

# P R O C E E D I N G S

## Symposium on Intermarriage and Jewish Continuity

1991 CJF General Assembly • Baltimore, MD  
November 20, 1991

Volume I

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## FOREWORD

A full-day Symposium on the topic of Inter-marriage and Jewish Continuity was held in Baltimore, Maryland on November 20, 1991 as a prelude to the 1991 General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations.

The purpose of the Symposium, the first gathering of its kind at a General Assembly, was to explore the challenge posed to the Jewish community in the decade of the 1990's by the critical issues of intermarriage and Jewish continuity, especially in view of the wide attention recently given to the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey.

The Symposium speakers reviewed significant data and set out to define the dimensions and underlying issues and to illuminate the impact and implications for the Jewish community. Twice during the day, at morning and afternoon breakout sessions, the participants gathered in small groups to exchange views and share suggestions for possible community action.

Volume I of these proceedings incorporates the presentations of each of the speakers and the highlights of the breakout sessions. In addition, a CJF Briefing Paper on Inter-marriage is reprinted in the Appendix, which also contains a bibliography.

Volume II contains additional papers on intermarriage and Jewish continuity, including a collection of papers on the topic published by the American Jewish Committee. These papers are based on data from studies conducted prior to the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. They represent a range of viewpoints and provide additional background information. It should be noted that they represent the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the CJF.

## WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS

Helene Berger, Miami

A cover article of Moment Magazine, earlier this year, entitled "Mixed Marriage Soup," dealt with couples who chose to intermarry but were struggling for acceptance in the religions of their birth. According to the article, and what we have since learned from the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, it is projected that by the year 2030, intermarried couples will constitute the majority of American Jews. A spokesman for a group of the children of these mixed marriages said, "If the Jewish community does sensible outreach to bring us in, instead of compelling us to struggle to get in, we will see the flowering of a new American Judaism that will grow and take in new people."

We have planned this Symposium today to address what the Jewish community's role should be as our concerns mount about the high rate of intermarriage. Some see this as a crisis of epidemic proportions that threatens to undermine Jewish life as we know it today and the prospect for meaningful Jewish life in the future, and therefore a reality which must be dealt with vigorously so we do not destroy the precious Jewish world our parents and grandparents entrusted to us. Others feel the subject is so controversial and emotionally charged that it will bring about divisiveness in the Jewish community at a time when our scarce resources should be going into surer bets. And there is the subliminal feeling that dealing with intermarriage, does more than acknowledge its presence; it sanctions it.

The Committee on Community Planning, which I chair, and the Steering Committee of the Department of Planning and Resource Development have judiciously considered both of these points of view, and have come down clearly on the side of the first -- that this is a serious and Jewish life-threatening issue that must be dealt with head-on through concerted Jewish communal action: hence, this full day Symposium. The fact that CJF is devoting an entire day to intermarriage and Jewish

continuity acknowledges that dramatic changes are taking place in the American Jewish community and that few of these changes have more far-reaching implications for the future of American Jewry than the growing pace of intermarriage. The vitality of the community's reaction may well determine its future.

This Symposium is called Intermarriage and Jewish Continuity, for it was felt that communities have the responsibility to create and implement a broad spectrum of programs which will move all families along the continuum towards more vibrant Jewish connections. The future of the American Jewish community increasingly depends on renewing a rich and vital core of American Jewish life for all Jews.

The plea of the Moment article for "sensible outreach" is clearly not being heeded. A recent CJF survey of planning and allocations experiences shows that very few Federations have outreach and programs for singles in place or on their future planning agendas.

What then is our hope for this Symposium? The fact that we have come together for a full day to discuss this multifaceted dilemma at a General Assembly is in itself a major and historic statement. This Symposium acknowledges that there is indeed a problem affecting the future of our people which the organized Jewish community must begin to address. So, before we even begin, perhaps a crucial goal has been achieved. But we certainly hope you come away with something more concrete. For years we've been shaking our heads saying, "Ain't it awful." Now there is hard statistical evidence before us, that must move us to action. This Symposium is designed to help us begin. We hope to learn from each other and to give guidance and ideas to lay and professional leaders on how to initiate a reasoned and comprehensive approach to face what all of us in this room can agree is a problem. Throughout our history, through persecution, war, and every conceivable trauma, we have never turned away from facing the wrenching problems Jews have encountered. In the modern era, Federations have led the way in initiating communal action, bringing together diverse groups, and enlisting all the talent and creative energy that exists to meet any crisis.

Will we who live one generation after Auschwitz stand silently by as our numbers are again being depleted, not by an external madman, but from within by our own children choosing to break the link with Jewish history and Jewish memory? It is inconceivable for us to write them off and remain detached. It is unspeakable for us to choose silence and indifference. Are we who are witnessing at this very moment, the miraculous rebirth of Jewish life in the Soviet Union and in those Soviet Jews who are beginning a new life in Eretz Israel, going to give up on our own children who have made choices that are so painful to us? By our failure to act collectively, are we prepared to say, what we never dreamed of saying to the Soviet Jews, "You are permanently lost to us?"

I urge us to take the lead in facing this challenge by choosing Federation as the vehicle for action to put our collective will together and continue to build a Jewish World for all our children and our grandchildren.



## **PART I: ISSUES OF INTERMARRIAGE & JEWISH CONTINUITY**

## THE CRITICAL CHALLENGE OF THE 1990s

Linda Cornell Weinstein, Rochester

Our coming together at the CJF Symposium on Inter-marriage and Jewish Continuity reflects a critical moment in the lives and history of American Jewry. The 1990 CJF National Jewish Population Survey has shown us the facts -- statistics that we might have tried to minimize but that we must begin to consider and discuss:

... Before 1965 only 9 percent of Jews had married a non-Jew.

... Of those Jews who married between 1985-90, 52% married a non-Jewish spouse.

... Of the 777,000 children of intermarried families only 28% are being raised as Jews.

As always, the facts only tell part of the story. For many of us here in this room, intermarriage is a powerful, emotional part of our own lives. It is no longer a subject that can be ignored in our communal conversations, just as we no longer can hide it in our private conversations and lives. When even Newsweek and the Wall Street Journal publish major articles on the topic, it is indeed time for all of us to face the challenge and develop strategies to deal with it. That is why I am so pleased that the leadership of CJF had the vision to develop today's program.

Our purpose today is to get a better understanding of the issues surrounding intermarriage, to share with one another some of the community and organizational programming already being tried, to discuss approaches to deal with the issues, and to help Federation leadership initiate planning in our respective communities. Intermarriage programming on a local and national level is currently fragmented. Many of these programs are effective, but what is needed is the all-embracing community effort that Federations can logically convene.

We will not complete this task today; if this program succeeds it will stimulate considerable additional discussion and future action.

The reality of intermarriage cuts across every segment of the Jewish population from the least affiliated to the most observant. We, as Jews, have become increasingly integrated as members of American society. Yet, must we accept assimilation and intermarriage as the price of full citizenship? Must we assume that if we confront the issues of intermarriage, we are tacitly endorsing it? Must we conclude that there should be no discussion of the American Jewish community of the 21st century, for there will be no American Jewish community of the 21st century?

I would argue that the answer to each of these questions is a resounding "No." We can have full American citizenship and a full Jewish life through many centuries to come only if we confront these issues now. We must continue to emphasize Jewish education and continuity programming at every age level. The additional challenge is to develop creative opportunities for intermarried individuals and families desiring a Jewish life and wishing to be part of the Jewish community.

This Symposium is a good beginning. But we can't stop here. We must take our discussions back to our communities — back to our Federations, agencies, organizations, and synagogues. We must make certain that the topic of intermarriage takes its place as a priority on our Jewish communal agenda.

The Jewish future of our children and grandchildren is at stake. We can no longer afford to bury our heads in the sand and hope that the "problem" will go away.

We have the power to change the future, if we only have the creativity to learn from the past...and then act.

**JEWISH CONTINUITY  
IN AN AGE OF INTERMARRIAGE**

Egon Mayer, Ph.D.  
Department of Sociology  
Brooklyn College

This past year I have been privileged to hear a number of rabbinic sermons whose central focus was the most recent facts about intermarriage, as reported by the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. Indeed, since Rosh Hashana I have been hardly able to find a synagogue where at least one sermon did not culminate in the pronouncement of the dreadful statistics: gasps and whispers about "the fifty plus percent intermarriage rate."

The North American Jewish Data Bank and its parent CJF have done well an incredibly difficult job. They have managed to count and describe in all its rich diversity the Jews of America. With the most sophisticated survey technology and the best demographic talent available, NJPS 1990 was completed and its Highlights published in record time. It is a tribute to its institutional sponsors as well as to its research director, Dr. Barry Kosmin, that the study has gained instant public recognition in such forums as The New York Times, Newsweek, The Wall Street Journal, U.S. News & World Report, American Demographics Magazine, and The Economist, just to mention the most prominent few. The findings of the study are so compelling, and its technical merits so unassailable that it has become the pre-eminent source of demographic wisdom for thinking about the American Jewish future for the next generation, at least.

Stories of Dina and Chava

Since I am the sociologist who tends to generate a lot of the statistics that rabbis cite in their sermons, in the spirit of professional *quid-pro-quo* therefore, I would like to reflect with you upon the widely-known facts of intermarriage with a few words of Torah.

This coming Shabbat we will be reading the story of Dina, the daughter of our patriarch Jacob and our matriarch Leah. *Va'Tetzeh Dina ... Liraot BiBnot Ha'aretz* -- Dina went out to see and be seen among the girls in the neighborhood of the Hivites. There the local prince, Shechem, apparently fell in love with her, seduced her, and then had his father, Chamor, approach Jacob with a request of permission to marry Dina.

As the story rapidly unfolds, Jacob and two of Dina's brothers, Simeon and Levi, offer to grant Dina to Shechem, and even to engage in general intermarriage with the Hivites on the condition that: "If you will be as we are, to circumcise every male among you, then we'll give our daughters unto you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will abide with you, and we will become one people."

To everyone's amazement the Hivite men agree, and proceed forthwith to get themselves circumcised. Abridging the story just a little bit, the very next thing we learn: "And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore in pain, that the two sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, took each man his sword, came upon the unprotected city, and slew all the males ... including Shechem and his father Hamor, and took Dina back."

I often think of this story as the first typical Jewish reaction to intermarriage. Indeed, if one sees in the Torah a psychohistory of the Jewish folk, then the story of Dina and Shechem stands out as what Carl Jung called the tribal archetype.

The Jewish abhorrence of mixing, of dilution, of pollution bears all the imprint of a tribal taboo that transcends religious, political, and demographic concerns. Indeed, as one reads Jacob's powerful castigation of Simeon and Levi's dastardly behavior, one can see that the Torah is trying to tame and temper what seems like a pathological response to a taboo.

Jacob, the patriarch after whom the folk is named Israel, is ashamed and afraid as a result of the barbaric conduct of his two sons.

What does all this have to do with us? With the current facts of Jewish interfaith marriage?

The widely reported trend line which shows that the rate of intermarriage has increased approximately five-fold in just twenty-five years has triggered with new intensity the debate as to what is to be done. Anxiety runs deep in the Jewish psyche, easily tapping into the primordial fears of Simeon and Levy. Those primordial fears were reinforced by thousands of years of real persecution -- proving yet again that even paranoids can have real enemies.

In that colorful paradigm of the Jewish family saga, Sholom Aleichem's Tevye, the Dairyman, we see that thousands of years after Dina and Shechem, for the simple Tevye of Anatevka the marriage of his daughter Chava to gentile Feyedka is simply the unthinkable alternative. While Simeon and Levi of the Bible kill the gentile, Tevye of Anatevka declares his daughter dead.

#### Cultural facts and forces

My friends, these cultural images are facts pertaining to the meaning of an interfaith marriage in the Jewish family that are every bit as important to our ability to act as the demographic data.

What these cultural facts suggest is that with respect to our response to interfaith marriage, we are heirs to a tradition of anger, fear, guilt, and no small measure of ambivalence.

In describing the incident of Dina and Shechem, the Torah takes pains to tell us that Dina was the daughter of Leah and Jacob. It is one of the basic principles of Torah commentary that all words of a story are meant to be instructive. Why are Dina's parents mentioned by name? Look at who they were. Our patriarch Jacob! Our matriarch Leah! These are no casual, three-times-a-year Jews. These are not pagan assimilationists. Jacob wrestled with an angel -- and prevailed. Leah coaxed God directly and her prayers were answered.

