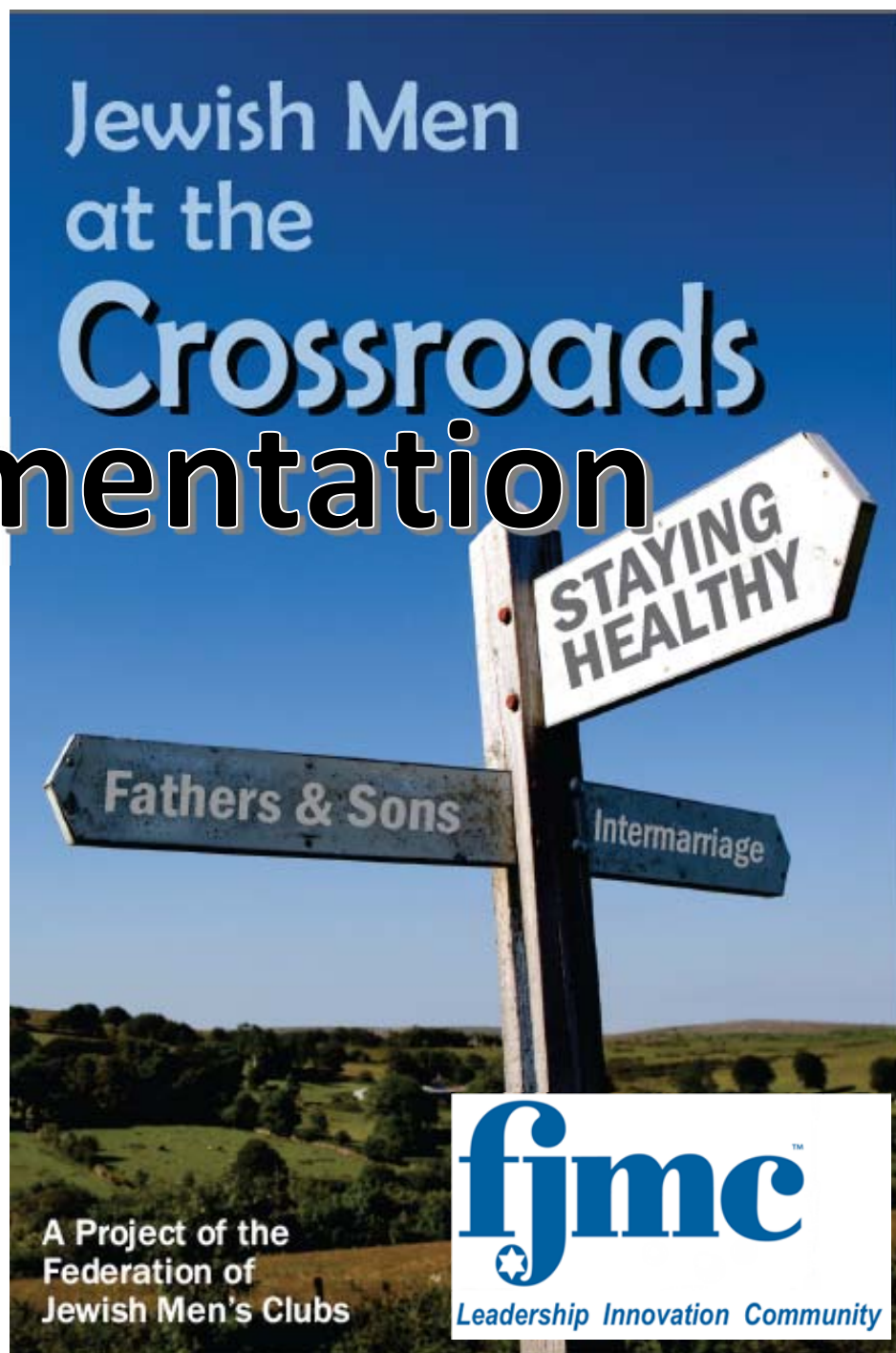


# Jewish Men at the Crossroads

## An Implementation Guide



2014

A Project of the  
Federation of  
Jewish Men's Clubs

**fjmc**<sup>TM</sup>  
Leadership Innovation Community



*Leadership Innovation Community*

The FJMC mission is to involve Jewish Men in Jewish Life by building and strengthening Men's Clubs in the Conservative / Masorti Movement. We accomplish this mission by:

**Leadership:** mentoring leaders at the club, region and international level,

**Innovation:** developing programming that better connects people of all ages to the Jewish community,

**Community:** forming meaningful long-lasting relationships based on camaraderie, common interests and core values.

FJMC, a partnership of affiliated clubs with members across North America and around the world, brings value and adds meaning to the lives of men and their families. Through our programming and the broad dissemination of the creative programming developed by our clubs, we touch hundreds of thousands of people each year.

