



**Jewish Outreach Institute**  
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**EVERY JEWISH PROFESSIONAL IS AN OUTREACH WORKER:  
RESOURCES FOR ENGAGING INTERMARRIED AND UNAFFILIATED JEWS**

**WE ARE ALL OUTREACH WORKERS**  
**ADDRESS TO THE ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH LIBRARIES CONVENTION**  
**By Paul Golin**  
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**Description:** Every point of contact with a Jewish professional might represent a first foray into the organized Jewish community for a newcomer. This presentation will explore resources to support positive and relevant first steps into Judaism, including books, websites, and other written materials. We'll answer your questions about this growing segment of the Jewish people.

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*[NOTE: Handout was a printed page from JOI's website that lists basic books about intermarriage and can be found online at <http://www.joi.org/library/biblio/basic.shtml>]*

In looking through the schedule of this conference I realized that you'll all probably be going home with about 20 pounds of resources and while I will add my handout to that pile, what I want to talk to you about is less about physical resources than it is about a *resourcefulness* in your approach and your mindset to the issues of intermarriage, disaffiliation, and outreach.

I think the title of this session "Serving Our Diverse Community" is so well phrased (and I assume that's by design) because while we may be talking about subgroups within the Jewish community, it would be a mistake to think of these subgroups as something separate or different from "our community," or worse yet as "minorities" within the community. It would be a mistake for two reasons. First, because what *everyone* needs from the organized Jewish community is generally the same, whether they fit into one of these subgroups or not: a warm welcome, an accepting community, and programs of meaning.

The second reason it would be a mistake to think of these subgroups as "minority" is because, statistically, you'd be wrong. One of the subgroups I've been invited to talk about is unaffiliated Jews, and unaffiliated Jews are actually the *majority* of our community. (In some communities, unaffiliated Jews are the *vast* majority.)

Does anyone know the national average percentage of affiliated to unaffiliated at any given time? It's less than 40% affiliated. And of course, of that 40% there's a much lower percentage of Jews actually *engaged* in active participation within Jewish institutions. So all the faces you see in your libraries, in your synagogues, in your JCCs and other Jewish institutions--all those people you know of as *your* Jewish community--are probably less than half of all the Jews in your area. Now of course people come in and out of engagement with Judaism during various stages in their lives, but that low percentage of affiliation tells us that the Jewish community can do a better job of reaching people and giving them something of meaning.

I'm also here to talk about intermarried Jews. It's almost impossible to talk about intermarried Jews without also discussing unaffiliated Jews because the overlap is tremendous. 80% or more of intermarried families are unaffiliated with the Jewish community. Addressing that disaffiliation among intermarried families is the primary mission of my organization, the Jewish Outreach Institute (JOI). So why do we believe this is such an important mission?

Well, intermarried families are what we at JOI call the "Coming Majority." Sometime soon, maybe within the next decade, there will be more intermarried households than in-married households. Does anyone know how many intermarried households there already are today in the United States? There are over a million intermarried households, out of a total of three million married Jewish households. The recent National Jewish Population Study showed us how in some ways this Coming Majority is already with us. Of all the young people on college campuses ages 18-29 who consider themselves Jews, only 48% came from two Jewish parents.

Instead of fretting over these numbers, at JOI we see an opportunity for the Jewish community. If we can find ways to welcome intermarried families and encourage the raising of Jewish children, our community can experience population growth rather than decline. And we believe that an inclusive community will speak to all disaffiliated Jews. There are below-average affiliation rates among all the subgroups we're discussing at this session.

**So what can we as Jewish professionals, and specifically you as librarians, do to help re-engage unaffiliated Jews with their Judaism?** Well, there's outreach. For many of you the phrase "Jewish outreach" may be associated with the efforts of the Reform movement to welcome and to provide programming for those intermarried families who come through their doors. And that's an excellent start. The problem we've noticed is that people are simply not walking through the doors of our institutions in large enough numbers. So JOI promotes a new definition of outreach, to take Judaism outside the four walls of our institutions, to meet people where they are (both physically and metaphysically) rather than waiting for them to come to us.

Before I go into that new definition let me talk out outreach in general and how it applies to you. Outreach is not a population; it's a methodology. So a good understanding of outreach methodology will help you with all disenfranchised populations not just the intermarried. In order for us to become a more welcoming, inclusive community, all Jewish professionals need to participate in this effort, because every contact we have with a newcomer might be that person's first contact with the Jewish community ever or in many years. That's why we say that *every* Jewish professional is an outreach worker.

So, for those intermarried couples or family members who happen to come through your doors, what resources can you provide? Well let's start with the basics and move outward. There are of course books that might be helpful. I've handed out a page from our website that lists some, specifically about intermarriage. On our website we have lists of other titles broken down by topics such as "introduction to Judaism," "conversion," and "raising children in an intermarriage." You can find them by going to [JOI.org/library](http://JOI.org/library). The first book on the handout I gave you, by the way, is the newest from our executive director Rabbi Kerry Olitzky and it's written specifically for the non-Jewish member of an intermarriage, so that might be helpful to you as well.