For all those who wonder, "What did we do wrong; how could it be that so many of our children and grandchildren are marrying gentiles?," the Torah reminds us that even the likes of a Jacob and Leah were not able to prevent their daughter Dina from "going out" among the daughters of the land.

Our data merely echo the profound insights of the Torah. Since 1965 the incidence of interfaith marriage has increased in virtually identical proportions among all but the most insular segments of the Jewish population. Among the children of the Orthodox intermarriage has increased from about 5% prior to the mid-sixties to about 25% since the mid-eighties, while among the children of the Reform the increase has been from about 12% in the mid-sixties to about 60% since the mid-eighties. The children of the Conservative reflect a similar trend-line located somewhere between the actual percentages of the Orthodox and the Reform.

The differences in the intermarriage rates of the children of the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform might be explained at least in part by their differential commitment to tradition. But the similarity in their trend-lines suggests the presence of other inexorable social forces that are apparently not buffered by those commitments.

The older age of first marriages among American Jews, their high academic and professional attainments, the growing frequency of divorce -- followed by remarriage, the growing Americanization of Jews, and their growing geographic dispersion from areas of dense Jewish concentration are forces that transcend issues of Jewish commitment. It is these forces that are likely to push intermarriage rates to ever new heights in the future.

Moreover, the approximately 600,000 Jews who are now married to non-Jews (exclusive of those married to Jews-by-choice, and exclusive of those who themselves have become ex-Jews) are likely to fuel the increase in interfaith marriage through the "echo effect" of their marriages upon the marriage choices of their children. Jews who are themselves a product of an interfaith marriage are about three times more likely to marry a non-Jew than those who have two Jewish parents.

Therefore, any question about intermarriage -- its causes, its consequences, what programs and policies the community ought to pursue regarding it -- has to be put in the context not only of rates and trends, but also in the context of actual numbers of people. These include people who already are intermarried, who are already part of the extended Jewish family.

#### Interfaith families, what to do?

In other words, we have to address not only the question of what to do about intermarriage as a social phenomenon, but also what to do with and for the people who are in interfaith families.

The zealotry of the Biblical Simeon and Levi does not provide a very useful model of conduct for those living and thriving in a peaceful pluralistic society.

Tevyeh's example is no more appropriate. As you will recall, he felt he had no choice but to declare Chava, his intermarrying daughter, as dead. We who live in a post-Holocaust, post-modern world, with obligations to the future no less than to the past, do not have the right to declare 600,000 of our brothers, sisters, and cousins and their children as dead. We do not have that right not merely for their sake. But, frankly we do not have that right for our own collective sakes either.

As countless American Jewish parents, facing the prospect of an interfaith marriage, have put it: "We don't want to lose our religion. But we don't want to lose our children either." A national survey of American Jewish leaders, conducted for the Jewish Outreach Institute in 1990, found that about half of Conservative and more than 90% of Reform respondents would regard their own grandchildren as Jewish even if their mother was not Jewish, as long as they were raised Jewish. Moreover, regardless of denominational affiliation, virtually all respondents felt that: (a) the organized Jewish community has not made enough of an effort to bring interfaith families under its umbrella of service and influence, and (b) that it



should now do so, including positive efforts to encourage the conversion to Judaism of non-Jews married to Jews.

The mandate of the American Jewish public, laity and leadership alike, is for efforts of inclusion not for policies of exclusion. The wisdom of such efforts is also dictated by an understanding of the intermarried.

#### Needs in both directions

The intermarried in most cases constitute the youngest, best educated, most upwardly mobile segments of the Jewish population. As such, they are also the ultimate inheritors not only of their parents' tradition but of their parents' wealth as well. Neglecting, not to say banishing, this segment of the Jewish population represents the potential waste of a very large pool of human and material resources by the Jewish community. Much more than they have need of the community, the community has need of them: their talents, their interests, their passions, and their commitments.

But the research on interfaith families shows ample evidence of needs in both directions.

For example, in the past six months, my colleague Ms. Jane Perman and I have conducted a series of focus-group type of discussions with groups of interfaith couples as part of our site-visits to five JCCs around the country.

The groups have included young couples on the eve of their marriage as well as couples with teen-age children, and even couples who were already empty-nesters. In every instance they came to these discussions, invariably held at JCCs, because they were looking for some Jewish connection. Whether it was a search for holiday recipes, or some knowledge of comparative religion, or a better understanding of the meaning of Jewish life cycle ceremonies was quite besides the point. Their presence in an explicitly Jewish setting, in an activity whose stated mission was to include them as part of the Jewish community -- regardless of their personal religious convictions or commitments -- was a testimonial to the power of an unconditional Jewish embrace.

In every instance Jane and I were amazed and slightly awed by the sense of gratitude expressed by one or another of the couples for having been invited to participate in these focus-groups.

Many expressed a sense of past alienation from the Jewish community as they've experienced in Hebrew schools and temples. Many, too, felt they've not had any place previously to take their concerns about child-rearing, religion, identity, and marital communication.

From the vantage point of the Jewish community one could easily identify the many deficits of Jewish education and lukewarm commitment -- not to mention the enormous complication of competing and conflicting religious ideas -- that such couples bring with them. But they came, they shared of their own experiences willingly, and invariably expressed an enthusiastic interest in being part of some on-going involvement with the JCC -- and by extension with the larger Jewish community.

There is little doubt from the findings of both NJPS 1990 as well as from other sources, such as our focus-groups, that there is a much weaker sense of Jewish identity among the intermarried and their children than is found among Jews who are married to other Jews.

However, there is also a fair indication of residual Jewish ties expressed by the intermarried in a variety of ways, such as subjective feelings about the importance of one's Jewishness, certain holiday practices that can be enjoyed with one's family, and even a desire on the part of many to live in or near Jewish neighborhoods. These residual ties are not nearly as attenuated as more formal religious and organizational ties.

#### Challenge to survival

The great growth in the numbers of intermarrieds in its midst poses an unprecedented challenge to the modern American Jewish community. Will American Jewry survive the demographic revolution that is now being wrought upon it by intermarriage? And, will it retain its organizational strength, its cultural

vitality into the twenty-first century despite the transformation of the Jewish family? It must, and I believe it can! But, to do so we must think beyond the debates now raging in response to the challenges of intermarriage. We must embark on a strategy of communal survival that differs sharply from the Jewish survival strategies of the past two centuries.

In the past century the central challenges to Jewish group survival have been framed by pogroms, the Holocaust, the rebirth of the State of Israel, and the salvaging of remnant Jewish populations in beleaguered lands. Each of these challenges has been met with the outpouring of extraordinary amounts of political creativity, and voluntary group activity, on the part of America's Jews.

However, the successful meeting of these challenges has conditioned the Jewish community to deal with its problems by essentially reactive, defensive measures. These are not likely to serve us well in the decades ahead. Needed, are more pro-active, culturally and even politically assertive measures that have been rather foreign to the Jewish style in America.

From the dawn of the liberal era in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Europe, the majority of Jews opted for social, religious, and cultural adaptability as a strategy for group survival. The operative slogan for the Jewish *modus vivendi* was be a Jew in your home and a citizen on the street. As part of this strategy, liberal Jewish thought argued that Jewish survival is best secured by three factors: social tolerance, equitable laws, and Jewish social invisibility.

Ironically, acceptance from the outside, it seems, was increasingly reciprocated by blending from the inside.

The experiences of the second and third generation children of Jewish immigrant parents placed increasing pressure on young American Jews to become just like their gentile peers. On the other hand, their increasing distance from immigrant ancestors has rapidly attenuated the hold of tradition on their lives. Thus, they have come to take for

granted that their lack of Jewish distinctiveness in the public domain should also prevail in the private domain.

One consequence of this transformation of Jewish identity is that as young Jews have entered the free-choice American marriage market they have found less and less reason to filter out their Gentile friends as potential marriage partners. Not only are they and their friends more alike, but the families and homes they go on to form are also losing their Jewish distinctiveness.

If Jewish parents and Jewish leaders have been distressed about the rising rate of intermarriage, surely one reason is that they have seen the unanticipated consequences of their own survival strategy boomerang in the lives of their children and grandchildren. In short, intermarriage has been one of the inescapable costs of the traditional strategy of Jewish survival. For that reason, efforts to stem its tide have proven generally ineffective.

The private nature of the act, along with the fact that it seems to spring from values -- such as love, the desire for personal fulfillment, and egalitarianism -- that are deeply cherished by contemporary American Jews, has made intermarriage a far more difficult challenge than some of the historically more familiar ones that Jews have had to face in their struggle for survival.

### Outreach

If American Jewry is to successfully meet the challenge that the current demographic revolution poses to its on-going vitality it must develop new strategies of outreach to interfaith families. Indeed, it has already begun to do so, principally through the Reform movement, and increasingly through the Conservative and Reconstructionist movement as well.

As I have indicated, other efforts have also been launched under the auspices of the local JCCs and Family Services agencies as well.

The various Jewish outreach efforts that have been undertaken thus far, are characterized by their common focus on the Jewish "internal agenda" (i.e. a focus on Jewish survival issues, and issues of institutional strategy). Regardless of sponsorship or purpose, they have concentrated on issues of program curriculum, (e.g. Jewish life-cycle and calendar celebration, introduction to synagogue practice and etiquette, etc.), personnel and methods of instruction, qualities of the setting and recruitment.

None have addressed the broader question of how outreach relates to the long-standing commitment of most Jews to social and cultural invisibility in the public domain.

If outreach is to succeed, it must confront the question of how Jews as individuals and the Jewish community as an organized entity confront the wider society. That question is not about the techniques of programming, or teaching style, or recruitment. It is not simply about making the "stranger" feel more welcome. Ultimately, that question is about how Jews as individuals comport themselves vis-a-vis their Gentile neighbors, and how the organized Jewish community represents itself in the public.

#### A new vision of Jewish survival

No community can depend solely on the efforts of its most exemplary members for collective survival. It must also develop institutional strategies that bolster the abilities of its ordinary members. Thus, the challenge that remains for the Jewish outreach enterprise is to articulate a new vision of Jewish survival.

I believe that vision must remain committed to at least two of the three principles of the traditional tri-part strategy: that is, to ever broadening the climate of tolerance in society for all cultures and doing so by strong political advocacy for laws that guarantee civil liberties and social justice.

On the other hand, if Jewish outreach is to have more than episodic relevance to just a few individuals it must finally reject the posture of Jewish social invisibility that has been

the lot of Jewry in the "liberal" modern world. It must take Judaism as a religion and Jewishness as a culture and civilization public, and stake its claim to a fair share of the public's attention. How this is to be done is the challenge that lies ahead for effective Jewish outreach.

Some of the ways that Judaism might be taken more public are suggested by the struggles of blacks and Hispanics to improve their image. The pressures brought to bear in recent years on advertising and media executives, on the publishers of textbooks and educational policy makers have clearly borne fruit in changing the public image of those communities. Jews might well consider:

- advocating for more positive, identifiably Jewish characters, themes, and images on the major networks (particularly in major urban markets where Jews comprise a significant segment of the consumer population);
- advocating for the inclusion of more Jewish cultural content in high school and college textbooks and courses, particularly in the humanities and social sciences;
- advocating for the restoration of Hebrew as a language option in high schools and colleges;
- advocating for the greater inclusion of Judaica in the holdings of local libraries, in the exhibition schedules of museums, and in the programs of community sponsored theaters and symphonies; and, in general,
- advocating for greater cultural exchange with Israel and other significant centers of Jewish culture around the world.

What effect these various strategies might have on the actual rate of intermarriage is impossible to predict. They may well have no impact on that issue at all. However, they are likely to enhance the self-image of Jews in ways that are public and accessible to non-Jews as well. As such, they are quite likely to provide the open door to Jewish civilization through which all who wish to come in may do so.

## THE ISSUES FROM AN INDIVIDUAL VIEWPOINT

Rabbi Rachel Cowan  
Director, Jewish Life Programs  
The Nathan Cummings Foundation

I would like to cover three areas that relate to the individual's experience of the community's concern about intermarriage. Here I am speaking principally about the views of the Jewish partner of an interfaith marriage. Other separate but important concerns are those of the parents whose child is intermarrying (most of whom do not know how to communicate successfully with the couple about this issue), and of the children of intermarriages.

