

Kol Rinah Policy on Including Interfaith Households- Updated May 2017

Kol Rinah welcomes the active participation of all members of interfaith households in our prayer services and especially at life-cycle events and other family celebrations.

Non-Jewish family and friends of honorees, along with other non-Jewish members of our community, may always be honored with leading prayers for the community in either English or Hebrew (e.g., the Prayer for Our Country or the the Prayer for Peace).

Torah aliyot (saying blessings before and after reading Torah) and the related honors of lifting and wrapping the Torah (hagbah and gelilah) are reserved for halakhically Jewish adults (born to a Jewish mother or have undergone conversion), who may recite the associated blessing “who has chosen us from among the nations.” However, non-Jewish adults may stand together with a Jew who is receiving an aliyah next to the Torah scroll; they will normally be included by English name in any blessings for a special occasion and will be congratulated publicly by the presiding rabbi or prayer leader after the aliyah. How a non-Jewish person is welcomed or identified for an honor determined in advance should be decided in consultation with the rabbi(s).

The honor of opening the ark (aron kodesh) during the service may be assigned to non-Jewish family members and friends, especially those who have been instrumental in opening the path to Torah to an honoree. It may also be assigned to a non-Jewish congregant or guest for whom this would be a particularly meaningful honor and who would approach opening the ark with appropriate respect and reverence. In all cases where this honor might be assigned to a non-Jewish person, the rabbi should be consulted. Carrying the Torah scroll around the sanctuary during services is reserved for members of the Jewish people.*

Any joyous life-cycle event or ceremony involving a synagogue member or their children or grandchildren, whether or not it is held in our synagogue or officiated by our rabbi(s), is an occasion for celebration; Kol Rinah does not have any restrictions on what types of wedding announcements, birth announcements, etc. may be listed in our monthly and Shabbat bulletins, and we welcome any related kiddush sponsorships, special cakes, etc. Please call our office for more details about these opportunities.

*** Kol Rinah’s policy on ark-opening follows the 2013 CJLS position authored by Rabbi David Booth: “The halakhic, symbolic, and sociological factors all argue in favor of an option for non-Jews to open and close the ark with some countervailing issues.... Each rabbi should assess how this honor would be experienced and decide accordingly. The honor should be done in a meaningful way by Jew and non-Jew alike.” We also follow in part Rabbi Elliot Dorff’s 2016 opinion, in which he writes, “In some cases that I know of, the non- Jewish spouse promoted the Jewish education and identity of the children even more than the Jewish partner. For such non-Jews I think it is not jarring at all to honor them by permitting them to open the ark at a Bar or Bat Mitzvah for their children, for they are indeed opening the Jewish tradition to their children.”**

Baby Naming and Brit Milah

If a family with a child who is not halakhically Jewish (i.e., the child was not born to a Jewish mother and has not undergone conversion) wants to have a Jewish baby naming at any time, our rabbi(s) will gladly open a dialogue with them. Conversion immediately before or simultaneous with a baby naming is ideal, but is not required.

Under most circumstances, our rabbi(s) will be happy to officiate at baby-naming ceremonies (either at home or at the synagogue) in which a child is not yet halakhically Jewish but the child's parents/guardians intend to or feel it is likely that they will pursue formal conversion before the child reaches Bar/Bat Mitzvah age. A baby naming during a prayer service means that at least one halakhically Jewish parent or grandparent is called up to the Torah for an aliyah; non-Jewish parents and other relatives are welcome to accompany him/her and be congratulated, as described above. Children who are not halakhically Jewish will have their names announced without the formal language of "his/her name will be called in Israel." A baby naming outside, or in addition to, a prayer service can take on a variety of ritual forms, which our rabbi(s) will be happy to advise on.

For a male infant, our rabbi(s) will also be happy to co-officiate with a mohel at a bris, which will always include wording indicating conversion if the child is not halakhically Jewish. (The child will still require immersion in the mikvah later.) If the family has had a surgical circumcision performed in the hospital, or if there is a medical reason to delay circumcision, our rabbi(s) can officiate at a baby naming in the synagogue or at home, as discussed above. Our rabbi(s) will not normally officiate at a baby naming for a male infant who is not halakhically Jewish and whose parents refuse circumcision, as there is no halakhic way for him to become fully Jewish.

Education and Bar/Bat Mitzvah

The [Kol Rinah Early Childhood Center](#) welcomes children from any religious background; ECC families need not have any other affiliation with Kol Rinah.

Children who are not halakhically Jewish are also welcome to enroll in our Religious School- [Kol Rinah Education Hub, or "KoREH"](#).

A child becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah must be halakhically Jewish in order to celebrate the happy occasion at Kol Rinah. There are many opportunities to include non-Jewish family members and friends in the service (see the general guidelines above) or simply to welcome them as guests. Families who need to include a conversion ceremony shortly before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service are invited to consult with our rabbi(s) about ways in which the two events might be connected.

Weddings

Although our rabbis are not permitted to officiate at an interfaith marriage due to the standards of practice of the [Rabbinical Assembly](#) (the organization of Conservative rabbis), interfaith couples are welcome to seek premarital counseling with our rabbi(s) or to celebrate an aufruf at Kol Rinah on a Shabbat before their wedding, using the same aliyah procedure outlined above (i.e., the Jewish member of the couple is formally called up for the aliyah by Hebrew name and recites the blessings before and after the Torah reading; the non-Jewish member accompanies the Jewish member, stands at his/her partner's side, and is welcomed by English name). The rabbi(s) will read the traditional pre-wedding blessing from Siddur Lev Shalem p. 443, identifying the couple "who soon will enter into a covenant of love," but will omit the following phrase "under the wedding canopy."

Any space in any building we own or rent as a congregation may be used for a wedding ceremony, whether it takes place between two Jews, two non-Jews, or a Jew and a non-Jew, and regardless of whether it is officiated by a rabbi or another individual (e.g., a judge); however, any such ceremony is subject to the approval of Kol Rinah's rabbi. Such facility use will also be subject to availability and to our usual building policies involving kosher food and supervision.

Funerals

Our rabbi(s) will be available to officiate at either a graveside burial or at a funeral service for any member of our community, Jewish or non-Jewish, or for their family members. If there is a quorum of ten adult Jews present, Jewish mourners will be encouraged to recite the Mourner's Kaddish. Any mourner or close friend, Jewish or non-Jewish, may also deliver a eulogy or recite a psalm during a funeral officiated by one of our rabbis. Co-officiation with non-Jewish clergy at a funeral service or burial should be addressed with our rabbi(s) on a case-by-case basis.

Funerals for non-Jewish community members, as for Jewish community members, may be held in any space in the Kol Rinah building. Community members are also welcome to sponsor memorial plaques and/or request yahrzeit listings for their non-Jewish loved ones, and Kol Rinah will announce deaths, funeral arrangements, and shiva minyanim for any member of our congregation or for their family. Judaism has an exceptionally strong ethic of caring for the dead, and we at Kol Rinah are also very deeply concerned with comforting the bereaved. Please contact our Chesed Committee for more information.