat that reaches out to interfaith families and those interested in Judaism.

Expand Interfaith and Outreach Program – Additional funds would enable us to bring in speakers and create more programs for our community of interfaith couples.

Budget:
12 week introduction to Judaism course 3 times a year – $4,000
Outreach Director at 10 hours a week - $10,000
Outreach Brochure - $2500

The Board of Temple Beth El is committed to this program. The Temple budget will cover the administrative costs of producing educational and informational materials and mailings.
Welcome to Temple Beth El

Welcome to Temple Beth El's Interfaith and Outreach program and resources brochure. We hope that many of the educational and social opportunities planned for 2002-2003 will be of interest to you. We have tried to anticipate the prevailing needs of Temple Beth El's Interfaith and Outreach community in our program offerings. We always welcome your feedback, and ask for your comments and questions.

Everyone at Temple Beth El; the Interfaith and Outreach Committee, clergy and staff, invite you to join us as we begin an exciting NEW YEAR!

Mission and Goals

Our MISSION is to enrich the experience of members and visitors to Temple Beth El regardless of their background or their current religious affiliation. To that end, we have the following GOALS:

- to welcome and support interfaith couples, and their immediate and extended families; and to provide educational and social programming to address their particular concerns.

- To welcome and support Jews-by-Choice and their immediate and extended families; and to provide programming to help them continue to integrate into Jewish life.

- To provide educational programs about Reform Judaism so that non-Jews can become more knowledgeable and feel more comfortable in a Jewish setting, and so that Jews can learn more about their Jewish identity, inheritance and choices.

- To communicate to our members and interested non-members that Temple worship services, programs and activities are open to and welcome the participation of non-Jews.

- To educate the congregation as a whole to issues relevant to Outreach, Jews-by-Choice and interfaith families.

- To maintain working relationships with the National and Regional UAHC Outreach organizations, and with other local Jewish agencies, in order to offer the most up-to-date programming available.

Philosophy

The Interfaith and Outreach Committee of Temple Beth El was established to address the changing needs of the Jewish community in an atmosphere of respect for the personal choices of individuals. We wish to support the large numbers of interfaith families and Jews-by-Choice within our community, and to affirm the important role they play in Temple life. Our philosophy of inclusion and self-determination reflects the philosophy of our Temple and the Reform movement. Every Individual and every family has to find their own path to and definition of a religious life. At this Temple you will find others who are also finding their own way.

We welcome anyone, Jew and non-Jew, Temple member and non-member. We want to welcome you to our Temple because we want to learn from what you have to offer and we'd like to share with you what we have to offer.

Temple Beth El Contact Information

Clergy: Rabbi Jim Bennett, Rabbi Judith Schindler, Rabbi Jeremy Barras - 704-366-1948
Cantor Andrew Bernard, Arthur Kramer, Executive Director
Temple Office - 704-366-1948
Interfaith and Outreach Director: Mara Gose - 704-583-1783
- Chairs: Audrey Afflerbach and Darcy Garfinkel
5101 Providence Road, Charlotte, NC 28226  email: info@beth-el.com  web site: beth-el.com

2002 - 2003

PROGRAMS AND DATES

- September 16
  Break the Fast
- October 13
  Genealogy Brunch
- November 8
  Learner's Shabbat
- December 10
  Holiday Social
- January 13, 2002
  Voices of our Children and Voices of our Parents
- February 23
  Importance of Israel to Jews and Non-Jews Alike
- March 30
  Seder Workshop
- April 28
  Holocaust Remembrance Event
- May 12
  What Does Living a Jewish Life Mean?

Monthly programs include a drop-in discussion group which focuses on issues relevant to interfaith couples and Jews-by-Choice. In each session there is opportunity for education, discussion and socializing.

See page two for Program descriptions
Description of Programs

Face to Events
invite everyone to participate freely in all of the planned events described below. We are always open to new ideas. If you have any suggestions for potential programs, or other questions regarding Interfaith and Outreach at Temple Beth El, contact Mara Gose at 704-583-1763.

Monday, September 16 - Break the Fast
6:45 - 8:30 p.m.
Apartment of Janet Hastings, Colony Apartments

Come break the fast directly following the Neilah (concluding) Service and help us kick off the 2002-2003 Interfaith and Outreach year. Bring your family and meet new friends as we conclude the High Holidays together.

Sunday, October 13 - Genealogy Brunch
Temple Beth El Social Hall - 10:30 a.m.

Join the Interfaith and Outreach Group for a Genealogy Brunch. Come enjoy bagels, coffee and juice and learn about the many ways you can trace the roots of your family tree. Topics covered include where to begin, why we search for relatives, and helpful websites. Please RSVP to Kim at 704-367-1229.