It is obvious, but bears repeating, that there is not one answer to this situation, but there are many small changes in attitude that will accrete to make a difference in the willingness of intermarried couples to join the Jewish community, and there are a variety of successful outreach programs to those seeking conversion and those interested in teaching their children something about Judaism which, if adequately funded, could make an impact on attrition.

I would like to talk first about who these individuals are and then about their perceptions of the Jewish community. Finally, I would like to give some ideas about what the Jewish community can do to make it more likely that these people will choose to make their spiritual home in some sector of the Jewish community.

### The individuals

The partners in intermarriage are hundreds of thousands of people. These are people in love. They feel love and happiness, we see problem and crisis. We use terms like cancer, epidemic, an internal holocaust; they use terms like joy, passion, future, mutuality and fulfillment. They think about choice; we talk about sanction. We do not speak the same language - they do not hear our humanity.

The non-Jews range from secular humanists to devout Catholics and practicing Buddhists. The Jews may be:

- a student at the University of Wisconsin for whom Jewish continuity is an abstract intellectual concept and not sufficient reason to refuse dates with non-Jewish classmates, team-mates or dorm-mates;

- a woman in her 30's who studied in Jerusalem and is a synagogue attendee, and who finally has met a man who loves her and understands her, but is not Jewish;

- a Jewish medical student who never thinks about this issue;

- a female graduate of a Jewish day school whose working relationship turned gradually into a love affair with a fellow investment banker but whom she will not marry unless he converts;

- a divorcee whose first marriage to a Jew brought pain and misery; or

- an anthropologist who values the preservation of culture, but wonders if he must practice it in his own marriage.

These are people who are successful. Most of them like being Jewish, and value it. They want to pass on a Jewish identity to their children, though many do not know how to do so. Above all, they are Americans -- they believe in the importance of individual achievement and happiness. Some of them will look for us, some of them will let us into their lives, some of them may never care.

What do they need? If we ask them, rather than telling them, they will speak of the need to resolve the issue of passing on Jewish identity when they have children. It is not a big issue for most of them in their lives right now. They do however, want to please their parents. They would like to find a caring, humane rabbi to perform the wedding, or to co-officiate. But for now, what they want most is to get married, to treat each other with mutual respect and fairness, and to be happy.

I find that when couples have been through an interfaith couples workshop, many will discover that they need to learn



more about religion and spirituality, Judaism, and children's religious development. They need help in bringing their Jewish understanding up to the level of the rest of their experiential knowledge, and they need help with the geography of the Jewish community, so they can find an open door.

They need help in activating a core identity, in opening up their Jewishness to share it with their non-Jewish partner. The Jewish partner needs help in finding personal Jewish meaning -- Israel and the Holocaust will not provide it for most of them. They need to understand Christianity, Buddhism, or whatever religion their partner has in order to plan their future spiritual life together, be able to understand their partner, and communicate well.

#### Perception of the community

When partners in intermarriage look at the Jewish community what do they see, and what message do they get? It varies, but typically they see their parents, their rabbi and their synagogue. Are their parents rejecting, rude, welcoming, sharing? Does the rabbi speak on the high holidays against intermarriage, or talk about compelling Jewish insights? Does the rabbi explain successfully why he/she will not officiate at the wedding, or act rudely when asked to? What language does the rabbi use to talk about couples like them? Is the synagogue lively or serious, welcoming or cold, an in-group, boring or teaching, celebrating, youthful and imaginative?

#### Communal objectives

We need to find language for the opportunity that exists, and not just for the danger. These are people whose energy, participation, and commitment the Jewish community needs. We need to figure out how to understand and to share what we have to offer them.

We need to recognize that their interests vary -- some will convert, some will be "fellow-travellers", some will come back later, some will disappear. We should think strategically about deploying resources so that we aim our programs at people who are likely to respond.

While we recognize that conversion leads to greater commitment, we need to understand that conversion is a process that requires learning, teaching, experience, welcome and support. Not every journey will be short and simple.

We need to pay attention to the barriers to participation, -- i.e., tickets, sermons, insider groups, the expense of Jewish life and find creative alternatives.

We need to provide programs that are gates of entry in a variety of venues. Some models are the Derekh Torah program at the 92nd Street Y in Manhattan -- a 30 week Introduction to Judaism, the University of Judaism Introduction program, the Union of American Hebrew Congregation's Times and Seasons program, Stepping Stones, learners minyanim, high-quality singles programs, and interfaith couples workshops.

We need to spend resources on high quality programs of public relations and public education.

We need to avoid a false dichotomy between outreach and in-reach. The students, for example, in the Derekh Torah program are not fish, and we have not spent millions on a fancy rod to catch them. They are Jewish souls discovering the beauty of their tradition. Some of them and their partners will become Jewish leaders. We can not do outreach without doing in-reach. We have to strengthen ourselves and our Jewish product if we hope to make it attractive to others. We can never bring others into the Jewish fold unless we have a richer, more interesting, more vital and relevant community. And, we cannot do in-reach without doing outreach, for we must work in dialogue with our larger society, infusing our tradition with contemporary insights.

**OUTREACH, INTERMARRIAGE AND JEWISH CONTINUITY:  
TOWARD A NEW SYNAGOGUE-FEDERATION PARTNERSHIP**

Rabbi Lavey Derby  
Executive Director, Council on Jewish Life  
Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles

I have a fantasy about the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. In my fantasy, CJF makes the historic decision to publish the entire survey in the traditional format of the Talmud. The text of the survey, with the tables, graphs and data would be printed in the center of the page. Around the margins, in a different type-face, the commentaries and analysis of our best scholars will be printed. I imagine these scholars poring over the text, as if it were scripture, trying to wring every last drop of insight and implication from its data. Of course, in fine Talmudic tradition they will vehemently disagree and debate each other across the pages of the text, just as Rashi and the Tosaphists did.

I have a second fantasy about the Survey, not nearly as positive as the first. In this fantasy the National Jewish Population Survey is "Dead Sea Scrolled," with various sections parcelled out to individual scholars who will study them independently for the next decade or so. Should this fantasy become reality, I hope that someone will give a copy of the entire text to The Huntington Library in Pasadena so that the general public can sneak looks at it.

I do not mean to suggest a cavalier attitude toward the Population Survey. Quite the contrary! I believe the National Jewish Population Survey is an extremely important document, if for no other reason than it provides the hard data to confirm most everything about Jewish life - and in particular about intermarriage and Jewish affiliation - that people in the field have presumed for years, through intuition and experience. I don't need statistical tables to tell me that more people are intermarrying; intermarriage is a fact in most every family that I know.

### Imperative that we act

I want, and the community needs, to have the Population Survey studied, with the Rashi and the Tosaphists commentaries. The danger is, however, that it will be studied only, and not acted upon. The last thing our Jewish community needs are more studies, assiduously developed and prepared by committees, publicized, and then set on the shelf. What we desperately need are effective techniques, strategies and programs which address the critical issues of Jewish identity and affiliations and which meet the needs of the complex Jewish life portrayed in the National Jewish Population Survey.

I recognize that this is a form of Federation heresy, but it is time for us, as Jewish professionals and lay leaders, to take seriously a credo suggested by Tom Peters in his best-selling book In Search of Excellence : "FAILURE IS BETTER THAN COMMITTEE PROCESS." We have studied, discussed and analyzed this data carefully. Now it is imperative that we take the next step, that we act. If we create programs and fail, so be it. At least we will learn important lessons from the failures. And be assured, there will be no successes, there will be no decrease in the rate of intermarriage, there will be no dent in the percentage of unaffiliated unless we act now.

The focus of perhaps the greatest attention in the 1990 survey is the increasing rate of intermarriage. The debate over real percentages, types of samples and other research methodologies can best be left to demographers. That intermarriage is more prevalent than ever - the price of the "brutal bargain" as it has been called, and of an abundance of freedom never before experienced by any Jewish community in history - is simply a matter of fact.

### Connecting Jews to Jewish life

For me, the question with regard to intermarriage and Jewish continuity is twofold: first, can the community reframe the reality of intermarriage into an opportunity for connecting Jews to Jewish life?; and second, can the community

marshal its resources to create and provide meaningful messages about Jewish life and inviting experiences rich in Jewish values, meaning and spirituality which will magnetically attract Jews to a deepened connection with Jewish community and Jewish life? These two questions are integrally related. To answer them, however, will require a community plan which strategically addresses outreach, be it to the pre-intermarried, the already intermarried, as well as the JNRs (Jews, no religion), the marginally affiliated or those who we know as, or who call themselves "just Jewish."

#### A new cooperative partnership

The community plan model which I suggest requires the basic recognition that there is not one institution, agency or organization strong enough and well-positioned enough in the community to single-handedly have a large impact on either the intermarried or the marginally affiliated. Minimally, a new cooperative partnership needs to be built between Federation and synagogues so that together they might address the issue.

Barry Shrage has already outlined the basic need for this collaboration in his essay "A Communal Response to the Challenges of the 1990 CJF Jewish Population Survey." There he argues that synagogues are the "primary gateways" through which the marginally affiliated might enter Jewish life. He suggests that Federations could help synagogues by providing resources needed for additional staff whose responsibility it would be to have more personalized contact with potential congregants, as well as funds for innovative programs and family education.

While it is true that synagogues do serve as a central gateway to Jewish life, I do not believe they will be able to bear the brunt of an affiliation plan by themselves. In fact, neither Federations nor synagogues are going to make more than a dent in this problem alone. Federation's expertise is in communal planning and fundraising; it hasn't the ritual, emotional or spiritual content to create long-lasting Jewish affiliation. On the other hand, synagogues, which can provide the ritual, emotional and spiritual content of identity, don't

have the resources (except in unique circumstances) - either financial or personnel resources - to provide what is needed. In this regard Shrage is absolutely correct: admitting synagogues to the allocations process is vital. Together, a synagogue-Federation coalition might have the resources and the central community power to make a difference.

The first step in creating such an alliance would be to convene the community synagogue leadership - lay and rabbinic - with Federation leaders so that together they might become educated as to the realities of Jewish life as revealed in the National Jewish Population Survey. It must be made clear and repeated over and over that the issues of outreach, intermarriage and affiliation are not merely a challenge for Federation alone; they are not challenges for liberal Jews or secular Jews alone; it is not a matter of this synagogue or that denomination taking on these issues by themselves. The issue of intermarriage and its implications for Jewish life in the future is an issue which affects the entire Jewish people. It is a community issue that requires a community response.

Such an invitation to synagogues to join forces in working together and with Federation on a communal challenge is a double-edged sword. For the synagogues it will require transcending their congregational and denominational agendas and working for the common good of C'lal Yisrael. For Federation, it will require honestly inviting synagogue leadership into the communal planning process, including rabbis in the process as full partners, recognizing synagogues as full and equal community agencies, and most importantly, making significant resources available to synagogues for their part in the community plan. It will also mean community leadership together giving serious thought to how synagogues might become more effective institutions - more than a gathering place for the "davenning-minority" and those in need of a life-cycle celebration. It will require synagogues accepting a community mandate to serve the Jewish community as a whole and not draw the boundary line at membership. Most rabbis already understand this transforming need. What is needed is a hand extended in partnership from Federation.

### Synagogues must be heard

It may be argued that many synagogues, particularly the more traditional Conservative and Orthodox synagogues, at worst will be antagonistic to an outreach effort to the intermarried, and at best will be highly uncomfortable with it. I believe that they must be invited into the process anyway. Their rabbis' and leaders' opinions must be heard, recognized and accepted as legitimate expressions of an authentic ideology. This should be the case with all opinions expressed around the planning table.

It may be suggested to the more traditional elements of the community that while they, in particular, may have difficulties endorsing the notion of outreach to the intermarried, the Jewish community as a whole is not about to turn its back on any Jew who might potentially and reasonably be attracted to Jewish life. It may be pointed out that it was community and inter-denominational cooperation that helped make the creation of the State of Israel a reality and which laid the foundation for the redemption of Soviet and Ethiopian Jewry. It may be said that Federation, representing the entire Jewish community can and should do things that synagogues cannot. Traditionalists might be invited to participate in an aspect of the plan which is suitable for them, and which does not require an abandonment of their ideological principles. Perhaps Orthodox rabbis might join forces to work towards defining new halakhic norms for the conversion of children born to non-Jewish mothers. Rabbi Simcha Cohen of Los Angeles, an Orthodox rabbi, has, in fact, taken courageous steps in this direction. Similarly, some synagogues might form a coalition, as part of a community plan, to create an ongoing series of outreach events to enable Jewish singles to meet each other. This, too, should be a part of a community-approach to intermarriage and affiliation.