My sense is that intermarried people finding their way into your institutions are going to be less conflicted about intermarriage itself, and will instead simply be looking for low barrier entry points into Judaism, which by the way is the same need as unaffiliated Jews in general regardless of marital status. Providing low-barrier entry points is what outreach is all about. When you think about low-barrier written resources, perhaps you want to hand someone a pamphlet rather than a tome; to have introductory material on hand for all aspects of Jewish practice.

So, how do we know what to give people? We ask them. My image of librarians is that you are very good at quickly drilling down what it is people are asking for. But those of us on the inside of the Jewish community develop this kind of "in" language, and we don't even necessarily realize we're using it until we're talking to someone who doesn't share that language. Lowering barriers means being mindful of our "in" language and not making assumptions about people's prior knowledge. That means, for example, not using Hebrew or Yiddishisms for those who don't have a Jewish background.

Books are an obvious resource. But a much more powerful resource for this target audience is in making a personal connection. Personal connections are key to successful outreach. It doesn't mean the personal connection has to be with *you*, if you're not the outreachy type. But if you can hook people up to living resources, that is a great outreach vehicle. Obviously, you may feel that your own institution, even your own library, runs programs that might be of interest to intermarried or unaffiliated Jews. Libraries may have a special role in outreach because they could position themselves as a lower-barrier entryway into Jewish learning, perhaps something less structured than a formal class. But it doesn't mean you have to or should limit references to your own institutions.

So, can you put together a list of local welcoming institutions in your area, to have on hand? On JOI's website we have a list of over 900 institutions nationally that claim to be inclusive toward intermarried families. Creating your own list involves knowing your Jewish community inside out. And to be really effective, you not only refer someone to a specific person within an institution, but you make the connection yourself by getting on the phone and letting that person know you're sending someone their way. We believe that outreach is most effective as a community-wide endeavor. Each institution cannot be all things to all people, so we need to work across institutional and denominational lines.

For example, we know that no Orthodox or Conservative rabbi will officiate at an intermarriage, yet some of them are willing to make references to their colleagues in the Reform or Reconstructionist movements. By the way, JOI will help couples find a rabbi to officiate at their wedding, but there is another resource that sells a list of rabbis who officiate at intermarriage, it's called the Rabbinic Center for Research and Counseling, and it's at [rcrconline.org](http://rcrconline.org).

Besides linking people to books or institutions, you might also want to be aware of specific programs in your area that might be of interest to this audience, keeping in mind this idea of low

barrier, low threshold entry points. For example, JOI put out a study a couple of years ago about the outreach potential of Jewish film festivals. Twenty years ago there was one Jewish film festival in the U.S., in San Francisco. Today there's over a hundred Jewish film festivals, in just about every town with a Jew in it. We found that film festivals attract a very different crowd than, say, High Holiday services, especially when the films are screened in secular venues like multiplex theaters.

So, perhaps you can refer people to a film festival as one possible entry point into making a connection with their Judaism. And the flip side of that is, perhaps you can partner with Jewish film festivals to let people know about your own programs or institutions.

Here's where we get back to JOI's new definition of outreach, taking Judaism out to where people are. Film festivals in secular venues lower barriers to participation because they don't ask people to walk into a synagogue or even a JCC, which might be intimidating. Also, watching a film usually doesn't require any prior knowledge. We actually promote outreach that we call Public Space Judaism, which lowers barriers even further by being free to participate in. These events often take place around holidays, for example, Hanukkah in the Mall or Passover in the matza aisle of a supermarket. This may sound familiar to those of you familiar with the Chabad-Lubavitch outreach. The challenge at all of these events is for Jewish professionals to make personal connections with unaffiliated Jews and then offer some logical "next step" into deeper engagement. You don't push synagogue membership to someone who stumbled across your menorah lighting at the mall.

It may be easier for unaffiliated Jews to access their Judaism culturally before religiously, which may be why film festivals are appealing and also why popular Jewish-themed books might also be a good entry point. One program that JOI just launched in Miami that tries to cater to that interest and may be of relevance to you is a program of book reading circles. It's called Cover to Cover (the website is [covertocover.org](http://covertocover.org)) and it's book groups that meet in coffee shops or book stores once a month to discuss the best in Jewish American literature. The definition is on the books as "Jewish American," meaning the author or themes are related to Judaism, but we do not define the participants of the program. And this is a model we'd like to launch nationally. Here in New York this fall we will be hosting a book brunch for families with young children in Tribeca, called Tribooka, that will take place in a popular brunch restaurant and will include author readings.

If you run programs, and if you want to attract unaffiliated and intermarried families as participants, consider running your programs outside the four walls of your institution. Putting some of your resources online is a possible first step. If you can provide meaning, and engagement with Judaism, to those families not currently walking through our doors, eventually they'll join our community and institutions. But it has to be at their pace. We can't push, because our community has pushed too many people away already.

In closing, I want to say that while written resources may be easiest for you to recommend, for unaffiliated and intermarried Jews the resource that would probably be of most value to them is your empathy, and your ability to connect them to something of meaning *to them*. It's about small, positive steps into deeper Jewish engagement; I hope that's what you take away most from my talk.