

My First Encounter with an Outreach Program

My first encounter with an Outreach program was actually in college, in the last semester of my senior year. The campus religious center was advertising a video and discussion about the subject of intermarriage between Christians and Jews. Since I had been dating a Jewish man for three years, I was curious to hear what they had to say.

That first encounter opened up the opportunity to ask questions, to make friends, and to experience my first Seder. That first contact also allowed me to acknowledge my growing affinity for Judaism by providing the information I was seeking.

Over the next two years, I started reading Jewish books and quietly observing holidays. It was not until my boyfriend and I got engaged that we started thinking seriously about Judaism. We started attending an "Introduction to Judaism" class (another Outreach program sponsored by the UAHC) in preparation for our marriage. Then, a few months after our wedding, I started attending the adult B'nai Mitzvah classes at Temple Beth El.

I formally converted to Judaism a few months before my Bat Mitzvah, after meeting several times with Rabbi Krause. Shortly before the conversion ceremony took place, I drove up to Los Angeles for immersion in the Mikvah; the conversion ceremony itself took place at Temple Beth Shalom, where I met before a council of three Rabbis before taking the Torah into my hands, reciting a passage from the book of Ruth, and receiving my Hebrew name.

I would have never guessed at the outset where my path would lead; I would have never thought that it would be possible for me to become an active member of a Temple. But in each case, an Outreach program was available to me whenever I was ready and interested in taking the next step. That level of support has made all the difference.

I recognize that there are those that feel uncomfortable with the idea of programs openly supporting conversion, in the fear that they would become too evangelical. Conversion is clearly not for everyone; it is a lengthy process that requires the support of family and friends.

So I want to emphasize that outreach is also intended to provide support for those who have Jewish spouses but who are certain that they would never convert. In the regional Outreach meetings, I have in fact met Outreach Committee Chairs who are active members of their local church. Outreach is aimed at meeting the needs of intermarried couples and children of intermarriage too.

By Kari Fields