

reating and  
Guiding a  
Keruv Committee

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**Abstract:** This paper addresses the second of two initial steps that need to be taken when a synagogue decides to initiate a Keruv program. The first step in this process is the creation of a language of inclusion that can be taught to all staff members and volunteers. The second step is the establishment of a Keruv committee.

*Rabbi Charles Simon  
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## **Conclusion: Where is this going?**

The Keruv Initiative is one of a number of steps that are necessary to transform our Conservative synagogue communities into places where the spiritual, social and intellectual needs of emerging generations can be met. It suggests a way of understanding the changing needs of our families based upon the information gleaned from the National Jewish Population Study of 2000. It understands that a vision of our future needs to include interfaith families.

reconsider current policies and procedures without suggesting or specifying any recommendations. Each congregation is different and has a unique culture. As such, each congregation must determine for itself what is appropriate.

### **Current FJMC Programmatic Initiatives**

1. A series of programmatic models designed for parents with intermarried or soon to be intermarried children.
2. A similar initiative specifically designed for grandparents.
3. A three session follow up for each group or a combined group that utilizes selected scenes from television shows and film in order to more easily facilitate appropriate language and to broaden the participants understanding of the complicated family issues involved.
4. A web based infomercial designed to attract to a synagogue young adults who are or might be in the process of intermarrying.
5. An initiative designed to attract young men and women of Jewish Descent to the synagogue.

## **Creating and Guiding a Keruv Committee**

### **Why Create a Keruv committee**

Most congregations are composed of a number of committees that help a congregation operate as an effective corporation. Committees are formed to address specific needs and are appropriately guided by a Board of Directors. This model of governance is generally effective and is usually aided by strategic and long range planning initiatives. These initiatives are usually focused on plans to assure financial stability, staff growth and viability of location and generally do not incorporate an understanding of how to address demographic change. Keruv is about understanding and positioning a synagogue to meet the challenge of demographic change.

There are times when neighborhoods change so rapidly that it is impossible to position a synagogue to attract people because any potentially viable population has already left. This is not the case in a majority of our communities. The demographics indicate that these communities still have the opportunity to attract new membership and to remain viable assuming they can be properly positioned. A Keruv committee is a committee of individuals reflecting a number of different populations within the synagogue community who are guided by the rabbi and a trained FJMC Keruv (volunteer) consultant with the mission of re-positioning the synagogue in light of demographic change.

## **What is an FJMC Keruv consultant(s)**

The FJMC Keruv consultant(s) are the front office people who allow the rabbi to function as behind-the-scene-quarterback. Rather than imposing an agenda that seeks congregational growth from the outside, the rabbi/consultant team develops a vision how the synagogue can be viewed in light of its unique culture and demographics. The presence of strategic lay partners in the Keruv process is crucial to its success.

The role of the Keruv consultant changes as the synagogue's Keruv vision develops. The concept of a volunteer consultant began in 2001. At that time, the FJMC suggested that the congregational rabbi attend a Keruv rabbinic think-tank and a recommended person be trained as a partner in a subsequent three-day training program. Just as the curriculum evolved from one training to the next, so too did the understanding of how congregations worked. The FJMC began to train male/female teams in 2006 in response to the realization that supportive non-Jewish spouses needed to be addressed with separate gender strategies. Originally, the newly trained consultant would meet with his/her rabbi following the training and jointly determine an initial program strategy that usually consisted of a presentation to the synagogue Board of Directors followed by some initial programming and publicity depending upon the culture of the community.

Today, consultants work with the rabbi and congregational president and jointly develop a Keruv committee. Consultants bring a host of skills to their congregations. They have been trained to address a synagogue, Men's Club and Women's Group Boards in order to sensitize them to our Movement's demographic challenge. They are able to suggest different perspectives to a congregation's programmatic calendar in order to more effectively involve the respective supportive non-Jewish spouses in their communities. They are capable of

assume that "welcoming" refers to just having "greeters" present when a person enters the sanctuary. Becoming a welcoming congregation is a more complex challenge than is often realized. Welcoming leads to Keruv in the same manner that walking can lead to running.

### **The Keruv Consultant Board orientation**

The FJMC Keruv consultants have been prepared to present a brief orientation session designed to explain to a synagogue Board of Directors why and how it needs to re-position itself in order to meet the needs caused by demographic change. This presentation includes strong reassurances that it will not result in a relaxing or diminishing of "standards" but will in fact attempt to unite all aspects of the congregation in a common vision. The following is a resolution approved by a major congregation in the Great Plains following a presentation made by a newly trained Keruv Consultant.

The Congregation moved forward with a Keruv initiative and approved the following motion (a bit paraphrased): "The development of a Keruv initiative of outreach and integration of intermarrieds and their families, especially children, into the Congregation and Jewish life and activities." Going forward, I plan on following the steps outlined in The FJMC Keruv Initiative Consultant Implementation Guide (FJMC March 2006.)

