TEMPLE BETH-EL KERUV PROGRAM: INTEGRATING CONVERSION CANDIDATES, JEWS-BY-CHOICE AND INTERFAITH COUPLES INTO TEMPLE LIFE

Name of Congregation: Temple Beth-El
Address: 211 Belknap
San Antonio, Texas 78212
Phone Number: (210) 733-9135
Number of Members: 1,220
UAHC Region: Southwest Council
Rabbis: Samuel M. Stahl, Barry H. Block, B. Allison Bergman
Outreach Chairpersons: Christina Weinfeld, Leslie Selig Byrd

Brief Description: Temple Beth-El's Keruv Program provides activities and learning opportunities for Jews-by-choice and interfaith couples, and builds bridges between these groups and the general temple membership. Activities are geared largely towards students in the temple's Introduction to Judaism class, a 15-week class taught each spring and fall by our rabbis, and a requirement for conversion. The Keruv Program is overseen and directed by Temple Beth-El's Outreach Committee and consists of five distinct subprograms as follows:

1. Mentoring Introduction to Judaism Students:
   Each semester the Outreach Committee holds a reception for the students on the first day of class or during a conversion candidate orientation session. Committee members, usually with help from members of the Temple's Board of Trustees, Sisterhood and Brotherhood, welcome them to the Temple by greeting and visiting with them and providing refreshments. Outreach Committee co-chairs also distribute a letter (see attached) to introduce themselves, describe Outreach Committee activities and offer help with any concerns or questions. In addition some members of the Outreach Committee and the temple's Board of Trustees host one or several conversion candidates at their homes for a Shabbat or holiday dinner. Feedback about these dinners from both hosts and guests is consistently positive.

2. Discussion Group for Conversion Candidates:
   A vital component of the conversion program is a series of discussion group sessions for conversion candidates and their partners. These sessions are led by a facilitator trained through the HUC-UAHC-CCAR Outreach Fellows Certification Program (see attached facilitator's letter to conversion candidates). Conversion candidates and partners participate in six group sessions to explore a variety of issues. These sessions begin about midway through the semester and continue every two to four weeks until the end of the semester and occasionally after the last class. This component of the conversion program provides support and an opportunity to explore, with each other, many of the personal challenges associated with conversion. An added benefit is that, as needs emerge in the group, the facilitator relays them to the Outreach Committee. The facilitator and other committee members then work together with the rabbis, as well as with interested congregants, to try to meet some of these needs.

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Instructions to Facilitator: The Keruv Program is overseen and directed by the Outreach Committee at Temple Beth-El. The committee functions under the guidance of Rabbi Barry H. Block. This partnership is key to the success and integration of our Outreach efforts.

Evaluation of Program: (See attached survey and evaluation forms.) The effectiveness of the Outreach Committee's efforts can be partially gauged by attendance at Outreach Committee-sponsored events. We have learned, however, that low attendance by conversion candidates while they are going through the conversion program does not necessarily mean a lack of interest. With much of their time spent in class and attending other required activities, their free time is generally limited. After they complete the class, many become more active in Outreach Committee events, as well as other temple functions.

Ironically, another important measure of the success of the Keruv Program is diminished involvement with formal Outreach Committee activities as new members become more integrated into the temple. (Some committee members, however, remain involved with the Outreach Committee long after they have become comfortable within the larger temple community, focusing their efforts on helping others.) We have many opportunities to observe the progress, in terms of temple involvement, of people who have converted - at services, holiday celebrations, study sessions and informal social events. Many of those who first came to the temple through the conversion program have become active temple members, serving in leadership roles on the Board of Trustees, various committees, and in the religious school. Many are also active within the wider San Antonio Jewish community.

Follow-up: Follow-up for this comprehensive program involves assessing our formal evaluations as well as our informal observations to determine if we are meeting the needs of our target groups. Based on this continual feedback, members of the Outreach Committee shift or prioritize goals and strategies and plan future events so that the Keruv Program remains dynamic and effective.

Follow-up Opportunities: Our ultimate goal is that Keruv participants become fully integrated in the temple community. For new Jews-by-choice, intermarried couples and new members of the temple this may mean involvement or participation in any of a number of temple activities, including worship, committee or board membership, study sessions, religious school, community service, and social events.