
Welcome Guide for Interfaith Families

Congregation Beth Shalom extends a warm welcome to interfaith couples and families who are seeking a connection to Judaism -- God, *Torah* and Israel and are interested in participating in the spiritual and social life of the Congregation. This includes persons who have decided to draw near to the people Israel, Jews and those thinking about or working towards becoming a Jew-by-choice.

This brochure offers an introduction to some of the principles and practices of Congregation Beth Shalom within the framework of the Conservative Movement as they affect interfaith couples and their families.

Beth Shalom

Beth Shalom is an egalitarian Conservative congregation with a rich heritage in the Kansas City metropolitan area beginning in 1878. The Congregation is dedicated to cultivating, developing and sustaining Judaism in accordance with the philosophy and standards of the Conservative Movement. The Congregation furthers its goals through offerings of religious services, life cycle events and programs. These cover a wide spectrum of Jewish religious, cultural, educational and social practices.

The Congregation Beth Shalom community and its clergy welcome interfaith couples and families to participate in synagogue activities. In this spirit, we believe we can all learn together and grow as a welcoming congregation. We encourage dialogue and are happy to discuss any issue or answer any question about Judaism and the Jewish people. A list of Beth Shalom contacts is at the back of this brochure.

Keruv

The word *keruv* – *keruv* – literally *drawing near* – is the Conservative Movement's outreach to persons who, in many important and life-altering ways, have cast their lot with the people Israel but who have chosen not to become Jewish formally. *Keruv* at Beth Shalom has the full support of its clergy and Board of Directors.

The mission of the *Keruv* Initiative is to develop programs for making Beth Shalom a welcoming congregation to interfaith couples and their immediate and extended families. In actualizing its mission, the *Keruv* Initiative focuses on educating the Congregation on the parameters of *keruv* within the Conservative Movement and developing relationships between interfaith families and Judaism.

Any interested person may contact any member of the *Keruv* Initiative whose names and telephone numbers are listed at the back of this brochure. The members of the Initiative are interested in what you have to say and will assist in making your relationship with Beth Shalom a positive, growth experience in whatever capacity you choose.

Programs for Interfaith Couples and Families:

Genesis and Mothers Circle offer a variety of programs to help couples and families address areas of concern unique to interfaith relationships and to explore and understand their relationship to Judaism and the Jewish community. All programs are open to the community.

For information contact Rabbi Linda Steigman, MSS,
Genesis Interfaith Outreach Coordinator, 913.754.2284,
[email: lindas@jewishkc.org](mailto:lindas@jewishkc.org)

Online Resources:

Jewish Outreach Institute
www.joi.org
E-mail: info@joi.org

Interfaith Family.com
www.interfaithfamily.com

Resources for Interfaith Information

Jewish Community Information & Referral
5801 W. 115th Street, Suite 201
Overland Park, KS 66211
913.327.4636 · Fax: 913.327.8110
E-mail: jcir@jewishkc.org

Jewish Family Services
5801 W. 115th Street, Suite 103
Overland Park, KS 66211
913.327.8250 · Fax: 913.327.8222
E-mail: info@jfs-kc.org
www.jfs-kc.org

Jewish Community Center
5801 W. 115th Street, Suite 101
Overland Park, KS 66211
913.327.8000 · Fax: 913.327.8040
www.jcckc.org

Jewish Federation of Greater Kansas City
5801 W. 115th Street, Suite 201
Overland Park, KS 66211
913.327.8100 · Fax: 913.327.8110
www.jewishkansascity.org

Worship Services

When attending worship services, the following guidelines apply. Anyone may sit anywhere in the sanctuary. All men must wear a *kippah* (head covering) at services. It is traditional to also wear a *kippah* during other activities while in the synagogue building. *Kippot* are available inside the entrances to the synagogue and outside the sanctuary. During morning services, Jewish men wear a *tallit* (prayer shawl) after the age of *bar mitzvah*. Any woman may choose to wear a *kippah* or other head covering and, women over the age of *bat mitzvah*, a *tallit*. Women must wear an appropriate head covering when called to the *bimah* (pulpit). A *tallit* is not worn by non-Jews. All may participate in all prayers as part of the Congregation.

During services, some congregants are called to the *bimah* for an *aliyah* (honor). In conformity with Conservative *halacha* (Jewish law), only a Jew may be called to the *bimah* for an *aliyah* because the *aliyah* is in fulfillment of a command placed upon Jews by God. The non-Jewish member may accompany the Jewish member to the *bimah* at all times and participate independently from the *bimah* in all prayers and rituals except chanting the Hebrew blessings before and after the formal reading from *Torah* (The Five Books of Moses), reading or chanting from the *Sefer Torah* (*Torah* scroll), reading or chanting a *haftarah* (a reading from the prophets), and *hagba* and *galilah* (raising and dressing the *Sefer Torah* after a formal reading).

Marriage

Congregation Beth Shalom encourages interfaith couples who are considering marriage to speak with the clergy. Our clergy are very interested in meeting with interfaith couples and providing guidance. Under Conservative *halachic* principles, our clergy do not officiate at interfaith weddings.