### What interfaith couples seek

While including the synagogues in a communal planning strategy is a critical step, the partnership assigned to address issues of intermarriage and Jewish continuity must be much broader. Synagogues are not the only purveyor's of

Jewish meaning and identity in the community. Synagogue professionals and lay leaders tend to be bound by their denominational ideologies. The unaffiliated, and particularly, the interfaith couple, are not seeking specific denominational ideologies. They are in need of openness, warmth, and space to explore. Specific ideologies tend to limit, if not hinder, that exploration.

Other agencies, all agencies which might provide an opportunity for people to draw closer to Jewish life, need to be included. When it comes to outreach, the more players at the table, the better. To turn momentarily to a Hasidic reference: it was said of the Baal Sham Tov that he could look into the soul of an individual and know exactly what act of "tikkun" - of repair - was necessary for that soul's bliss and fulfillment. No one today is the Baal Sham Tov. We cannot look at individuals and say to them "you need Reform" or "You need Conservative." We cannot afford the luxury of saying "This is the only Jewish doorway to walk through in order to be a part of Jewish community really. What we as a community need are as many open-doors, as many gateways to Jewish life as possible.

We need the Federation to convene all the agencies in the community which might in any way be responsive to intermarried couples at a point when they can be attracted to connect to Jewish life, or which are responsive to any unaffiliated Jew, for that matter. Jewish Community Centers, Hillels, Jewish Family Service, Jewish pre-schools, Bureaus of Jewish Education and religious schools, Jewish hospitals, counselling services, adult Jewish education programs and Jewish institutions of higher learning - all these and more need to be at the planning table with the synagogues.

I envision all these players, sitting with top Federation leadership, convened by Federation, developing a community strategy that:

- 1) identifies every possible moment of entry and doorway into the Jewish community for the intermarried;



- 2) identifies as many of the potential needs of the target group as possible;
- 3) develops new programs for the agencies involved to meet those needs and to be responsive to the entry-point; and
- 4) coordinates all these programs into an organic network, in which information flows back and forth and people are moved and tracked through the system.

This exact model of community planning has been adopted and funded in Los Angeles for the acculturation of Soviet emigres. Other communities probably use the same model. If we are willing and able to do this for Russian Jews, what prevents us from doing it for my American born next-door neighbor? Or for my cousin?

In addition to synagogues and community service agencies, room must be made at the planning table for new, innovative "alternative" programs as well. In Los Angeles the Jewish Feminist Center and the independent School of Jewish Meditation have been hugely successful in attracting and connecting hundreds of unaffiliated Jews to Jewish life. These, and other alternative non-institutionalized programs which we have not yet even begun to generate, are capable of conveying meaningful possibilities for enrichment through Jewish connectedness. Enough time and energy must be devoted in the planning process to create, shape and fund these alternative doorways to Jewish life.

If we are serious about reaching out to interfaith couples, or to individuals before they become involved in interfaith relationships, we are going to have to create positive, powerful expressions of Jewish life, to provide Jewish experiences and messages which are meaningful and toward which people will gravitate. The era of scare tactics, guilt and exhortation is over. The idea of insisting that parents "just say no" is simplistic and will not alone convince our youth. If we want people to affiliate, to become more Jewish, we had best provide the sense that Jewish life

is beautiful, enriching, intellectually vibrant and spiritually fulfilling.

#### Can Federations meet the challenge

Finally, if Federations are serious about taking on the challenges presented by demographic studies - including outreach to the intermarried and the issues of Jewish continuity - we will need to create appropriate structures in Federation to work on this challenge. A CJF survey of large and intermediate communities found that only two communities had intermarriage and outreach on the planning agenda. Perhaps a few others have continuity on the agenda. The likelihood is that there is not a single Federation with a department dedicated to these issues. The problem with pursuing the course of action which has been suggested here this morning - that we go into the community and find out from the intermarried themselves what it is they need from the Jewish community - is that in all likelihood they will tell us! If we have not planned in advance and developed the systems necessary to be responsive to the expressed needs, if we do not have departments and staff dedicated to this work, we will have lost an opportunity that may be difficult to regain.

We have been talking about affiliation and studying it for twenty years. We have watched the rate of intermarriage steadily increase over the years. We have listened to rabbinic voices pleading with us to take issues of Jewish affiliation and continuity seriously, and to put it on the Federation agenda. The National Jewish Population Survey provides one more incentive, one more call to action. If we do not begin to act now, it will not only be "a shanda" - it will be irresponsible.

#### Spiritual redemption

As a scholar with CLAL - The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership - I travelled around the country and taught groups of Federation leaders about the rabbinic concept of "Pidyon Shevuyim" - the redemption of captives. The religious duty to redeem captive Jews who may be in physical danger resonated in such a profound way by these leaders that

they began immediate Operation Exodus campaigns, frequently making gifts themselves three or four times. There is a corollary concept known as "Tinok She'Nishbah" - a child who is spiritually a captive, who cannot learn to live as a Jew. This spiritual captivity is as dangerous, as heinous as physical captivity. Now that we have learned the lesson of physical captivity and have responded magnificently as a national community, isn't it time we turn our attention to the possibility of opening Jewish doors to all who are willing to enter? Spiritual redemption, creating possibilities for stronger Jewish connectedness, is also a mitzvah. All it requires from us is commitment, and a new communal partnership.

**PART II: IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNAL POLICY &  
PLANNING DEALING WITH ISSUES OF  
INTERMARRIAGE AND JEWISH CONTINUITY**

**POLICY CONSIDERATIONS FOR FEDERATIONS AND THEIR  
CONSTITUENTS TO INITIATE COMMUNITY ACTION**

David G. Sacks, President  
UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York

Seven guiding propositions

1. Directing Federations, (individually or through the Council of Jewish Federations) into efforts to outreach to the intermarried does not condone or encourage intermarriage any more than freedom of choice encourages or condones promiscuity.
2. Directing some community resources to outreach to the intermarried need not deplete resources -- human or financial -- from prevention.
3. There is a demographic imperative in two of the statistics from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey:
  - 52 percent of Jewish marriages were intermarriages (1985-1990)
  - 28 percent of children of intermarrieds are raised Jewish
4. Synagogues cannot do it alone -- the non-affiliation rate is above 50 percent, and higher than that among the intermarried.
5. Federations must get involved.
6. Federations cannot do it alone.
7. We need a national Federation effort.

Jewish education and culture

Jewish admonition, education and lamentation have failed to stem the tide of intermarriage in our assimilated society.

Jewish education cannot be seen as prophylactic with a 100 percent effective rate.

Jewish education should be viewed as one resource within a full spectrum of responses.

Continue educational efforts, particularly at the times in life at which the marginally affiliated Jew is most vulnerable: dating in high school and college, marriage, and raising children.

#### Outreach vs. in-reach

Many, including Jack Ukeles, President of Ukeles Associates, have the view that communal investment priorities should remain focused on those who have already demonstrated a higher degree of Jewish involvement than have the intermarried.

Directing community resources to outreach to intermarrieds need not deplete those resources -- human or financial. We are talking tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars, not mega dollars.

#### What is goal of outreach?

Is the goal of outreach conversion of the non-Jewish population? Is the goal the ingathering of the issue of intermarriage? Is it missionary, or merely educational?

The answer is yes to all these goals. The goals are twofold: to promote Judaism as a religion; and to promote Jewishness as a culture.

#### The demographic imperative

According to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, 52 percent of Jewish marriages were intermarriages (1985-1990) and only 28 percent of children of intermarrieds are raised Jewish.

If we could have only 51 percent of those children, "we would win."

Synagogues cannot do it alone because of the non-affiliation rate especially among the intermarried.

### Role of Federations

Only two major Federations, Los Angeles and MetroWest, have outreach efforts and only a few of the others have programs.

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations cut 82 percent of its outreach budget and the Conservatives cut 10 percent. Synagogues cannot do it alone, Federations must help:

- through Jewish education (community centers and camps)
- through trips to Israel, and
- through family service agencies

The problem is too big and too pervasive to be left to any single element -- leadership, synagogues, Federations, or national agencies.

### Role of national agencies

Most agencies have a single purpose, have expertise, and serve a clearinghouse role and as a resource for all (Federations and synagogues) to promote the best practices.

There is no need for a new national agency. CJF should not act alone, but a CJF co-option or the Jewish Outreach Institute are both acceptable possibilities.

### Downside

We may fail, but it is better to fail in the pursuit of excellence than not to try. If we do not try, will our grandchildren say of us what we say about the Jews of the 1930's?

We will have to be delicate in the handling of all constituencies: the observant, the intermarried and the community. We will offend some, and we may spend more than the results seem to justify.

### Next steps

Put intermarriage on the agenda of your Federation and put it on the agenda of CJF.

**IMPLICATIONS OF INTERMARRIAGE  
FOR JEWISH FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

**Marc S. Salisch**

**President, Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies**

The Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies (AJFCA) welcomes this opportunity to participate in this Symposium, a significant effort to facilitate a productive dialogue on intermarriage and Jewish continuity.

The subject of this Symposium is a critical concern for our Association and our member agencies. This Symposium is also helpful as we develop, with our members, policies on Jewish communal issues that are critical to the future of the Jewish family and Jewish children. In this process, which is a new role for our Association, it has become increasingly clear that both Jewish communal policy and the process by which it is developed have significant implications for the program priorities of our agencies, their communities, and the continental Jewish community.

The Association recognizes the critical importance of not only involving our national leadership and our local agencies, but entering into a dialogue with representatives of a broad range of other local and national organizations. We look forward to future opportunities to work with many of you and your organizations that share our concern for the future of the Jewish family, the needs of Jewish children and adolescents, the provision of social services under Jewish communal auspices, and many other challenges to the future viability of the North American Jewish community.

Before I briefly outline some of the policy choices facing our agencies in serving Jewish families and children, I thought it important to share with you two major assumptions that impact upon the ability of our agencies to respond to the challenges to Jewish continuity posed by intermarriage.



### Who should our agencies serve?

Most communities and Jewish Family and Children's Agencies would agree that they have a special responsibility for the poor, the needy and the powerless, but too often to the exclusion of other members of the Jewish community. While most of our agencies are no longer limiting their services to this segment of the Jewish community, too many communities have yet to accept that a broad range of members of the Jewish community can benefit from the expertise of their local agency. Many of us sitting in this room could and should avail ourselves of services provided by the local Jewish Family and Children's Services agency. Our ability to deal with the intermarried, our sons, daughters and grandchildren, will be limited until the community accepts a broader definition of our service role.

### How do we help ourselves?

The lay and professional leadership of our agencies suffer from confusion and ambivalence about how to best respond to the reality of intermarriage. Individual feelings about, and personal experiences with intermarriage, combined with the impact of traditional social work values, impact on how we perceive the appropriate role for the community and its agencies. This ambivalence towards dealing with intermarriage, and a need to clarify or redefine the professional values that guide the work of our staff, are a concern not only of the leadership of family and children's agencies, but must be dealt with by the leadership of many other communal organizations. It is unrealistic to expect our agencies to confront these issues in isolation from the rest of the Jewish community.

### **Policy Choices**

In my preparation for this presentation, I had an opportunity to review a substantial amount of program material that clearly indicates that many, if not most, of our agencies are addressing, in some way, intermarriage and Jewish continuity. While I could have shared with you many of these creative programming efforts, it seems more appropriate to

focus on the policy issues and decisions confronting our agencies and their Association. These are policy issues and decisions, that, I would suggest, face not only the Jewish family and children's service movement, but local Federations and other Jewish communal agencies and their national organizations, as well.

As one means of helping our individual agencies resolve how they will meet the challenge of intermarriage, we have identified a number of areas that require the development of appropriate policies, and we are in the process of addressing them. I would like to very briefly discuss seven of these policy areas.

#### Practice/programming policy or agency policy?

It is clear that many of our agencies are responding in the context of their traditional practice modalities and programs to the needs of the intermarried. Is it desirable and appropriate to limit our decisions to practice concerns and policies, or should we begin to address agency policy? This is the issue that must be resolved. If we want to evaluate serving the intermarried along with other significant agency service commitments and priorities, then boards must explore this service area and provide a clear policy direction for the staff and to the community.

