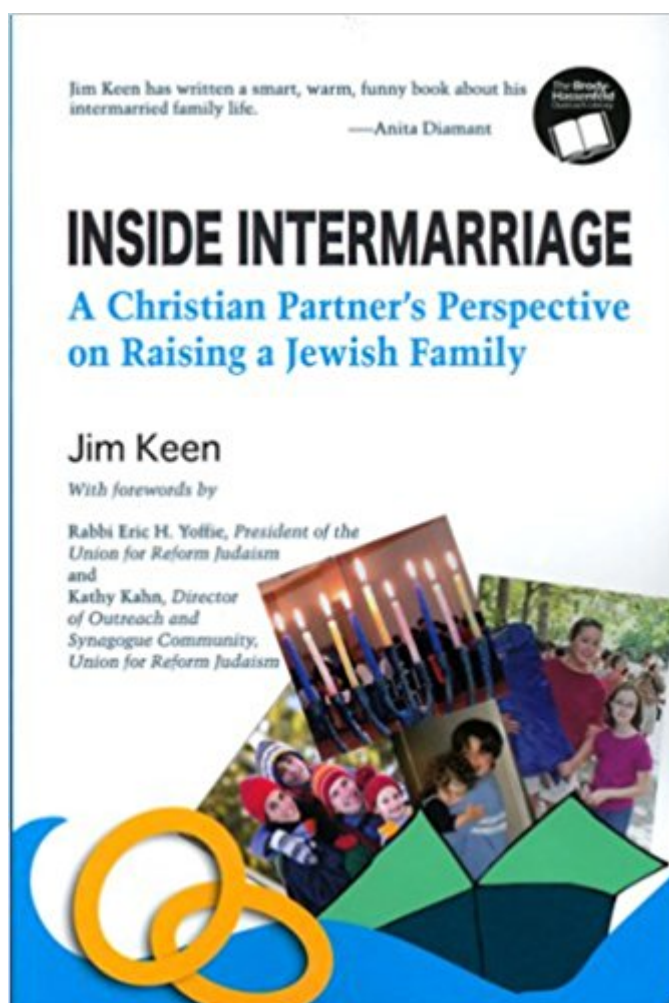


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Inside Intermarriage: A Christian Partner's Perspective On Raising A Jewish Family



Synopsis

The author of *Inside Intermarriage* is a Christian father helping his Jewish wife raise Jewish children. Together, they have made many tough decisions. It's no secret that interfaith marriages are complicated, especially when both partners are connected to their own religious faiths and communities. Using humor and insights gleaned from his own experience, Keen provides couples with practical advice and solutions for how to give children a clear Jewish identity while maintaining a comfort level for both parents. Any family, no matter what the faiths of its individual members, can find his approach relevant. Interfaith homes come in all shapes and sizes; no two are alike. However, the foundations that will help them thrive are the same, and Keen's straightforward ideas are sure to help. This book also includes perspectives from professionals who work with interfaith families.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Jim Keen graduated from the University of Michigan in 1989 with a degree in Communication. He has been in the same interfaith relationship since the time he began working on that degree. He wrote *Inside Intermarriage: A Christian Partner's Perspective on Raising a Jewish Family* to demonstrate that there are workable solutions to one of the biggest issues facing the Jewish community. He is a columnist for InterfaithFamily.com, the *Detroit Jewish News*, the *Atlanta Jewish Times*, and the *Ann Arbor Family Press*. He lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan with his wife and two daughters.

I really enjoyed reading this book, and so did my husband. I think that with us being in a mixed marriage, we wanted clarity on how we could raise our children. The author spoke about how they did things, what they considered, and so on. This helped my husband and I talk a lot about what we could potentially do, and what our thoughts and wishes were. This book was great!

This book is well written. My wife and I both enjoyed it. It was very easy to relate to some of the stories, especially since we've had similar experiences. While it doesn't claim to have all the answers to interfaith marriage issues, the author does give good advice as to what worked for his family.

Jewish Integrity, Continuity
Reviewed by Rabbi Dennis S. Ross
Special to the Jewish News
Inside Intermarriage: A Christian Partner's Perspective on Raising a Jewish Family, by Jim Keen, URJ Press, New York, 2006. 146 pp., \$15.95
When an interfaith relationship gets serious, a call to clergy may follow. "I'm Jewish. She's not. We're in love. And we're not sure what to do." I hear it often. As a rabbi, I recognize the delicacy of the situation: It's a balance of Jewish communal integrity, Jewish continuity, romantic ties and family bonds. My counsel can be a multi relationship-breaker. Of course, some couples figure things out on their own - conversation with clergy not required. Others need professional assistance to reach an accommodation. For many, Detroit Jewish News columnist, Jim Keen's Inside Intermarriage: A Christian Partner's Perspective on Raising a Jewish Family will be a valuable resource as it is for anyone concerned about Jewish peoplehood, intermarriage and outreach. Writes Keen, an Ann Arbor resident: "It's purely frightening to be in love with someone so much, yet also to have this nagging feeling that your union will implode because of your religious differences. Don't lose hope, though. It is possible for the situation to be successfully resolved." Keen well recognizes the potential complexity of an interfaith marriage, especially one like his - Jim, a Protestant, and Bonnie, a Jew, each kept their birth faith. Inside Intermarriage is a gently told story of one couple's journey, uniquely written from the perspective of a Christian father living in a Jewish home: "I am a Christian dad helping to raise a Jewish family." And he adds, "Interfaith homes come in all shapes and sizes. No two are alike." Each couple builds the household that is right for them, clumsy as the process may be. Keen reveals how he and his wife-to-be decided that neither would convert, that children would be raised in one faith only, that the faith would be Judaism, that he would retain his Protestant belief and practice, that all family members - children-to-be included - would participate in the religious lives of the others, all the while honoring their own faith commitments. And just what do the girls think when they go to a Protestant service with their father? "This is Daddy's Church; they go to a synagogue." And he sweetly describes his