In Judaism there is a tradition known as *aufruf* where the bride and groom are called to the *bimah* for an *aliyah* and blessing on the Sabbath before their wedding. The Jewish member of the couple may have the *aliyah*. The non-Jewish member may accompany him/her to the *bimah* and receive the blessing.

Children's Religious Identity

The Conservative Movement follows the *halacha* of matrilineal descent; that is, a child's religious identity is determined by the mother's. Beth Shalom encourages all interfaith parents to raise their children as Jews. There are opportunities at Beth Shalom and local agencies to assist parents with issues that arise when an interfaith family decides to raise their children as Jews. The Beth Shalom clergy plays an active role assisting interfaith couples in this very important journey.

Baby Naming

Names in Judaism are of extreme importance and baby naming is a recognized life cycle event. Baby girls are often named in the synagogue during a weekday *minyan* (quorum for public prayer). Boys are usually named at the *brit milah* (ritual circumcision) which is often in the home of the parents or a relative or friend of the family. When a baby is named in the synagogue, it is traditional for both parents, regardless of religion, to participate by being called to the *bimah* for a special blessing. At the naming ceremony, the child is given a Hebrew name.

Nursery School

All children are welcome in the Beth Shalom Nursery School which strives to imbue our children with a love for the Jewish people and our traditions, rituals and fundamentals of faith. Our nursery school classes celebrate Sabbath every Friday with prayers over wine and *challah* (braided, holiday bread). They hear the sound of the *shofar* (ram's horn) before *Rosh Hashanah* (the Jewish new year). They eat in a *sukkah* (temporary dwelling) during the holiday of *Sukkot* commemorating the wandering in the desert following the departure from Egypt. They light *Chanukah* candles commemorating the victory of the Macabees over the attempted Hellenization of *Eretz Yisrael* (land of Israel). They dress in costume on *Purim* commemorating Queen Esther's saving of the Jews from destruction by Haman, an Assyrian Grand Vizier, i.e., one with absolute political power. They study the exodus from Egypt and participate in model *seders* (Passover meals). All children in the nursery school share in these experiences.

Congregation Beth Shalom Contact Information

Lamar Campus Address:	14200 Lamar Ave. Overland Park, KS 66223
Wornall Campus Address:	9400 Wornall Road Kansas City, MO 64114
Administrative Office:	913.647.7279
Ritual Office	913.647.7279
School Office:	913.647.7286
Youth Lounge:	913.647.7292
Nursery School:	913.647.7285
Gift Shop:	913.647.7298
Fax (<i>Administration</i>):	913.647.7277
Fax (<i>School</i>):	913.647.7278
General Email:	info@bethshalomkc.org

Keruv Initiative Contacts

Rabbi Alan Cohen	913.642.0572
Sharon Cohen	913.338.2544
Jannie Cubbage	913.851.7911
Kyla Hartong	913.219.8340
Alan Jacobson	913.649.9895
Stephen Kort	816.661.2921
Margot Menes	913.766.6194
Allan Reichman	913.649.0887
Sylvan Siegler	816.942.3670
Rabbi Robert L. Tobin	913.647.7294

Conversion

Because the Conservative Movement adheres to matrilineal descent, only the child of a Jewish mother is considered Jewish. The requirements for conversion of a child are immersion in a *mikvah* (ritual bath), affirmation of both parents to raise the child as a Jew and, for a boy, a *brit milah* (ritual circumcision). A baby naming can be performed after conversion.

Adult conversion requires a period of study under the supervision of a rabbi. Upon completion of study, one appears before a *beit din* (Jewish court) and is immersed in a *mikvah*. In addition, a man undergoes a *hatafat dam brit* (symbolic circumcision) if a medical circumcision has already been performed. Upon satisfactory completion of these requirements, the individual is a member of the Jewish community.

Religious School

The Beth Shalom religious school is open to children of all members until the age of *bar/bat mitzvah*, 13 years of age. Beginning with approximately the seventh grade, parents must decide whether their child will become a *bar/bat mitzvah*. Only Jewish children may become a *bar/bat mitzvah* and continue in the religious school.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah

The *bar/bat mitzvah* marks the transition from childhood to adulthood for purposes of religious law. The *bar/bat mitzvah* (as the child is called) participates from the *bimah* leading many parts of the service. Both parents have opportunities to participate in aspects of the *bar/bat mitzvah*, including saying a parent's blessing over the *bar/bat mitzvah*. At the time of *bar/bat mitzvah*, the clergy will assist the interfaith family in determining how the parents will participate.

Sisterhood

Beth Shalom Sisterhood is a gateway into Jewish life for Jewish women and women married to Jews. Sisterhood is a resource providing the knowledge, skill and experience necessary to foster a Jewish home and lifestyle. The commitment to understand and perpetuate Conservative Judaism in the home, synagogue and community is the goal of Sisterhood.

Burial

Respect for the dead and comfort for the bereaved are two principles guiding Jewish practice in death. Under current Conservative *halacha*, each Congregation may decide whether Jews and non-Jews can be buried together in a Jewish cemetery. Congregation Beth Shalom is currently reviewing its policy. Additional information pertaining to death and mourning customs is available through the Ritual Office.