Friday, November 8 - Learner's Shabbat
6:00 p.m. - Dinner
8:00 p.m. - Temple Service

Discover the added beauty and meaning in the weekly gift of Shabbat and learn how to incorporate it into your family's life. The temple service this evening will be more explanatory than usual.

Tuesday, December 10 - Holiday Social
6:00 - 8:00 p.m.
Home of Yvonne and Pete Levine

Bring your family and join us for a festive holiday social at the home of Yvonne and Pete Levine. RSVP to Yvonne Levine at 704-442-5354 for directions.

Monday, January 13 - Voices of Our Children and Voices of Our Parents

Social Programs - TBA: Please watch for further information on upcoming social programs sponsored by the committee of Interfaith and Outreach. Continue to check bulletins and "The Voice" for opportunities to get involved.

7:00 - 8:30 p.m.
Temple Beth El Social Hall

Join us for a panel discussion as both parents and children share their experiences of being part of an interfaith family. Learn about the decisions these families made in developing their children's religious identities. Don't miss this opportunity to ask questions and gain valuable information.

Sunday, February 23 - Importance of Israel to Jews and Non-Jews Alike
10:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Temple Beth El Social Hall

Come and take part in a discussion of Israel's current situation and how it affects Jews and Non-Jews. Join us for breakfast and gain insight on Israel's struggles and how Americans are involved.

Sunday, March 30 - Seder Workshop
2:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Temple Beth El Social Hall

Come and learn about hosting or attending a seder and take part in making traditional Passover dishes! We will also discuss how to set a traditional Passover table and the items needed for a successful seder.

Monday, April 28 - Holocaust Remembrance Event
7:00 - 9:00 p.m. - Program
Temple Beth El Social Hall

Please attend the Interfaith and Outreach Holocaust Memorial event, as we endeavor to discuss the implications and the history of this terrible time of attempted genocide during the most devastating war ever contemplated.

Monday, May 12 - "What does living a Jewish life mean?"
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.
Temple Beth El Social Hall

How do you make your home a "Jewish" home or live a "Jewish" life? Join us for a discussion of daily, weekly and monthly Jewish rituals in the home, what they mean to you and how to incorporate them into your life.
Community Resources

- **Rabbi Bennett, Rabbi Schindler, Rabbi Barras and Cantor Bernard, 704-366-1948**
  
  We at the Interfaith and Outreach Committee are fortunate to consider our clergy our greatest asset. If you have not yet had the pleasure of meeting our clergy, please find the time to make an appointment and get to know them.

- **The Jewish Community Center, 704-366-5007**
  
  The Jewish Community Center located in Shalom Park has a wealth of potential opportunities for involvement. Recreational activities, a variety of classes, and chances to meet other people are all present at the JCC. Call the above number for membership information.

- **The Jewish Federation, 704-366-5007**
  
  For newcomers to Charlotte, the Jewish Federation publishes a Shalom Y'all pamphlet which lists local Jewish agencies and resources.

- **Speizman Jewish Library, 704-944-6763**
  
  The Speizman Jewish Library, located in Shalom Park at the JCC, offers many titles of interest to Interfaith families and Jews-by-Choice. Call Amalia Warshenbrot, librarian, for recommendations and information. (Also see inserts for current titles available at the library.)

- **Other Agencies and Contacts**
  
  Jewish Family Services, 704-364-6594
  Carolina Agency for Jewish Education, 704-366-5007 ext. 272
  Charlotte Jewish News, 704-944-6765

**Temple Information and Temple Life**

- **Temple Membership**
  
  Intermarried? A Jews-by-Choice? You are not alone. We have a diverse congregation that have many needs. If you'd like to join us, we'd love to have you. Family and single memberships are available for an annual contribution. No one is refused on the basis of need. Tuition for Religious school and Hebrew school is additional.

- **"The Voice" and Interfaith and Outreach Mailing**
  
  We maintain an active mailing list of people interested in interfaith and outreach, including parents of intermarrieds. There is an $18 fee to cover the cost of mailings for non-members. This includes a subscription to the Voice, the monthly Temple Bulletin. If you are not currently on our list, call Betty at 704-366-1948.

- **Jews-by-Choice**
  
  The decision to join your path with the course of the Jews is accompanied by months of preparation and the excitement of the conversion itself. What happens next? Participation in Temple life is one way to feel more comfortable as a Jew. Still, feelings of isolation are common, as is the desire to continue to learn. We offer the opportunity to meet with other new Jews-by-Choice for discussion and study.

  Are you new to the Jewish world, or do you just feel your Jewish education is incomplete? Would you like to learn more about Jewish traditions and customs, both cultural and religious? Call Mara Gose at 704-583-1763.