#### Responding to individual and community needs

Our agencies have a long history of responding to members of our community in need and we are already responding to the families of the intermarried, the intermarried, the formerly intermarried and the children of the intermarried, when they are in pain. While we can and will continue to meet individual needs, our ability to assist the community in responding to the challenge posed by intermarriage will be greatly enhanced if this is seen as responding to a need of the Jewish community, as well as to the needs of individuals within that community. The ability of our agency leadership to address intermarriage in a community context will be enhanced if the community openly accepts that as one of its priority concerns.

### Dealing with intermarriage as pathology or relationship option?

If Jewish Family and Children's Agencies and the Jewish community deal with intermarriage as a pathology, and address the intermarried as exhibiting deviant behavior, we will ensure the failure of our programs for the intermarried. It seems safe to suggest that the majority of the intermarried and their families do not see themselves as "sick" people needing help to be cured of an illness. As comforting as such an approach might be for some of us, it flies in the face of today's reality.

While most of us, even many of the intermarried, could agree that intermarriage is not, at least in the abstract, the most desired relationship option, the reality is that most intermarried individuals feel that they have selected a healthy relationship option that is appropriate for them. Like any other healthy relationship, they would benefit from support and assistance as they explore and perfect the many facets of that relationship. Their relationship to the Jewish heritage of one of the partners, their relationship to the Jewish community and the role of Judaism in raising their children are just three of the many issues that they may benefit from help in exploring. These issues are quite similar to ones that many of our agencies address for the intra-married through Jewish Family Life Education Programs.

### Decide upon a value system to guide agency practices

The social work profession has traditionally been trained in a series of process values that guide how the practitioner interacts with clients. While these process values may be quite appropriate for many agency settings and client relationship, there are also situations in which the basic values of the system determine the appropriate behavior limitations for the individual practitioner. The agency needs to determine what set of values will guide the practices of its professional staff, as it provides services to intermarried individuals as an agency with a commitment to the Jewish community and the continuity of the Jewish people, as well as to meeting the needs of clients.

### Develop policies & programs reactively or proactively?

Jewish Family and Children's Services agencies can choose to develop policies, specific services and programs dealing with intermarriage by responding to community requests and client demands. The alternative is for the agency to look at the growing numbers of intermarried and their needs, resolve how the agency should best meet these needs on behalf of the Jewish community, determine the type of support required to implement these policies and services and then advocate for them within the community. The second approach, the proactive one, demands that AJFCA Agencies depart from their traditional role of responding to needs brought to their attention and take responsibility for determining how they can best respond to the challenge of intermarriage.

### Autonomous or collaborative involvement?

There are a number of service areas that are clearly recognized as the responsibility of JF&CS Agencies in which they could develop responses to the particular needs of the intermarried. There are other service areas in which a number of agencies or organizations including JF&CS could appropriately respond and others in which JF&CS can provide support and expertise to other community groups, as they provide services to the intermarried. To maximize the effectiveness of our response, we need to bring together and involve all elements and organizations within the organized Jewish community. Unfortunately, too many communities lack a history of successful collaboration among agencies and with Federation, no less with synagogues, self-help groups, youth groups and educational institutions. Despite all these concerns, we must place collaboration ahead of the specific agenda of any agency or organization.

### Participant or leadership role?

There is little question that JF&CS agencies can and should play a role in any community effort to deal with intermarriage. Like any community effort, there is a need for a lead agency to mobilize and coordinate community resources. While the decision must be obviously reached in each

community, I would strongly suggest that the JF&CS Agency, because of its expertise in dealing with a broad range of human needs and concerns, the neutrality of its ideological position, reputation for openness and accessibility, degree of protection from donor over reaction, and freedom from being seen as self-serving in recruiting members, is ideally suited to play this lead role. The decision about the role it would like to play needs to be carefully considered by each agency's Board and professional leadership, and then by the community.

Next step, an appropriate response

While I am pleased that I was able to share with you some of the policy decisions facing JF&CS Agencies as they mobilize to respond to the growing challenge of intermarriage, I am even more excited by the opportunities for our agencies and the North American Jewish community in successfully responding to the intermarried in our communities. I would be less than candid if I left you with the impression that once the agencies resolve these policy issues, it will be an easy task to begin serving the intermarried. I see the resolution of these policy issues as the prerequisite to the even more difficult process of providing an appropriate community and agency response to the intermarried. This response will demand changes in the attitudes and feelings of staff and lay leaders, as well as new program directions and initiatives.

As the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies engages its members in discussing these policy decisions, I would like to tell you that I am confident about the decisions that our 145 member agencies will reach. I do know what I would like the outcome to be, but as I have learned quite quickly, the ability of an Association President to direct local policy decisions is quite limited, possibly nonexistent. What I can promise you is that we have placed the discussion of these policy decisions very high on our National Agenda, and that we will make it difficult, but unfortunately not impossible, for our member agencies to be unaware of the policy choices that they need to consider. It is our goal to help the JF&CS Agency in your community accept

its responsibility to participate in developing and delivering a community response to the challenges posed by intermarriage.

I want to thank the leadership of CJF for beginning this important dialogue, and all the communities and organizations represented in this room for their willingness to enter a constructive dialogue on intermarriage and Jewish continuity. I hope that our Association and our member agencies can continue to contribute to this process as we all work together to mobilize the resources of the North American Jewish community to respond to the new realities of intermarriage.

## IMPLICATIONS OF INTERMARRIAGE FOR JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTERS

Rosanne Levitt  
Project Director, Interfaith Connection\*

Interfaith couples often view a program at a Jewish Community Center as less threatening than one held at a synagogue. Many of the non-Jewish partners I have encountered have never met or known a Jewish person prior to their involvement with their partner (as difficult as that may be for some of us to believe!). They are wary and suspicious. Just walking in the door of a Jewish institution is often traumatizing. The Jewish Community Center setting often provides a less threatening locale and gives the non-Jewish partner an opportunity to learn about Judaism -- its cultural as well as religious values.

### Ideal entry points

In facilitating groups and workshops in the past five years, I have observed that the non-Jewish partner gains a greater understanding and develops a positive regard for Judaism as a result of participation in a group. I consider this an important first step in connecting these interfaith couples to the Jewish community.

In addition, the message to the Jewish partner is, "We want you and your non-Jewish partner to participate in Jewish life." Will all of these couples elect to participate? No. Will some of these couples elect to participate? Yes. The challenge is to develop programs in which a majority will continue to participate and raise their children as Jews.

Jewish Community Centers are the ideal entry point for interfaith families and those Jewish families who are marginally affiliated. The Centers have a pluralistic membership in which they can feel comfortable. Jewish Community Centers, by the very nature of programs we offer, often attract intermarried and unaffiliated households at a

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\* A Joint Project of the San Francisco Jewish Community Center and the Jewish Family and Children's Services, San Francisco, with funding provided by the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties.

crucial time in the families' development. This often happens through pre-school and day care programs. For a great many families, children's involvement is the single most powerful influence in becoming involved in Jewish life. For instance, attendance at a nursery school Shabbat program with their children may be the parents' first Jewish experience in their marriage.

The Jewish Community Centers are not necessarily selected for their Jewish content, but because they are quite often the best pre-school or day care facility the community has to offer. We, in the Jewish Community Center field, see this as an opportunity to engage interfaith families and unaffiliated Jewish families. It is in the Jewish community's best interest that this excellence in programming continues to be the case. It is also incumbent to have a quality curriculum that enhances Jewish family life. We see the Jewish Community Center as a legitimate and worthwhile affiliation. We need to ensure it as a meaningful Jewish affiliation.

In addition, it is important for intermarried couples to have multiple entry points into the Jewish community. While the Jewish Community Centers are one of these entry points, synagogues are certainly another. The crucial point is to have the programs available in a variety of settings.

#### Making interfaith couples welcome

Jewish Community Centers by their nature have attracted a broad membership. The question of Jewish-Jewish or Jewish-Gentile composition of the family is not asked of potential members. There are no boundaries to participation at the Jewish Community Center. However, while this may be very clear to us, we need to publicize this policy to inform intermarried families that they are welcome.

By offering a program for interfaith couples and families we are making a clear announcement: "You are welcome to participate in the Jewish community" -- a far different message than was sent years ago when the intermarried couple was often ostracized. I have experienced the Jewish partner as being surprised, then delighted, that there is something for the interfaith couple within the Jewish community. After a first time conversation about the Interfaith Connection, one gentleman offered to write a letter expressing how meaningful the program was to him. I exclaimed he hadn't even attended



a program -- and he responded, "Just the fact that you are there to answer the phone and speak to me makes the program worthwhile."

### Setting policies

Other points to consider are Board membership and Board policies. Modification of board membership policies may be needed to support new programs of outreach. Certain questions arise once interfaith couples and families are encouraged to become active in a Jewish institution. What if they become very active and take a leadership role? Or supposing the non-Jewish partner is the active member and becomes a force in the community? It is necessary for the Board to look at these issues carefully. Can a Jewish person who is intermarried serve on a committee, be a committee chair, or serve on the Board, as an officer, as President? Can the non-Jewish partner who demonstrates a leadership role be considered for any of the aforementioned positions?

The time to make these determinations is in advance. Policies should be stated clearly. If policies are not decided in advance, controversies may develop around the individual rather than the issue. These are not easy questions with easy answers, and the decisions will depend on the community in which they are raised. It is important that Boards do not tackle these issues cold. They should be educated and sensitized with the help of experts. The Board must then become advocates for these outreach programs.

### Community-wide planning

Finally, I would like to address the idea of community planning. A community-wide planning effort, rather than agency by agency and synagogue by synagogue, is ideal. Programs will then include all aspects of service and needs without duplications and gaps, while taking into consideration the importance of multiple entry points. Communal planning also helps create community-wide support for the concept of outreach to the marginally affiliated, non-affiliated and intermarried. This will also be more cost effective and ultimately prove to be more successful. If communal planning cannot be accomplished in the first stages then it is imperative to meet with other agency directors and Rabbis to apprise them of an impending effort to develop programs and

ask for their input. This helps diffuse concerns and criticism.

When the Interfaith Connection at the San Francisco Jewish Community Center began, there were many concerns in various sectors of the community. Reform Rabbis saw their territory as being invaded. Orthodox Rabbis felt we were encouraging intermarriage. Some agencies were fearful to become involved in the issue. By doing advance footwork, we were able to alleviate these concerns.

In a time of diminishing resources and increasing needs, it is almost heresy to declare that additional programs need to be considered. We do not have the luxury of deciding 10 years from now that we should have been doing something in 1991. We need to expand resources for Jewish family programming and use them to offer programs designed to increase the commitment of interfaith and unaffiliated families as well. While this will take additional funding, the result will be increased Jewish identity and community participation with increased future giving.

We need to be willing to take the risk. We have no choice. Otherwise the consequences of doing business-as-usual could lead to a shrinking Jewish community.

#### Intermarriage Outreach Readiness Project

What is the Jewish Community Centers Association doing about this critical concern -- the increasing incidence of intermarriage and unaffiliation? Many Jewish Community Centers have programs for interfaith and unaffiliated families. Most of these programs are located in the major cities. There now needs to be more involvement in outreach throughout the Center Movement. In an effort to accomplish this, the Jewish Community Centers Association is involved in an Intermarriage Outreach Readiness Project.

The project is designed to help Centers take the steps necessary to work with interfaith families, preparing their professional staff, lay leaders, members, and overall community for this task. A questionnaire was sent to all Jewish Community Centers to determine what services for interfaith families already exist. In addition, five diverse Jewish Community Center outreach programs have been studied in depth. As a result, a resource guide is being written which will address many issues, including: 1) the need for

community planning, 2) professional staff and lay leadership development, 3) program development, 4) outreach strategies and 5) marketing and funding issues. The resource guide will be distributed to Jewish Community Centers and to all other interested Jewish institutions in an effort to help others replicate programs that have been effective. Regional training workshops for professionals will also be planned.

The myth that offering programs for intermarried couples and families causes intermarriage to accelerate has been dispelled. Even though there is a lack of programs throughout the U.S., the rate of intermarriage continues to climb. Other questions and fears arise when creating these programs. Is conversion an expected outcome? Will the community support these programs? Are religious issues the sole domain of a synagogue? What pressures are brought to bear on the religious community, such as Rabbis who may be sympathetic but who must remain true to their official denominational principles? Are the professionals in the field sometimes ahead of the lay leadership in their thinking? Are our expectations too high? Finally, how do we define success?