Website: [www.fjmc.org](http://www.fjmc.org)

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## Introduction

- Are you looking for exciting new program ideas?
- Do you need proven, pre-planned, stimulating programs that are easy to implement in these busy times?
- Would you like to attract “fresh faces” to Men’s Club?
- Do you want an activity that is a “natural” for engaging Men’s Club participation?
- Do you want to draw in and whet the appetites of less involved men?

If the answers to any of the above are “YES” then the FJMC Hearing Men’s Voices (HMV) program is a proven approach for accomplishing these objectives. The recent publication of Jewish Men at the Crossroads provides Men’s Clubs with new and exciting opportunities to either expand an ongoing HMV program, or to kick one off, with enough fresh material to cover literally years of programming.

HMV can be used by any club. Part of the challenge for men today is finding an outlet for honest discussion and a safe environment to connect with others in a meaningful manner. HMV helps to create a tightly bonded community; one in which feelings are affirmed, differing perspectives are respected, and challenges are shared jointly. HMV also promotes the development of listening and leadership skills.

This guide is a resource for our clubs to help in implementing the essays in Jewish Men at the Crossroads using the Hearing Men’s Voices process. Each of the essays in Crossroads is a catalyst to attract and engage men. The guide provides several questions for each essay that a facilitator may use to stimulate open and meaningful discussion.

For those unfamiliar with the HMV process, or who would like a refresher, this booklet starts with guidelines and proven practices for planning and implementing HMV programs. References for other HMV books and related FJMC publications can be found at the booklet’s end.

FJMC consultants are available to assist you in getting started. They are available by phone or could, depending upon your locale, visit your club and help you generate programmatic ideas.

For training materials to implement Hearing Men’s Voices programming in general, see <https://fjmc.org/content/implementation-guide>.

FJMC may be contacted by email at [international@fjmc.org](mailto:international@fjmc.org), through the website [www.fjmc.org](http://www.fjmc.org), or by telephone at 212-749-8100.

Jewish Men at the Crossroads represents the most comprehensive collection of H MV essays published to date. It was created in honor of and edited by Dr. Robert Braitman, a past FJMC International President and the founder of Hearing Men’s Voices (H MV). The book offers thought-provoking essays and discussion questions on topics of critical importance to men, and which can be used to effectively engage men through H MV programming.

H MV is that rare program which costs nothing to run, but pays dividends for many years to come. Running an H MV program using this implementation guide and the Crossroads material will help engage men of all ages more actively in your club.

In addition focused programming around this book can be an important tool to attract new members. Sessions can be facilitated by anyone with an interest in the topic and a willingness to stimulate conversation. H MV discussions can be targeted to any demographic group in the club or region and is a perfect small group activity.

## **Hearing Men's Voices Guidelines**

### **Principles of Good Practice Program Planning & Implementation**

**Determine the target audience.** Imagine how attendees should feel after the event has concluded.

**Determine the nature of the program.** Will it require a Speaker or a Facilitator or is a different format needed.

Many communities have in their Club, *shul*, or in the broader community someone with appropriate experience as a facilitator and/or has been trained by FJMC Mentschen to facilitate H MV groups. Check with your regional leadership if you need help identifying an experienced facilitator. For specialized topics, consider partnering with a local community institution that can provide speakers, resources and/or other support – depending on the topic, these may include a medical center, Jewish federation agency, or government agency.

**Establish a timetable.** Consider what makes the most sense for your target audience

**Determine appropriate ways of promoting the event:** Synagogue publications; e-mail; social media; etc.

**Decide upon a location** (e.g. *shul*, home or other neutral location) – again, consider the target audience and what would work best for them

**Plan for meal/refreshments.** It’s always a good idea to have light refreshments or even a light meal, depending on time of day

## Programming Suggestions

The following suggestions are not meant to be prescriptive, but models to build upon. Every community will likely be able to come up with other themes/topics that may be even more relevant to their own Club and *shul* community. Again, understanding the audience for the program is vital.

