

Hidden in Plain Sight

With his Yom Kippur blessing last year, Rabbi Bach encouraged our supportive congregants who were raised in other faith traditions to come forward and receive a blessing. This was a powerful message of recognition and leadership by our rabbi. Our interfaith members are with us daily, quietly doing the business of creating Jewish households, sustaining our community. Often they are hidden in plain sight and by asking those to step forward, Rabbi Bach brought us out of the shadows.

When Bruce and I got married in 1979, we were unprepared for the discomfort our interfaith marriage would cause to our families and synagogues. I was not ready to convert to Judaism and doubted my ability create a Jewish household. This led to fitful encounters with rabbis and ambivalence in the Jewish community about our interfaith family. Eventually Bruce convinced me to attend Rosh Hashanah services at Temple Shalom in Chevy Chase, MD. Rabbi Bruce Kahn gave a sermon on “positive Judaism” that led me to decide that I would focus on supporting our Jewish family. We enrolled our children in Religious School and I volunteered in their classes. My mother-in-law sent me her sisterhood cookbook to assist me in preparing Jewish foods, which was helpful when cooking for our Passover Seders that were attended by Jewish and Christian family and friends. We worked alongside our children through their b’nai mitzvah and confirmation services. Participation on the bima of non-Jewish partners was encouraged which helped me Jewish service practices. We began regular trips to Israel where our children learned to eat falafel, schnitzel and play beach paddleball to supplement their religious studies.

My question to is how many other congregants are hidden in plain sight? These folks are transporting their children to Religious School and participating in countless volunteer tasks. The jobs that go into supporting our community require many helping hands. How do we honor their commitment? We need to continue the conversation, listen, and respond to their needs. The Interfaith and Inclusion Committee does this in our meetings, but the work requires support from the broader Judea Reform community. We hope that you will join us in future conversations around this vital topic.