We have been looking at the statistics of the rate of intermarriage and lack of Jewish affiliation for a number of years. The time for hand wringing and "oyveying" is over. We need to act NOW.

## IMPLICATIONS OF INTERMARRIAGE FOR JEWISH EDUCATION

Rabbi Arthur Vernon  
Director, Educational Resources and Services  
Jewish Education Service of North America

I want to begin with two disclaimers: My remarks reflect the opinion of one observer of Jewish education and in the limited time available, I am going to deal only two issues: 1) What are some problems which must be addressed with regard to intermarried families?, and 2) How shall we address intermarriage itself in Jewish education?

In a recent paper for an American Jewish Committee symposium, Jonathan Woocher, my boss, characterized the current debate surrounding intermarriage as walking the tightrope of not condoning intermarriage, while at the same time, not condemning the intermarried. If Jonathan has captured correctly the prevailing mood of the community, then the highly differentiated, diverse field of Jewish education is facing a number of issues.

Within our midst, there are those who would invest all their energy in preventing intermarriage. On the other hand, there are those who actively seek out and welcome intermarried couples into their congregations and their children into schools. It is clear that consensus on community policy regarding intermarriage and Jewish education is, for the present, impossible to achieve given that positions on the issues are grounded in divergent interpretation of Jewish tradition, custom and law, with each group maintaining that its posture is authentic and genuine.

### Some challenges

To understand some of the challenges facing Jewish education with regard to intermarried families and their children, I would like to pose a few questions that individual schools and communities are facing, without any comment as to how these questions might be answered:

What should be the admissions policy of community day schools with regard to children of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother?

What should be the response of a teacher to the child who uses both a Chanukah menorah and Christmas tree at home?

In a Jewish genealogy project, how does the child of an intermarriage relate to the non-Jewish side of the family?

What is taught to a Bar/Bat mitzvah candidate about the participation of the non-Jewish parent in the service?

These practical questions require answers in order to welcome and accommodate intermarried families and their children into the Jewish education system. I am certain that this audience can generate many more problematic situations confronting Jewish schools in relating to intermarried families and their children. These questions respond to the need for accepting the intermarried, particularly those who have sought the Jewish community and Jewish institutions for themselves and their children. But, they have no relevance for dealing with intermarriage.

With regard to intermarriage itself, there are those who feel that little can be done to prevent it, or lower the rate. It is the price we pay for living in an open, pluralistic society. Indeed, Mordecai Kaplan held this view in 1934 in Judaism As A Civilization. To paraphrase, in a democratic society, no objection can be raised to intermarriage. Yet, I sense that most of us would "prefer", if possible, to prevent intermarriage as a first option. If so, what can be done? Can Jewish education prevent intermarriage?

There is some evidence in the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey that Jewish education may be a factor: more years of Jewish education and more intensive Jewish education correlate positively with lower intermarriage rates. But, one cannot conclude from these data that Jewish education was the cause of the lower intermarriage rates. There may be, and probably are, intervening variables or factors which explain the correlations. Further analysis and study may lead to

understanding the relationship of factors that result in lower intermarriage rates.

### Deeper questions

And yet, I believe that intermarriage poses far deeper questions which Jewish education must address. If I am reading recent studies correctly, we are witnessing a not so subtle shift in values taking place before our eyes. The glue which historically, geographically and generationally bound Jews to each other is coming undone. Put another way, the organic unity of Jews, Judaism and Jewish community, which once operated forcefully to hold all three together, no longer has that power or force. The sense of legitimate authority which defined the boundaries of behavior for individual Jews no longer is accepted by many, if not most, Jews. To quote from the Book of Judges, we have reached the stage of each Jew acting on the basis of individual criteria of acceptable behavior. This is true not only in selecting marriage partners, but in virtually all realms of Jewish life.

I offer this interpretation not as a condemnation or a diatribe, but merely as a description of the current situation. If it is correct, then we must develop a new basis for Jewish affiliation -- a new compact regarding Jewish community. Our school programs and curricula must recognize and respond appropriately to this challenge. What can be done?

### A new basis

First, we must emphasize those elements of Judaism which promote distinctiveness. I think we have tended to emphasize in our curricula those values which we share with mankind. While all religions are equally valid, that does not mean that all religions are the same. Individual Jews must come to understand the uniqueness of Judaism.

Secondly, we must examine how we teach about marriage and family life, particularly what our expectations of marriage ought to be. Society teaches that marriage is a means to personal fulfillment and glosses over the commitment necessary to achieve that. Our tradition emphasizes the nature of shared commitment and purpose between husband and wife.

Thirdly, we must strengthen the sense of community in our schools. The old neighborhoods no longer exist and young Jews may not meet each other frequently as Jews except in schools or other community sponsored programs for Jewish youth. This leads to my next point.

We must try to lower the age at which Jews marry. Current socio-economic trends among Jews, entry into a wider variety of new occupations, neo-location in relationship to birth residence, all weaken the attachment to Jewish community and the potential influence of family on spouse selection. We must attempt to counteract these forces through promoting earlier marriage.

And finally, we must decrease the drop-out rate at all ages of Jewish life, but particularly from post Bar/Bat Mitzvah through young adulthood. Continuous affiliation with Jewish groups, activities, institutions and programs increases the likelihood of meeting enough Jews to find a suitable mate. Young people must not have the option of dropping out of Jewish education and Jewish life before high school graduation. We, their parents, can make this happen by changing our attitude and approach.

In closing, I will confess that preventing intermarriage, or decreasing the rate, may prove impossible. Nevertheless, implementing the five suggestions above will strengthen Jewish education and Jewish life and may result in reducing the current alienation from Jewish life associated with intermarriage. In the end, however, as my professor Dr. Eugene Borowitz taught, if God wants Jews, she will have to do something about it. With God's help, may we continue to find ways of strengthening Jewish life and our communities.

### **PART III: SUMMATION OF BREAKOUT SESSIONS**



## **SUMMATION OF BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

### **THE COMPLEXITY OF THE ISSUES & DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY AGENDA**

Twice during the day of Symposium proceedings, participants gathered in small-group breakout sessions to exchange views on a one-to-one basis. In morning breakout sessions, participants were assigned to discussion groups at random, while in afternoon sessions, they were assigned to groups by community size and/or region.

#### **Morning Sessions**

The morning breakout sessions focused on individual views toward intermarriage and Jewish continuity and on whether they are appropriate issues for intensive involvement by Federations. The group leaders seeded the discussion with questions about personal philosophy toward intermarriage, about the division of scarce resources between the intermarriage issue and other competing priorities, about the likelihood of communal friction and controversy if intermarriage is placed on the Federation agenda, and about what "outreach" to the intermarried means.

The participants responded by probing deeply into basic questions that Federations must deal with in approaching the intermarriage and Jewish continuity issue. "Why be Jewish?," and "What will Judaism in America be like ten years from now?," some asked. Others saw the need for a strong financial commitment, a prerequisite as in Operation Exodus. It was felt strongly and generally that Federations, synagogues and agencies must work together in outreach to strengthen Jewish identity and affiliation.

Running through many of the ideas and thoughts was the need for consensus among different segments of the community. While more is needed, it will be difficult to develop. Federations must play a key role in establishing concerns and priorities that include a sense of Jewish community and an understanding of Jewish religion and culture.

As some saw the picture, there are two separate, but interrelated, agendas -- encouraging Jewish identity and affiliation, and outreach to intermarrieds -- with complementary roles for Federations and synagogues. If dealing

with the intermarried in a synagogue is too threatening, then some other organization is the place to do it. Participants pointed to three factors that kept intermarried couples from affiliating: the often confused Jewish partner of intermarriage, the attitudes of the non-Jewish partner and the policies of institutions.

On the matter of conversion, there were a variety of viewpoints. Whether or not the ultimate goal of a program should be conversion of the non-Jewish partner, many felt that the first step should be to invite the non-Jewish partner and spouse to participate in Jewish life and spiritual values. Don't reject them, even while recognizing that intermarriage is not Jewish marriage.

It was noted that the time to steer children away from intermarriage starts when they are very young and that Jewish education should continue beyond Bar/Bat Mitzvah. On college campuses even Jews with a strong commitment find it hard to resist inter-dating. Hillel serves a major purpose on college campuses in providing committed Jews to serve as role models.

The participants made suggestions on how to proceed in a program on intermarriage and Jewish continuity. Use different approaches at different levels; include intermarrieds in the discussion of how to deal with the issue; concentrate on entry points to Judaism; if intermarriage is wrong, communicate that to the Jewish community, especially to high school and college students and to singles.

#### Afternoon Sessions

In the afternoon, the discussion went into questions about community organization and developing a community agenda for dealing with intermarriage and Jewish continuity. The leaders asked for views about what elements of the community should be represented in the planning process, the barriers to the Jewish community that needed to be overcome and how this should be accomplished, the steps Federations could take to initiate action and how the Council of Jewish Federations can help. The goal would be to define an agenda in terms of community policies and programming, representation and membership, service delivery and target populations, and priorities and funding.

Participants said that it was up to each community to define the scope of its involvement and to shape its own

goals. Once a mission is clear, a number of tracks should be followed, with clearly defined goals. It was widely felt that intermarriage should not be treated as an isolated issue but should be approached as a part of the total question of Jewish continuity.

A number of specific programs were mentioned, either as models or as elements of an overall action plan. The rescue and education of Soviet Jews was proposed in one discussion group as a model for action at home. Strong Israel-oriented programming was cited as a very powerful tool in fostering Jewish continuity. Programs of outreach and education that might serve as examples were noted in Los Angeles (sponsored by the Council on Jewish Life), Nashville (holiday workshops), Baton Rouge (day care and nursery programs), Seattle (Jewish culture programs for youth) Denver (programs for children of the intermarried), New Haven and MetroWest.

One implication of the wide-ranging discussion was that developing a plan of action would need the involvement of all the key players in the community -- Federations lay leaders, rabbis, communal professionals, educators, and community opinion leaders. "Turf" issues should not be allowed to get in the way.

It was also understood that there has always been Jewish pluralism. There are many ways to be Jewish. Programming should reflect this.

One suggestion called for an intermarriage program bank so that programs that are evaluated and found to work could be shared with other communities.

Participants observed that CJF must play a major role. Part of its responsibilities would be to help in defining priorities, provide resources and materials, and make grants for the development of special programs at the community level. A clearinghouse function and the dissemination of information about successful programs might be another possible CJF activity.

**SUMMATION: WHAT ACTIONS NEED TO BE TAKEN  
TO MEET CHALLENGES OF THE 1990'S**

**SUMMATION: WHAT ACTIONS NEED TO BE  
TAKEN TO MEET CHALLENGES OF THE 1990'S**

Helene Berger, Miami

Yitz Greenberg wrote an article two months ago in The Jerusalem Report called, "For Whom the Shofar Blows" which begins, "In his great code, the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides teaches that the sound of the shofar serves as an alarm clock, announcing: 'Sleepers, arouse yourselves from your slumber!' For the U.S. Jewish community, the wake-up call came this year in the form of the new Council of Jewish Federations National Jewish Population Survey. Lulled by the explosion of Jewish activism and self-assertion, the community discounted the evidence of increasing intermarriage and assimilation." His article concludes, "The Population Survey speaks to leadership: Ask not for whom the shofar blows, it blows for thee!"

We have all come today to heed the sound of the shofar — calling us to respond to the crisis. When we convened this Symposium this morning, I acknowledged that the idea of losing such vast numbers of our future generation was an emotionally charged subject and there was legitimate controversy about how to address it. But, I think we come out of this day with certain concepts we can agree on.

First, much as we may deplore the mounting high rate of intermarriage, and much as we must harness all our creativity and resources to prevent it, intermarried households are a reality and will continue to be a factor in the demography of the American Jewish community. Second, the number of children who are brought up in intermarried homes will increase. Third, while some Jewish members of intermarried couples may not find their heritage to be relevant to their lives, others will find meaning and value in their Jewishness, and they will wish to retain their identity and roots and pass the legacy on to their children.

If these are the facts, some conclusions are evident. To abandon those who may wish to maintain some connection may

permanently break their link to the Jewish community and will certainly have lasting negative effects on the future of the American Jewish community. The sense that I got today from hearing the speakers and from the discussion groups that followed was an almost universal appeal to act now.