encounters with Jewish holidays, Shabbat, the lifecycle, Jewish culture and Jewish attitudes toward intermarriage, all intertwined as an inviting, easily read introduction to Judaism. When religion looms as an insurmountable obstacle, Keen shows how one couple worked it through with the support of loving family and attentive clergy. This couple finds childcare, friendship and volunteer opportunities at the Jewish Community Center and religious education and spiritual life at the synagogue. We quickly realize that their achievement is thanks, in large part, to their willingness to turn to outside personal and institutional resources, people and organizations that are really there for them. Each brief chapter is punctuated by a "Postscript," practical advice offered by a Jewish professional. One Postscript offers pointers on maintaining warm relationships with parents: caution the family of origin not to jump to conclusions about the couple's religious future, offer reassurance about continuing commitments to all relatives, emphasize commonality rather than differences, talk in person rather than over the phone or by e-mail, and sooner is better than later. Folks, like me, who marry and live comfortably in the birth religion, sometimes fail to recognize the bravery it takes to walk into an unfamiliar house of worship, all the while wondering, "Yes, I am in love with a person. But is this place for me?" In Keen's words, "It's purely frightening." Our visitors summon courage; what is our response? How will we reciprocate, all the while recognizing that the future of our people is at stake? Jim Keen's story in *Inside Intermarriage* shows how we can welcome the stranger and, at the same time, serve Jewish integrity and Jewish continuity. Rabbi Dennis S. Ross, serving at Temple Emanuel in Worcester, Mass., is author of *God in Our Relationships: Spirituality between People from the Teachings of Martin Buber* released by Jewish Lights Publishing. His Web site is [...]

Written by Jim Keen, a Christian father committed to helping his Jewish wife raise Jewish children, *Inside Intermarriage: A Christian Partner's Perspective on Raising a Jewish Family* is a one-of-a-kind testimony about the unique dynamics of interfaith love, matrimony, and child-rearing. "A friend of mine recently asked me how I decided to give this 'gift' [the decision to raise the children Jewish] to my wife. She wanted to know what were the factors that made this the right choice. I had a hard time answering that one. I finally said that, technically speaking, there wasn't one thing per se that did it. Nothing forced us to decide one way or the other. The only criterion that we had was that we both had to be happy with the resolution. There is no right or wrong answer." Chapters address the author's experience as an outsider to his wife's culture, well-treated but still a "non-Jew", learning to make family connections at the Jewish Community Center, difficult choices during family celebrations of the holidays, particularly in the ubiquitously marketed Christmas season, and much more. "Fortunately, Bonnie's stepmother offered us a refreshing bit of wisdom.

She said, 'One day out of the year isn't going to make or break their Jewish identity. It's how you raise your kids as Jews the other 364 days that counts.'" A fascinating testimony in its own right, and enthusiastically recommended reading for anyone contemplating interfaith marriage or especially interfaith parenting.

Inside Intermarriage is a welcome addition to books on intermarriage between Christian and Jews. The author, Jim Keen, the non-Jewish partner in an interfaith marriage, decided together with his Jewish wife to raise their children as Jews while he maintained his Protestant Christian beliefs and practices. This is the first book written from the Christian partner's perspective. Since interfaith marriages are complicated, the author does not encourage them but, it is a reality that should be addressed, which he does in a clear, frank, upbeat, easy-to-read way. The book deals with their experiences starting with dating, engagement, marriage, and parenting their daughters through the early elementary school years. While the couple tried to discuss as much as possible with each other, there were surprises, which Keen discusses. He also talks about open discussions with both of their parents. The Keens clearly have a Jewish home, but the children also respect their father and his parents and their beliefs. Keen too has felt stronger in his own faith and he helps raise his daughters Jewishly. I have a child in a similar marriage. I found the book very supportive. It is good for those contemplating such a marriage and couples in the earlier years of an interfaith marriage as well as the parents of the couple.

This is an excellent book. Easy to read with wonderful ideas for blended families.

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