**Format Options:** There are several. Here are just a few that have proven successful.

- “Traditional” HMV discussion – planned and led by a facilitator that typically lasts 1- 1 1/2 hours allowing limited participation by all members of a group (see attached guidelines). Have the attendees read the relevant essay in Jewish Men at the Crossroads. The essays are very short – typically 2-3 pages – and can provide not only food for thought, but also enhance the texture and scope of the dialogue that ensues.
- Rapid engagement model - planned and led by a facilitator which typically last 30 minutes to 1 hour The group typically will interact in two concentric circles with individuals across from one another engaging on a question/comment posed by the facilitator and then engaging again with another person as the outer or inner circle rotates to set up a new pairing. “Engagements” typically range from 1-5 minutes.
- Lecture by a Guest Speaker
- Short Program as part of a Board or other meeting (either rapid engagement or brief “traditional” models work here).
- Panel discussion
- Health & Wellness Fair (Special Event) – health care professionals and organizations staffing tables

### Guidelines for Conducting Hearing Men’s Voices Sessions

***It might be helpful to distribute these guidelines to all participants at the beginning of the event.***

#### PARTICIPATION WITH INTEGRITY

1. I will listen and not act defensively. (I cannot hear with my mouth open.)
2. I will not give advice, complain, explain, intellectualize, rationalize, make excuses or protect. What I offer should come from my heart, not from my head.
3. I will be specific, speak for myself and stay on the subject.
4. I will share from my own experiences. I will express myself to others: “I know how you FEEL... I have FELT the same way... This is what I have FOUND...”
5. I will stay out of my ego as much as I can.
6. I have a personal obligation to make this seminar go.
7. I will try not to take comments personally.
8. What goes on in this room, stays in this room.

*The questions which follow here plus those following the essays in Crossroads are provided to help the facilitator lead the discussion. Feel free to develop your own questions!*

## **Part One: Entering the Crossroads** Recognizing Crossroads and Dealing with Them

### **Jewish Men, Then & Now -**

- What does it mean to “be a man?”
- What does it mean to “be a Jewish man?”
- Has this changed since your father’s generation? How?
- Will it change for your sons?

### **The Disappearing Volunteer: What can be done to Change this Trend? –**

- What obstacles do you see to being an active volunteer?
- What other activities take priority to your volunteer life in the Jewish community? Why?
- Do your parenting responsibilities get in the way of time for your volunteerism?
- Do workplace-related pressures get in the way of time for your volunteerism?

### **From Shakespeare to Homer Simpson: What Happened to Men?**

- How accurate are reflections of men in the media?
- How has that impacted on your own self-image and your actions as a man generally and a Jewish man specifically?

## **Part Two: Fathers and Sons at the Crossroads** On Being a Father and on Being a Man

### **Fathers & Sons at the Crossroads –**

- What do we want from our fathers?
- What do our sons and daughters need from us?
- How do we teach our sons to “be men”?
- What challenges do we face as our own fathers age?
- If you are now the “patriarch” in your family, how did you feel in assuming that role?
- What were the Crossroads you remember experiencing as a son with Your Father and as a Father with Your Son?
- What have been the unique challenges that you’ve faced as Stepfathers &/or Stepsons?

### **Stepping up to the Plate -**

- Talk about an important mentor in your life.
- Discuss your experience with mentoring others.
- What can you do to become a better mentor?

### **Parents as Rebbes --**

- I'm a new father - now what?
- If you had one lesson to teach your children, what would it be?

### **Blessing the Children –**

- Talk about YOUR experience in blessing your children; of being blessed by your parent.

### **A Father's First Mitzvah: A Meditation on *Brit Milah* –**

- Share the feelings that you experienced at your son's *Brit Milah*.
- If you could send a message to your son at the time of his *Brit*, what would you like to convey?
- How do we as Jewish men ensure that our sons will enjoy a meaningful involvement in Jewish life?

### **Fathering a Daughter –**

- What particular challenges have you faced or do you expect to face in fathering a daughter as compared with a son?

### **Yahrzeit for a Child –**

- What have you done to deal with such an unspeakable loss? What have you said and/or done to assist others in dealing with this challenging situation?
- How did such an experience affect your faith?

### **You Have Never Met Anyone like Me –**

- Discuss the challenges have faced in raising a special needs child.
- How does your *shul* attempt to be truly inclusive and in supporting special needs parents raising a Jewish child?

### **Telling Your Story: Writing an Ethical Will –**

- What are the thoughts, values, advice, teachings you might like to share with you heirs?
- If you've written an Ethical Will, have you shared it with your family? What was their reaction?