Let me try to summarize some of the conclusions we came to today about the role of the organized Jewish community:

1. The Federation, and its system of agencies, and the synagogues must work together to actively reach out to strengthen the identity and the association of all those who want to have some connection to Jewish life.
2. It is important that all the organizations and agencies involved in this outreach give careful scrutiny to the attitudes they convey to the intermarried, to insure that those on the margin do not remain on the outside looking in.
3. In the process of reaching out we must maintain the delicate balance between making entry comfortable for those who are torn between two worlds and retaining the standards of practice that will preserve our heritage and our distinctiveness, so that we will not dilute the Jewishness of our institutions.
4. In reaching out to encourage the Jewish identity and affiliation of the intermarried, we must not neglect our primary responsibility to support in every way the creation of a vibrant Jewish life for all Jews. Only by strengthening Jewish values and traditions, by transmitting the sacred teachings of our Torah, will we insure that there will be a future generation of Jews to carry on the rich heritage which has been handed down to us by generations that came before us.
5. A comprehensive plan of action to reach out must be formulated that engages our most thoughtful leaders and community professionals, particularly Rabbis and all institutions engaged in education, culture, religion, family service, work with college students and young adults, day care, and community relations.

Federation is the logical and appropriate institution to bring these various facets of the community together to express their viewpoints and ideologies and to develop a comprehensive action plan.

6. CJF has offered its resources and its lay and professional time to effectively address this crucial issue. In attempting to be responsive to the hard reality of the 1990 Population Survey, CJF will give assistance and guidance in whatever way that is appropriate and required.

Finally, in a world that makes constant demands on our time, pulling us away from that inner core of Jewish faith, wisdom and knowledge, we must enlist all our creativity, our zeal, our intelligence, to insure that there will be a future generation of Jews. That future is no longer a given. We cannot leave it to chance. We must plan for it. We must help our children and our grandchildren feel part of a family, bound to Jews across space and time, bound to our ancestors, and bound to the Torah given to us at Sinai. It is that Torah we honor today when we perpetuate our heritage by serving the Jewish community, by helping others feel connected to that community by a common history, common customs, common memories and a common sense of purpose and responsibility.

## **APPENDIX**



**WORKING PAPER  
NOT FOR DUPLICATION**

# **Briefing Paper on Intermarriage**

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## **BRIEFING PAPER ON INTERMARRIAGE**

### **Introduction**

This briefing paper on intermarriage is based on information from the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey and other national studies, local Federation community population studies, proceedings of special conferences on intermarriage, and selected literature on the subject. It is the first of a series of papers that the Planning and Resource Development Department of the Council of Jewish Federations will prepare on the implications of the Population Survey for Jewish family life, the Jewish household, and Jewish identity and continuity.

The 1990 Population Survey now confirms and documents the quickening pace of intermarriage in the Jewish community. The Survey defines intermarriage as the marriage between a born Jew and a non-Jew who has not converted. The shape and significance of the intermarriage trend needs to be examined closely. If it continues, the consequence is the growth in the number of children and adults with mixed (Jewish and non-Jewish) parentage. Currently, more than 35 percent of young adults age 18 to 24 in the Jewish population are of mixed parentage. The adult children of intermarriage are far more likely to intermarry than to marry Jews. Moreover, the divorced not only have a high probability of remarrying, but of intermarrying.

The briefing paper reviews an array of issues on intermarriage and children of intermarriage that will be of vital interest and concern to Federations in their future planning.

## Background

The picture of the American Jewish family that emerges from the 1990 CJF Jewish Population Survey is strikingly at odds with the traditional view of Jewish family life. One significant factor in the changing American Jewish scene, and perhaps the most important one, is the growing rate of intermarriage. Jewish intermarriage is one of the key concerns in measuring the prospects for a creative and viable Jewish community in the next century.

Currently, there are 2.6 million married born Jews, and 28 percent of these are married to non-Jews. The proportion of intermarried families varies regionally and is highest in the West. The rate of intermarriage of Jews to non-Jews has risen dramatically over the last three decades from under 10 percent before 1965 to over 50 percent in the years 1985 to 1990:

### Rising Rate of Intermarriage

- 52% of Jews who married in 1985-90 married a non-Jew.
- 44% married a non-Jew in 1975-84.
- 26% married a non-Jew in 1965-74.
- 9% married a non-Jew before 1965.

An even more striking inference is the current rate at which intermarried families are being formed. For every one marriage between two Jews there are two marriages between a Jew and a non-Jew.

### Growing Acquiescence to Intermarriage

The 1991 CJF National Jewish Population Survey found, generally, a low level of opposition to intermarriage among all types of Jews. The Population Survey asked, "Hypothetically, if your child were considering marrying a non-Jewish person, would you: strongly support, support, accept or be neutral, oppose or strongly oppose the marriage?" The answers to this question show that opposition to intermarriage is greatest from those who identify themselves as Jewish by religion. Yet the Survey found that only 22 percent of this group are opposed to intermarriage, 46 percent would accept it, while a third would support the

intermarriage of their child. (See Table 1, "Views on Intermarriage.") This situation should be compared with the results of the National Jewish Population Study of 1970 in which 56 percent of all Jews not intermarried disagreed that "It is all right for Jews to marry non-Jews." The current results suggest that a general acquiescence to intermarriage has developed in recent years.

**Table 1**  
**Views on Intermarriage\***

Question: Hypothetically, if your child were considering marrying a non-Jewish person, would you: strongly support, support, accept or be neutral, oppose or strongly oppose the marriage?

**By Percent of Identity Group:**

<u>Jewish Identity</u>	Strongly Support	Support	Accept	Oppose	Strongly Oppose
Jews by Religion	11	22	46	13	9
Secular Jews	21	24	51	2	2
Converts Out	19	30	45	3	3
Jewish Descent/Other Religion	16	24	56	2	2

\*Source: Highlights of CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey

**Intermarried Households with Children Fastest Growing Type**

There are 2.7 million households with one or more Jews. About 32 percent are intermarried households. Of all the specific household types -- Jews living alone, married Jews with and without children, and intermarried couples with and without children -- the fastest growing household type now is an intermarried family with children. Of households with at least one Jew, 15 percent are of this type compared to 17 percent that are entirely Jewish couples with children. Another 24 percent --the largest household type -- are Jews living alone, which include divorced, widowed and other single individuals.

### **Children of Intermarriage Not Being Raised Jewishly**

Of the 770,000 children in intermarried families, only 28 percent are being raised as Jews. Another 31 percent are not being raised in any religion, and 41 percent are being raised in another religion. It is likely that, within the next decade, the majority of children of Jewish parentage will have only one Jewish parent.

### **Pace of Assimilation Quickening**

The heightened pace of assimilation is evidenced by a marked increase in the number of younger adults aged 18-44 of Jewish parentage or background who follow another religion compared to older people in this same group. Assimilation is highest in the Midwest and South.

### **Comparison with Intra-married**

The Population Survey found that the Jewish partner of an intermarriage is as likely to be female as male. On average, the Jewish partners of intermarriage are substantially younger than their intra-married counterparts. Whereas over 70 percent of the Jewish partners are under 45, only 39 percent of the intra-married are in the same age category.

Intermarried families are more likely to have young children. The Survey found that 55 percent of intermarried households have one or more children under age 18, while only 36 percent of intra-married families have such children. Moreover only 24 percent of intermarried families expect to enroll children in formal Jewish education, whereas 42 percent of intra-married families expect to do so.

The Jewish partners of intermarriage do not differ noticeably from the intra-married in sex, home ownership and region of residence. However, the intermarried are more likely to be under 45 years of age and to be third-generation Americans. In addition, intermarried families are more likely to have an income between \$30,000 and \$60,000, while the two family types are equally likely to have incomes in the lower range, below \$30,000, or in the upper range, above \$60,000.

The data on Jewish identity show that Jewish intermarrieds under age 45 are more likely than intra-marrieds to have received a Jewish education in Sunday school rather than a more intensive Jewish education, be a Reform or secular Jew rather than Orthodox or Conservative, live in a household which is not religiously Jewish, and not give to a UJA-Federation campaign. Intermarrieds are also less likely to have received a formal Jewish education, to have celebrated a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, to belong to a denomination other than Reform, or to live in a household where anybody is a synagogue member.

While studies until now suggest emerging trends, they do not permit firm conclusions to be drawn about the causes or consequences of intermarriage. Knowledge about the relation of intermarriage to other aspects of Jewishness is very tentative because studies on the subject look only at two variables at a time ("bivariate analysis") and thus may neglect other variables that might be significant.

## **Analysis**

Exactly, what are the contrasting patterns of Jewish identity between intermarried families, with one Jewish spouse, and intra-married ones, where both partners are Jewish? The answers have clear implications for Federation planning. Questions of this nature were examined by Dr. Egon Mayer and Dr. Bruce Phillips in their presentations based on the Population Survey data at the CJF 1991 Hollender Colloquium in Los Angeles.

### **Pattern of Assimilation**

Intermarriage generally does not mean an abrupt loss of Jewish identification. Mixed marriage is an accelerating factor in assimilation, but the process is gradual, marked by continued and diminishing involvement in Jewish communal activities, home celebrations and religious practices.

The major long-term consequence of the growing pace of intermarriage is the growth in the number of children and adults with mixed Jewish and non-Jewish parentage. Currently, more than

35 percent of young adults age 18 to 24 are of mixed parentage and about the same percentage of children under 18 are in mixed families. In sequence, the adult children of mixed parentage are far more likely to intermarry than not. Moreover, the divorced not only have a high probability of remarrying, but of intermarrying, and the data indicate that intermarriages lead to divorce more often than marriages between Jews.

### **Jewish Practices**

As to Jewishness, the Population Survey shows a sharp contrast in the affiliation patterns. The overwhelming majority of the intermarried (87 percent) does not affiliate with synagogues, and an even larger fraction does not affiliate with other Jewish organizations. By comparison, over 40 percent of families where both partners are born Jews have synagogue membership. More intermarrieds, not surprisingly, attend a synagogue sometimes than belong to one.

The situation for Jewish charity-giving is different. Over a quarter of intermarried families continue to contribute to a Jewish cause or charity, even though overall they are only about one-third as likely as intra-marrieds to contribute. A possible explanation for this is that more intermarried families are willing to give than to join, perhaps because giving involves less commitment.

The comparison of observance and Jewish practices and rituals is also instructive, but open to interpretation. (See Table 2, "Jewish Practices.") Overwhelmingly, the two Jewish holidays most observed by intermarrieds are Passover and Hanukkah. To be sure, these are the two Jewish holidays most closely related in time with major Christian holidays. Moreover, a majority of intermarried families celebrate Christmas in some fashion, and a Christmas tree is to be found in 80 percent of intermarried homes.

Another measure of the difference between groups is the contrast in Shabbat observance. The fraction of intra-married families that light Shabbat candles at least sometimes (44 percent) is about twice that of intermarried families (19 percent). While this level of Shabbat observance among intermarrieds is small, it is not inconsequential. Perhaps more striking is the personal

commitment by over a quarter of the Jewish spouses of intermarried families to fast on Yom Kippur.

### Attitudes

Yet another important expression of Jewishness is support and emotional attachment to Israel. For many Jews, this one secular activity is equivalent to religious observance. Visiting and giving money to Israel are two evidences of this attachment by American Jews. The Population Survey shows, however, that intermarrieds are much less likely to visit Israel than intra-marrieds.

In the choice of neighborhood, the Population Survey shows that intermarried families live away from the organized Jewish community, making it more difficult for them to interact with and participate in the Jewish community. While only 16 percent of intermarried families live in Jewish neighborhoods, 31 percent think that it is important to do so.

In other matters of attitude, some 60 percent of intermarried Jewish spouses say that being Jewish is important to them, but only about 20 percent would agree that they could depend only on other Jews in a crisis, as opposed to over 50 percent of intra-married families which held that belief.

The attitudes and practices of intermarried families toward child rearing provide an indication of the Jewish continuity of these families. A clue comes from an examination of the past lives of adults who are themselves products of mixed marriage. Results of the Population Survey show that they are less likely to identify as Jews by religion than adults with two Jewish parents. That attitude continues in the upbringing of their children. Intermarried Jewish mothers are no more likely than intermarried Jewish fathers to raise children Jewishly, contrary to popular myth.

Today, intermarried parents who are rearing children under age 18 tend not to favor any religion. Less than 10 percent are providing their children with some type of formal Jewish education. An equivalent percentage are receiving a non-Jewish religious education.