### **The Keruv Consultant Men's Club and Women's Group orientation**

The FJMC Keruv consultants have been trained to conduct a session for the Boards of Men's Clubs and Women's groups that will sensitize them to the need to involve the respective supportive non-Jewish spouses. The session runs for about twenty minutes and has been designed to challenge each affiliate to develop an effective strategy. The lesson plans also challenge the respective Boards of Directors to investigate and

charged with developing a strategy that will maximize the family involvement and at the same time minimize any discomfort.

For example:

The women's group has developed a program designed to attract and socially integrate the supportive non-Jewish female spouse. A number of women have successfully attended events and would like to become more active. The women's group guidelines prohibit membership of non-Jews. The committee representative brings this issue to the group and to the rabbi and congregational president in order to develop an appropriate strategy.

For example:

One of the teachers in the Talmud Torah has told his/her class that it is forbidden for a Jew to have a Christmas tree in their homes. Two of the children in the class announced that they always have a tree. One of the students is ashamed and the other is angry and defends his non-Jewish parent. The committee learns about this and requests that a teacher training program be developed to handle these situations more effectively in the future.

The Keruv committee provides a gestalt vision and forum for the community to confront and address demographics.

### **The relationship between being a welcoming congregation and a Keruv committee**

The Membership chair who sits on the Keruv committee should be entrusted with developing in conjunction with the rabbi and implementing a "welcoming plan" based on "The Spirituality of Welcoming" by Ron Wolfson. One should not

instituting a series of programs for parents with intermarried or soon to be intermarried children as well as grandparents with intermarried grandchildren. They have been taught to utilize film in order to assist people to obtain a deeper understanding of the situations they face and the language they need to employ if they wish to enhance their current and potentially future families. They are a resource that should be treasured and serve as a role model for others.

### **Who can become a Keruv consultant?**

It is the rabbi's responsibility to select the persons to be trained as Keruv consultants. The criteria are simple. They must be people whom the rabbi can trust. They must speak well and have the necessary skills and standing to lead a committee and to institute appropriate programming. They can be of any age and any gender. They need not have intermarried children or family members. This past year, a number of our colleagues have recommended intermarried couples to be trained as Keruv consultants. The presence of individuals in our training programs resulted in our developing a deeper understanding of the choices they have made, and, at the same time, it increased their connection to the Jewish people. *I think this is indicative of what is already occurring in our congregations, and it is important for us to understand this as we consider the nature of our existing communities.*

### **What is the Keruv committee's Goals?**

The goals of a Keruv committee are four-fold;

1. To bring together and sensitize appropriate persons associated with the synagogue in order to sensitize

them how to respond to intermarrieds when they come into contact with the synagogue

2. To monitor each of the designated “gates” (entry points) to insure they are functioning properly
3. To transform the congregation into a “welcoming congregation” because welcoming leads to Keruv
4. To introduce successful FJMC Keruv programs

### **How Should a Keruv committee be composed?**

Congregations are composed of interest groups; parents of toddlers differ in many cases from parents who have children in the Talmud Torah. Empty nesters have different needs than newly marrieds etc. A properly organized Keruv committee needs to be composed of representatives of each of the various populations that exist in the synagogue community. Depending upon the community’s demographics, the following groups should be represented on the committee.

- Nursery school
- Talmud Torah
- Membership
- Brotherhood (Men’s Club)
- Sisterhood (Women’s Group)
- Ritual
- Personal
- Social activities
- Adult education
- Social Action
- Intermarrieds — *The presence of intermarrieds in our communities necessitates their voices and the voices of Jews-by-Choice be heard.*
- Mature adults — *They need to be included to demonstrate that their needs are important and recognized within the*

*synagogue in spite of the rush to attract and educate younger families.*

### **How should the Keruv committee function?**

A Keruv committee needs to meet at least three times a year and in the interim designated people need to work with their appropriate committees or affiliates in order to insure that Keruv is on the radar of each group.

For example:

The Keruv consultant needs to meet with the Men’s Club Board and impress upon them the importance of the Men’s Club’s leadership to develop a plan that will reach out and socially involve the supportive non-Jewish male spouse. The Men’s Club president needs to be prepared to report at the Keruv committee meetings on the men’s club’s progress.

Each meeting should consist of brief reports on the progress of each committee and discussions of new issues or concerns as they arise. Once the issues have been articulated, the rabbi and congregation president needs to be informed.

For example:

The representative to the Talmud Torah committee working with the school principal has determined the number of parents in the school with non-Jewish family members who have children who will become b’nai mitzvah in the coming year. A list has been compiled and shared with the rabbi and the representative from the ritual committee. The rabbi and ritual committee are