## **Part Three: Guess Who's Coming To Dinner**

### **The Challenges and Opportunities of Intermarriage in the Jewish Community**

#### **When Traditions Merge: Japan + America + Judaism = ? -**

- How can we overcome our own stereotypes about individuals from different cultures?

#### **Mazel Tov. Is He Jewish? -**

- Can you love a non-Jewish son or daughter-in-law as much as a Jewish one?
- What do our reactions to intermarriage teach us about ourselves?
- How do we as parents and grandparents adjust to the increase in intermarriage in our communities?
- What do you feel you can do to create a more welcoming space for those who intermarry?

### **Having a Baby: Now What? -**

- How do you share your feelings about religious expectations with women whom you date? When do you have this conversation?
- Do you have this conversation even if your date is Jewish?

### **Fatherhood Has Strengthened my Jewish Identity, and Interfaith Marriage is the Reason -**

- What's happened to your level of Jewish engagement in your marriage?
- In what ways has your level of Jewish engagement changed as a result of becoming a father?

## **Part Four: Experiencing God's Wonder**

### **Men in Search of God -**

- What are the obstacles for you to experience God's wonder?
- Have you found God? If so, when, where, how?
- If not, is it important to you?
- Do you believe God has a purpose for you? What might it be?

### **Why are There Fewer Men in the Synagogue? -**

- What it is that led you to engage in your Club/Synagogue and what form(s) of satisfaction have you derived?
- What are the barriers you see to other men engaging as you have done?
- Where do your friends go to seek community? If it is not the synagogue why is that?
- How can we, as men and leaders challenge the disappearance of this sense of community? How can we make the synagogue/men's club a place where those who are in search of community are more likely to turn?

### **Barriers to Prayer -**

- In what ways do you find prayer to be either satisfying or unsatisfying?
- What barriers do you experience in getting to prayer, deriving meaning/experiencing satisfaction/enjoyment/fulfillment from prayer
- What have you done to remove these barriers?

### **Defining our Spiritual Selves -**

- Do you describe yourself as a spiritual person? If so, what does that mean to you?
- What are some ways that you have brought God and observance into your life that differed from the home in which you grew up?
- How have you added *mitzvot* to your observance, and what prompted you to add them?
- For those who don't see themselves as "spiritual" which *mitzvot* would you suggest they adopt to begin this process?



### **The Fraternity of Mourners -**

- Please share your experience(s) with mourning (as a mourner &/or supporting a mourner). Does the phrase fraternity of mourners resonate with you?
- How did Jewish customs of mourning help you to deal with loss?
- Why do you believe we are not allowed to recite *Kaddish* alone (at home for instance)?

## **Part Five: For Whom Do I Work?**

### **Are We What We Do? -**

- What is success?
- Is what you do for a living the litmus test for your success?
- When asked to define yourself is your occupation part of the first sentence?

### **Retirement: A Time for Change -**

- Share your experience with change as a retiree or, if not yet retired, your expectations for change in retirement.
- What do you lose in giving up your employment and gain by entering retirement?
- Does the definition of success change from one stage of life to another?

### **Retirement is a Process, Reflections on Retirement -**

- Share your experience with the various stages of retirement from when you first contemplated it, to the time leading up to it, to the first years of retirement to the present; if not yet retired, your expectations for retirement.
- How does your view or experience of retirement differ from what you saw with older generations?

### **Spousal Conflict: The Volunteers Dilemma -**

- Describe the issues you have faced in your family life with respect to the time you've devoted to Men's Club and synagogue.
- What do you get from involvement in volunteering that you don't get at home or at work?
- How have you tried to minimize the gap between your home life and your volunteer life?

### **Living to Work? -**

- How do you try to balance work and family life?
- How critical is your role at work as well as the type of work you do to your identity?
- How important must a job be to be your primary sense of self?

## **Part Six: Men Staying Healthy and Fit**

### **A Jewish Perspective on Health & Wellness -**

- Does your faith/synagogue commitment/engagement contribute to your physical/mental well-being? If so, how?
- Is your health affected by your spiritual life? How?

### **Why Don't Men Seek Health Care? -**

- Is this true for you? Is it “unmanly” to seek health care?
- What does healthy (physical and mental) mean/look like?
- What does it mean to admit to yourself or others that you could have a health problem?

### **What I Gained from What I Lost -**

- Share your experience with weight/weight loss.
- What has been the meaning of food in your life?
- If you've engaged in a weight loss program, what or who motivated you to start?

### **Aging and Sexual Desire in Men: Applying Mindfulness -**

- This is a very personal and sensitive topic. It may not be appropriate for a general Hearing Men's Voices program. On the other hand, it can make a powerful program with the right speaker.