- **Interfaith Couples/Weddings**
  
  Mazel tov. Under certain circumstances, our Rabbis will perform a Jewish wedding for an interfaith couple. Feel free to call for an appointment. They can help you arrange the ceremony which is best for you.

  If you are an interfaith couple, we want to help you meet other interfaith couples. We also want to offer access to information about Judaism if you should want it. We do not have an explicit goal of convincing people to make Jewish choices for themselves or their families, although obviously we are happy if you do. At our events you will find others who are exercising a large variety of religious options. We hope to see you at some of them.

**Educational Opportunities**

- **Temple Beth El**
  
  Temple Beth El periodically provides access to classes to both Temple members and others interested in learning more about Judaism. Attending Adult Education classes can be an excellent way to get comfortable at Temple Beth El. Call the Temple office for current class offerings (704-366-1948), and watch the bulletin and "The Voice" for current scheduling.

- **Jewish Community Center (JCC)**
  
  The JCC regularly publicizes their class and enrichment opportunities. Hebrew, Art, exercise and children's swimming lessons are possible choices in a given year. Call the JCC at 704-366-5007 for current catalog.

- **Speizman Jewish Library**
  
  Check out the library for books and other periodicals relating to Judaism, Hebrew, and other Jewish issues.
Holidays, Shabbat and Life Cycle Events

The High Holy Days
The High Holy Days are a time many Jews come to Temple. We encourage interfaith couples and families, and Jews-by-choice to attend these services. Take advantage of this opportunity to experience the rich tradition of Judaism by coming to the beautiful services held during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. If you are an interfaith couple or family, this time provides a sense of celebration as well as a time for discussion about Jewish customs and tradition. If you are a Jew-by-Choice, celebration of the High Holy Days encourages a deeper immersion into Jewish beliefs and worship. These extremely special days and these services will only heighten your awareness of your own continuing journey to the heart of Judaism.

Note: High Holy Day tickets are available to non-members. Please call the Temple office to arrange for the tickets and the suggested donation. No one will be turned away on the basis of need.

The Winter and Spring Holiday Seasons
December is often a difficult time for interfaith families and Jew-by-Choice. Often, Chanukah can fall around the same time as Christmas, so it is important to respect the religious traditions of everyone involved. Make the effort to participate—as far as you are able—in family celebrations and social occasions. Be creative in your planning and plan ahead of time, to insure that everyone feels included. Purim and Passover, which fall in the springtime, give the interfaith family and the Jew-by-Choice another opportunity to communicate with family members and friends. Reading the Book of Esther at Purim, and partaking of the Seder at Passover, will generate thought-provoking and lively discussions about Jewish customs and traditions and the history of Judaism and its holidays.

Shabbat
Shabbat is a discovery of joyful faith and observance. From simple celebrations of the Friday evening Shabbat dinner to Shabbat temple services, Shabbat is the realization that resting from the cares of the work-week is integral to our faith-life, and is the perfect time to remember our family and friends.

Life Cycle Events
It can be very stressful to attend family life cycle events such as baby namings, baptisms, b'nai mitzvahs, communions, weddings, funerals. The best idea would be to educate yourself and your family members on what will be happening in a particular ceremony or event. This will make everything less stressful for all involved. If there is some aspect of the service or ceremony you don't understand, or if there is a problem in explaining something to a friend or family member, please ask someone more knowledgeable such as a clergy member.
Steps to Conversion:

1. Initial Contact If you are interested in exploring the possibility of conversion you should set up an initial meeting with a member of the clergy. During this meeting, you will share your religious and personal background, and discuss your motivations for conversion.

2. Academic You will work with a member of the clergy to determine a course of study leading to conversion. Typically, study begins with an introduction to Judaism course offered at the Temple. Your course of study may also include other formal classes offered at Temple Beth El and independent study which the clergy will help you create.

While instruction in Hebrew is optional, it is recommended as it will give you a familiarity with basic Hebrew terms.

3. Spiritual You will choose a primary clergy member with whom to study, but will also meet with all Temple clergy throughout your course of study.

Each clergy member will help you explore issues, arise, answer questions, and reflect on your spiritual and social journey to Judaism. It is recommended that individuals meet with clergy monthly during the conversion process.

4. Conversion Group You will meet quarterly with other conversion students and a facilitator, to discuss issues related to conversion such as questions about dealing with non-Jewish family, creating a Jewish home, and holiday issues.

5. Communal We encourage you to participate in as much synagogue and general Jewish community life as possible.

You should attend Shabbat services, High Holy Day services and other religious, educational, cultural and social offerings as often as you can in order to experience the variety of Jewish religious life.