Other factors influencing the differences in Jewishness of intermarried and intra-married families are, for instance, the branch of Judaism in which the Jewish intermarried partner was raised, the gender of the Jewish partner, and academic achievement.

Whatever the reasons and the causes, intermarriage has become an important issue around which increasing community resources are likely to be mobilized in the future.

**Table 2**  
**Jewish Practices\*\***

<u>Jewish Practice</u>	<u>Percent by Household Type</u>		
	<u>Entirely Jewish</u>	<u>Mixed</u>	<u>Jewish Descent/ Not Currently Jewish</u>
Attend Passover Seder*	86	62	25
Never have Xmas Tree	82	20	13
Light Hanukkah Candles*	77	59	17
Contributed to Jewish Charity (1989)	62	28	13
Contributed to Federation/UJA	45	12	4
Light Sabbath Candles*	44	19	13
Current Synagogue Membership	41	13	2
Celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut	18	6	5
Contributed to Secular Charity	67	66	54

\* Sometimes, Usually, Always

\*\* Source: Highlights of 1990 CJF National Jewish Population Survey

### **Issues & Options**

The issue of intermarriage will be one of the important issues on the agenda of Federations in the 1990's. It will gain increased focus as a matter related to concerns of Jewish identity and continuity and will provide a ground for developing strategies of intervention that are innovative and inclusive. Increasingly,

outreach to intermarried families will be an integral part of an intervention strategy that builds on strengthening Jewish identity, while prevention will continue to be one of the viable community goals.

To search out the solution to a difficult problem, the first step is to frame the questions simply. For intermarriage, the questions, simply put, are what are the implications of the current high rate of intermarriage?, what modes of outreach to intermarried families are acceptable and effective?, what are the implications for Jewish education in serving children of intermarriage?, what services can be provided to strengthen their Jewish identity?, what are the political implications for Federations in dealing with the intermarriage issue?, and how should limited funds be allocated to critical competing demands, such as confronting the high intermarriage rate or providing programs for children to promulgate Judaism?

Seeking answers to these questions gives rise to a range of ideas, issues and considerations that form the basis for further community planning and action. The discussion below reflects a range of thinking representing Jewish community, academic, denominational, and national organization sources.

Prevention, is it an impossible policy? According to some views, the high intermarriage rate indicates the high level of integration of Jews in American society. Some argue that marriage is being redefined from Jewish norms to American norms to reflect an open society in terms of where people live, where they are educated and what personal beliefs they hold. Consequently, rather than prevention, there are points of intervention during critical life cycle periods where the Jewish community could provide incentives to live in certain areas, go to certain colleges, and meet socially. An example of such effective intervention would be a highly subsidized year in Israel for youth at age 16 or 17. Although intervention by promotion of conversion would heighten Jewish identity and ensure that children of intermarriage are raised Jewishly, conversion now is the choice of only a very small minority. Less than five percent of non-Jewish spouses in intermarried families are converted to Judaism.

Intermarriage reflects society. Intermarriage may be an indication of the state of society as a whole. Even Jews who marry Jews assimilate and then are lost to the Jewish community. On a broad scale, the critical issue in the Jewish community is one of retention rather than prevention. The approach needed is effective outreach -- both to intermarried families and to entirely Jewish ones -- that nurtures and maintains a fairly high degree of association and loyalty.

Cost of intervention. For Jewish communities, the hard question is whether achieving a small reduction in the rate of intermarriage is worth the potentially high cost of intervention. Some would argue that the consequences of high intermarriage surely justify the expenditure for intervention and outreach. In addition it is accepted almost without question that Jews should be motivated to marry Jews. To these ends, Federations face the formidable task of allocating limited resources so as to most effectively confront the intermarriage issue and reach out to those in the formative years, without the condoning or encouraging of intermarriage.

Who gets services, and what services? How does the community define who gets services directed at potential or actual intermarrieds. Should it concentrate on teenagers, students in colleges, and/or intermarried families. The challenge to communities is to come up with a cost effective mix of approaches that supports programs in colleges to reduce the intermarriage rate and family education and outreach.

Long-term strategic planning. The current focus on the intermarriage threat may arouse the Jewish community to a major rethinking of how it wants to allocate and spend its money. New allocations policies may be needed that shift dollars into youth education, trips to Israel, college programs, camping, day care, parenting education, and emphasis on life cycle events.

Reaching adolescents and young adults. Jewish education hardly touches adolescence. Jewish communities invest the least amount of money in adolescents and teenagers, and the next to least in college services. The current policy is generally for the greatest investment of money before age thirteen. The rising concern over intermarriage likely will dictate a change in policy that leads to

greater investment in programs at institutions and in places where young Jews of both sexes gather and meet.

Strengthening linkages with intra-marriage. What are the practices and attitudes that correlate most strongly with intra-marriage? Are they the same in modern society as in the past? As a result of the concern over intermarriage, communities may wish to concentrate their focus on a few essentials: visits to Israel by adolescents, Jewish fellowship, and support of positive Jewish home life experiences.

Education to emphasize family and community. One approach to Jewish education favored by some would be to emphasize family life and marriage, Jewish traditions and Jewish values, as distinct from the rest of society. This would be a very Jewish agenda that would be intended not to increase the size of the Jewish population but to make it more cohesive. It would argue that only a smattering of Jewish education is not a preventative against intermarriage. Today, many Jewish children know little about life cycle events that past generations understood well. What in substance is a Jewish marriage or a Jewish home? Why be Jewish? In the same sense that one cannot be Jewish on a desert island, one cannot be the only Jew in a household, according to this viewpoint.

Outreach to those wanting to belong. Often the connection between the Jewish community and an intermarried family may not be an overly compelling issue such as intermarriage, but simply that the family is new in town and in need of day care or other services. By meeting intermarrieds "where they are at," communities can indicate to intermarried families the power of belonging to something. This approach to outreach relies on the observation that the desire for Jewish fellowship and association outside of organized programs persists, in spite of changes in society away from a Jewish ideal of family and communal activity.

The concept of fellowship and association that is needed may require the reordering of some priorities in synagogues and Jewish community centers. For example, what could be done by these institutions to more effectively reach out to unaffiliated singles under age 45, and what positive steps might be taken to make it easier for Jews to go from one community to another and still feel a continuity and connectedness.

Outreach to intermarried. Just more day care, however, may not be enough. Communities currently have the opportunity to reach out and make a major statement about including people who are intermarried. For the most part, Federation and its constituent agencies are not now dealing with intermarriage. Federations might well consider developing creative approaches to connect intermarrieds and the children of intermarrieds to the Jewish community and identify questions and guidelines for community policy decisions.

Both centers and synagogues could develop and carry out effective programs of outreach to intermarrieds. More targeted approaches may be desirable to incorporate children of intermarriage into the Jewish community and teach them about Jewish customs, holidays and values. Competition in the market place for children of intermarriage from fundamentalist church groups is a reality, particularly in the South.

A comprehensive approach to outreach. Community planning has not yet thoroughly developed a full range of policies, plans and strategies for conducting outreach in general or to the intermarried, in particular. A CJF survey of the planning and allocations experience of large and intermediate communities found that only two communities had intermarriage and outreach on the planning agenda. While funds are allocated for many purposes, domestically and in Israel, little is allocated to strike at intermarriage. Federations may begin to sense that this is an opportune time for changing the system to make it more capable to serve the children of intermarriage. An immediate response might involve the offering of four or five specific life-enriching programs to convey the message that the children are welcome. Collectively, Federations might decide and set out, for example, to bring 100,000 children of intermarrieds into the Jewish fold by the year 2000 with the goal of bringing the entire family into the fold.

Marketing to intermarried families. A marketing approach would say that intermarried families should get what they need, not what we think they need. There is a great variance between the different types of intermarrieds. They are not a monolithic group. Rather, there are many shades of gray. The marketing approach is to find

out what the "customer" wants, not tell them what we think they need. Federations might wish to try a different approach, by for example doing marketing analysis of intermarried families, segmenting the market and advertising.

Selling the virtues of Jewish family life. The Jewish family is highly regarded in the market place. Would it be appropriate for communities to go all the way and sell Jewish family life on grounds that it is more successful than the alternative? The Population Survey indicates that Jewish families have a higher level of education and income.

### **Conclusion**

With the findings of the CJF National Jewish Population Survey at hand, there is a growing sentiment to discuss the pattern, dimensions and implications of the intermarriage issue. The immediate goal would be the development of principles, policies, and guidelines for communal intervention.

At the Symposium on Intermarriage and Jewish Continuity during the 1991 General Assembly in Baltimore, the participants made presentations and engaged in discussion on the whole range of issues affecting intermarriage. The Symposium, the first gathering of its kind at a GA, gave recognition to the Jewish community's urgent need to develop extensive programs on Jewish identity and continuity.

**SYMPOSIUM ON INTERMARRIAGE AND JEWISH CONTINUITY**  
**1991 General Assembly -- Baltimore, MD**

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# AGENDA

COUNCIL OF JEWISH FEDERATIONS • 730 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, NY 10003 • 212/475-5000

## SYMPOSIUM ON INTERMARRIAGE AND JEWISH CONTINUITY

Wednesday, November 20, 1991

8:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Marriott Inner Harbor Hotel

General Assembly, Baltimore, MD

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The purpose of this Symposium is to examine the critical issues of intermarriage and Jewish continuity that will confront and challenge the Jewish community in the decade of the 1990's. The focus will be on communal approaches and involvement in the intermarriage issue, as well as in the strengthening of Jewish identity and commitment. Speakers and participants will share communal experiences and examine enrichment and outreach models developed by various institutions and organizations. The Symposium will explore implications for community policy and planning and actions that Federations can take.

Convener: Helene Berger, Miami, Chairman, CJF Committee on Community Planning

Co-Chairmen: Linda Cornell Weinstein, Immediate Past President Jewish Community Federation of Rochester, Vice President, Jewish Community Centers Association of North America

David G. Sacks, President, UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York

8:00 - 8:30 Registration & Continental Breakfast

8:30 - 8:35 **WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS**  
Helene Berger

8:35 - 8:50 **THE CRITICAL CHALLENGE OF THE 1990'S**  
Linda Cornell Weinstein

8:50 - 9:20 **THE FACTS OF INTERMARRIAGE & COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING**  
Egon Mayer, Ph.D., Department of Sociology,  
Brooklyn College

9:20 - 9:30      **QUESTION PERIOD**

9:30 - 10:00    **THE ISSUES FROM AN INDIVIDUAL VIEWPOINT**  
 Rabbi Rachel Cowan, Director, Jewish Life  
 Programs, The Nathan Cummings Foundation

10:00 - 10:15    **Coffee Break**

10:15 - 11:15    **BREAKOUT SESSIONS (9)**  
 Participants meet in groups by random selection  
 for discussion on views regarding complexity of  
 issues and possibilities for concerted community  
 action.

11:30 - 12:00    **THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF SYNAGOGUES IN JEWISH IDENTITY,  
 CONTINUITY & OUTREACH TO THE INTERMARRIED**  
 Rabbi Lavey Derby, Director, Council on Jewish  
 Life, Jewish Federation of Los Angeles

12:15 - 12:45    **Box Lunch**

12:45 - 2:00     **IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNAL POLICY &  
 PLANNING DEALING WITH ISSUES OF INTERMARRIAGE AND  
 JEWISH CONTINUITY**

Chairmen: Linda Cornell Weinstein, David G. Sacks.

**Policy Considerations for Federations and Their  
 Constituents to Initiate Community Action**  
 David G. Sacks

- **Implications for Jewish Family Services**  
 Dr. Marc S. Salisch, President, AJFCA
- **Implications for Jewish Community Centers**  
 Rosanne Levitt, Director, Interfaith  
 Connection, JCC of San Francisco
- **Implications for Jewish Education**  
 Rabbi Arthur Vernon, Director of Educational  
 Resources and Services, JESNA

2:15 - 3:15      **BREAKOUT SESSIONS (7)**  
 Participants meet in groups by community size and  
 region to discuss issues and implications involved  
 in developing a community agenda.

3:30 - 4:00      **SUMMATION: WHAT ACTIONS NEED TO BE TAKEN TO  
 MEET CHALLENGES OF THE 1990'S**  
 Helene Berger

**CJF Resources:** Norbert Fruehauf, Barbara S. Hoenig,  
 Joan Fuld Strauss, Dr. Barry A. Kosmin