

Interfaith families have a home at Congregation Beth Shalom

You don't have to be Jewish to enjoy everything Congregation Beth Shalom has to offer!

We have many members who are part of interfaith families. Not all husbands and wives follow the same religion. The CBS family is a diverse group. Just because some members have married someone from a different faith, it doesn't mean they're not practising Jews.

Our members range from those who have come from an Orthodox background, to Reform, Reconstructionist and converts. Whichever path you follow, you'll be assured a warm welcome at CBS, a truly *independent* Jewish community. Here's what some of our interfaith families have to say:

The Wojcek Family



Jim and Diane Wojcek have been CBS members since 1999. Diane was born Jewish, Jim, Christian.

Diane writes:

'About ten years ago, after attending my cousin's son's Bar Mitzvah, I decided it would be nice to get active again in a synagogue. I looked in the local phone book, found CBS located nearby, called, spoke to Rabbi Remson, and asked if I could see him. He cordially said to come and visit that afternoon. I told him that my husband was not Jewish. Rabbi Remson was most accepting of us. We began to attend Shabbat services on a regular basis and experienced the warm, friendly congregants and clergy. Our transition was beautiful and seamless.

Jim and I both feel at home and most comfortable here in this, our family extension. We participate in a number of activities together: Shabbat, Mincha/Havdalah, Days of Awe services, Torah study, social events, fund-raisers, shivas, oneg shabbats and classes. Jim and I truly enjoy being members.'

The Gross Family

Jeff and Wendy Gross have been members of CBS since 2002.

Wendy is Jewish; Jeff, a member of St. Timothy's Lutheran Church, Naperville.

Wendy says:

Unlike many interfaith families, for over 25 years Jeff and I have both remained active in our "birth" religions. As a matter of fact one of the things we discussed early in our relationship was that we would never try to convert each other! I am pleased to say that Jeff feels comfortable and welcome at CBS. He even has a favorite Jewish Holiday, Purim! We have the pleasure of celebrating double the holidays of the "average" Naperville family and we have found the commonalities we share in both of our religions, no matter how we elect to worship. We share many beliefs such as the importance of giving back to our community, treating others as we would want to be treated and staying spiritually grounded in a fast paced and ever changing world.

Jeff says:

I appreciate going to temple where I can to immerse myself in a different religion and culture. Someone a long time ago asked me how Wendy and I find our religions compatible, I simple said, "It is the same God". I have met many interesting people who have welcomed us into their lives and homes.



The Greenberg Family



Mark and Melanie Greenberg joined CBS in 1998. Mark was born Jewish, Melanie was born Protestant.

Melanie says:

"Mark and I had agreed that we were going to raise our children Jewish, and attended services at different West Suburban synagogues to find the right place for us. After shopping around, we realized that Beth Shalom was the best fit for both of us. Mark liked the tradition in the services, and I finally found a place that I felt that I fit, too. I know we are not the only interfaith couple, and so this is a place that I feel I truly belong."

"We wanted our children to get a strong Jewish education, and Jewish identity, but they know they aren't the only children to come from an interfaith home here. Attending the Jewish summer day camp was also something that strengthens our children's sense of Jewish identity and belonging, and we're lucky that Beth Shalom offers that, too."

"During the bar mitzvah training of our oldest son, we became much more involved in the synagogue. Mark ended up joining the board, and going on to serve as president of the synagogue. I also found many ways that I could volunteer and even though I have never converted, there are many ways that I can contribute and be a part of the synagogue."

I was raised in a liberal Protestant home, and actually my father is a minister at a UCC church in Aurora (and a professor of philosophy at Aurora University).

My sister also married a Jewish guy, and we both chose to go through conversion ceremonies for our infant children (mikvah). My kids don't feel isolated maybe because they know their cousins are the same. My niece actually has her bat mitzvah in six weeks.

We do have family gatherings on Christmas and Easter with my side of the family. There are many family traditions and foods that our kids have learned about from my family, but our children know that they are Jewish. We also invite my parents to Passover (but my kids eat their portion of gefilte fish!)

My parents are fine with all of this, and our family is a real melting pot. My two brothers married Asian women, one a Shinto Buddhist from Japan, and the other a Filipino Catholic. So, we have sticky rice at Thanksgiving, Christmas and every other holiday! Our traditional Christmas Eve dinner is now Bulgogi and home made Hot and Sour soup.

For more information about Interfaith Families or any question about how you might call Congregation Beth Shalom your home, please visit our website at www.napershalom.org. If you'd like to speak with someone, you can reach us at 630-961-1818 or send us an email at VPmembership@napershalom.org.