

Congregation Keneseth Israel
Policies, Practices & Guidelines

Policy, Practice or Guideline: Non-Jews in the Synagogue: Involvement

Source: Religious Practice Committee

Date Adopted: 12/1996

Dates Revised: 7/2022

- I. Introduction: Keneseth Israel counts among its members a large percentage of intermarried couples. In order to create a spiritual environment that is meaningful to all people, guidelines have been established to define the non-Jews level of participation in Shabbat Services and life-cycle events.
- II. Policy Statement: It is the policy at KI to welcome and support non-Jewish spouses and family members to the *Bimah* and allow them, in some way, to participate with the many facets of life at KI.
- III. History: Traditionally the candle blessing and Kiddush were read only by Jewish family members. A Bar/Bat Mitzvah was an individual event and only the child, Rabbi, and Cantor would participate in the service. Other participants, frequently only the parents, would have minor passive roles confined to non-liturgical parts. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah was viewed as a family event with most families trying to involve as many family members in the Service as possible. Almost all of the opportunities for participation in the KI Service were created for this purpose. The Congregation created these parts assuming that everybody in the nuclear and extended family were Jewish. With the change in Jewish marriage patterns, this assumption no longer applies. However, all families, both in-faith and interfaith, continue to relate to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah as a family event.
- IV. Definitions:
- V. Procedure
 - a. **Candle & Kiddush.** The non-Jewish spouse reads the introductory text prior to the Candle Lighting and Kiddush. The actual Candle Lighting and

Kiddush would be led by the Jewish spouse or child. Rituals should only be led by Jews.

- b. **Bar/Bat Mitzvah.** The Torah Transmission ceremony is meant to symbolize the transmission of Judaism, within the family, to the child. If the non-Jewish parent has actively participated in the child's Jewish upbringing, then he/she would participate in this ceremony. While all of the child's grandparents could come to the *Bimah*, only those who have supported the child's Jewish education would actually participate directly. The Rabbi will meet with the family prior to the event to determine to what extent the non-Jewish family member(s) have supported the child's Jewish education. While any family member could stand at the reading desk, during the Torah Service, only Jewish family members would say the traditional Torah blessing. Non Jewish relatives may read an alternative passage in English. During the Torah transmission the non-Jewish member would stand with his/her Jewish spouse during the parental *aliya*, without singing the blessing. Since the Torah is the central Jewish symbol, it is preferred that Jewish relatives would dress and undress the Torah. Lifting the Torah shall only be done by a Jew. Since there is no religious or liturgical significance to opening or closing the Ark doors, any relative is permitted to do this.
- c. **Shabbat Services.** Guidelines consistent with those for Bar/Bat Mitzvah will apply to regular Shabbat Services. That is Prayer should be led only by Jewish members. Grandfathering will not apply as it may cause misunderstandings and hurt feelings and it would not be clear as to where to draw the line.

VI. Reference: P&P: Family Participation in Bar/Bat Mitzvah Services