6. Mentor Program As part of the support system for individuals who are well on the conversion track, you will be paired with a mentor who will serve as support for you in your process.

7. Time-Line for Conversion Each person is unique. While some may be relatively new to Judaism as they begin the conversion process, others may have been living a Jewish life for many years. Typically, the conversion student should expect at least a year of study and preparation, however, once you are well established on your journey and feel ready to commit to Jewish living and embracing your Jewish identity, you and your primary clergy will determine your time-line to conversion.

8. Concluding Rituals and Ceremonies The rituals of conversion allow you to enter the covenant of Judaism by proclaiming your faith and commitment to the Jewish people.

There are several steps to the concluding rituals:

1. Bet Din—A panel of three clergy assemble to reflect on and assess your journey.
3. Public or private affirmation—receiving Torah and a Hebrew name marks the final stage in the conversion process.

You may choose to do this in a private ceremony, however, a public ceremony during Shabbat services enables the community to embrace and celebrate with you.

9. Follow-up You are encouraged to maintain contact with the clergy and your mentor after conversion. This ensures that any unforeseen issues will be addressed and provides an opportunity for further study and for finding additional paths of involvement in the Jewish community.
Mentoring During Conversion

A guide for mentors and the individuals they are mentoring during the conversion process

What Mentoring Does
The process of conversion involves much study and preparation. Our clergy are here as guides and teachers.

Temple Beth El offers the conversion Mentoring Program in order to respond to issues that may not be covered in class and sessions with the clergy. Our mentoring program will provide an opportunity to connect in a less formal setting.

As you begin to create your Jewish home and integrate new ideas and practices in your life, having someone you can bounce ideas off and ask questions of can be a tremendous help.

This brochure will explain more about mentoring, and the role of both the conversion student and mentor.

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Temple Beth El Merkin Outreach Institute

What is the Mentoring Program?
The Conversion Mentoring Program is part of the Temple’s effort to assist those who are on the Conversion track with support and resources.

Mentoring is an opportunity for a member of the congregation to provide a conversion student with the benefit of their life experience, support, and encouragement as they explore what it means to live a Jewish life.

Those mentoring and being mentored will determine together the level of contact that works best for them. It may include answering quick questions, attending services together, or joining together for holiday celebrations.

For the Conversion Student:
As you reach a certain point in your study, you and your primary clergy will begin to discuss the mentoring program.

You will be paired with a member of the congregation who will serve as support, who can answer questions, and serve as a guide in living a Jewish life.

As you start to create your Jewish home and integrate new ideas and practices into your life, your mentor can be a great resource and friend.

For the Mentor:
As you are paired with an individual studying to become a Jew, your ability to listen, suspend judgment, share openly and act as a resource, all in an accepting and supportive atmosphere, are essential.

Two important skills for mentors to have are in-depth listening and the ability to use your personal wisdom. As a mentor, you are not expected to “tell” the person you are mentoring what to do, but to share your own experiences and knowledge so that they may create their own, comfortable Jewish identity.

By being part of the Conversion Mentoring Program, both mentors and conversion students will benefit from the experience. Each person will grow, learn and explore the fascinating world of Judaism. We hope this exchange will help the student create stronger connections in the community and feel more comfortable living a Jewish life.
Conversations on Conversion

Throughout the year, Interfaith and Outreach will offer an opportunity for congregants who have completed their conversion journey to share thoughts, opinions and commentary on their conversion process.

This month, Cindy Crane reflects on what was the most interesting thing she learned during her process of conversion.

"The one thing that made the most difference was learning the meaning of the Hebrew word for conversion. It means 'to walk along side', and not to change. I realize no one was asking me to give up my background. The difference between Judaism and Christianity in conversion is that in Christianity when you "accept Jesus" you're "different" than before. But not in Judaism."

For Cindy, a mother who always felt she had "(been) walking along side her children", she felt that after conversion she was still the same person, but now walked along side her children as a Jew.

In becoming a Jew, Cindy found it "not only a personal faith, but (she) wanted to be part of a community, and feel connected to a larger Jewish community around the world. It is a very cool feeling."

For anyone interested in the conversion process, please call the Stephanie at 704-944-6838.

Interfaith and Outreach News

"What Does Living a Jewish Life Mean?"
7:00 - 8:30 p.m. at Temple Beth El
Monday, May 12, 2003

How do you make your home a "Jewish" home or live a "Jewish" life? Join us for a discussion of daily, weekly and monthly Jewish rituals in the home, what they mean to you and how to incorporate them into your life.

Babysitting provided with advance reservations. Please RSVP to Heather Kushner at 704-343-2353 by May 9, 2003. Hope to see you there!