### **The Reclamation of Spirit and Health for Jewish Men Today -**

- Does your faith/synagogue commitment/engagement contribute to your physical/mental well-being? If so, how?

### **I Don't Want to Talk about It: The Hidden Epidemic of Depression in Men -**

- This is a very personal and sensitive topic. It may not be appropriate for a general Hearing Men's Voices program. On the other hand, it can make a powerful program with the right speaker.

### **For Better or For Worse, A Burden of Love –**

- Relate your experiences as a caregiver for a spouse, parent or child. If you've done both, is there a difference?
- How has being a caregiver affected your life and lifestyle?

## **Additional Hearing Men's Voices Resources**

### **Our Fathers, Ourselves**

*Edited by Dr. Robert Braitman*

The first installment of the Hearing Men's Voices series explores men's roles in the Jewish family and provides programming ideas to help men better understand and strengthen their relationships with their fathers and children. Some of the programs focus on aging parents in an effort for men to understand the health issues which their fathers - and ultimately they themselves - might be facing.

1. Communicating with your teenager, Use the program format suggested in the book to have a session dealing with issues arising in relation to adolescent boys and girls, including limit-setting, responsibility, curfews, and sexual activity. Also discuss how blessings and hugging can build family relationships and unity.
2. Responding to Aging and Infirm Parents. Using the materials in the book, have a discussion about topics such as inheritance, medical proxies, and decisions about when life should end. A related topic is "What to Do if Your Parents Are Starting to "Lose It."

### **Body and Spirit: Men Staying Healthy and Fit**

*Edited by Dr. Robert Braitman*

The second book in the Hearing Men's Voices series discusses health issues that concern men and provides tips on how to live healthier and happier lives. Some of the suggested ideas are program-length and others entail only a 15-minute discussion, which would be ideal for insertion in a Men's Club business meeting.

1. Monthly series on men's health issues. This could be held in the synagogue or in various homes. Every month the series would feature a different men's health issue with a different expert to lead discussion.
2. Health Fair. This can go in many different directions. Some clubs run them with everything free (including food); others have fees involved. Some have commercial booths; others don't. Some also have individual speakers as part of the Health Fair, and some also involve safety aspects in the Fair. Some of the booths you might consider: cholesterol screenings (local Department of Health); vision and hearing screenings (Lions Club); and blood pressure testing and blood donation (American Red Cross).
3. 5 or 10 kilometer run/walk/bicycle race. You could make this a leisurely recreational activity for adults only, or you could make it an elaborate synagogue-wide event that doubles as a fund-raiser.

## **Listening to God's Voice**

*Edited by Dr. Robert Braitman*

The third installment in the Hearing Men's Voices series focuses on men's spiritual lives and examines the nature of our relationships with God. The book consists of more than a dozen lesson plans designed to stimulate discussion in these areas.

1. The Whys and Wherefores of *Tefillin*. The book gives an excellent discussion of the reasons for wearing *tefillin* and an explanation of the related prayers - ideal to be incorporated into the World Wide Wrap.
2. Shabbat afternoon study session, meal, and *Havdalah*. Pick a topic to discuss and follow it with the traditional third Shabbat meal - *Seudah Sh'lish't* - and then *Havdalah*.
3. "The Spiritual Moment." Hold a discussion where men share a spiritual event in their lives.

## **Work and Worth**

*Edited by Daniel M. Kimmel*

Groundbreaking essays on the significance of work in men's lives. Includes structured program ideas to explore work-related topics in your community. Covers everything from security issues to workplace ethics, illness, and the loss of a job. Contributors range from doctors and lawyers to rabbis and cabinetmakers.

1. Introduction and Self Definitions (Program A page 8)
2. Work and Family (Program B page 9)
3. Mid Life Change (Program F page 29)
4. Returning to work after a serious illness (Program G page 31)
5. Retirement (Program I page 34)

## **Related FJMC Publications of Interest**

- [Building a Successful Volunteer Culture](#)
- [Intermarriage: Concepts & Strategies for Families & Synagogue Leaders](#)
- [Engaging the Non-Jewish Spouse: Strategies for Clergy and Lay Leadership](#)
- [Hearing Men's Voices Implementation Guide \(https://fjmc.org/content/implementation-guide\)](https://fjmc.org/content/implementation-guide)
- [The Diminishing Role of Jewish Men in Jewish Life: Addressing the Challenge, HMV Pamphlet \(PDF\)](#)

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