

Policy Regarding Announcements of Celebrations of Life Cycle Events at Adath Shalom Congregation

13 February 2019

Adopted by the Board on April 7, 2019

Preamble

It has long been the practice at synagogues that are members of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ) not to make any announcement about forthcoming intermarriages or births of children from intermarried couples, with the exception of children who are born to a Jewish mother and who are expected to be raised as Jewish. (This position is most fully set out as policy in the Teshuvah EH 16.1989 of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJL&S) of the USCJ entitled “Congratulations to Mixed Marriage Families” written by R. Jerome Epstein and passed by a vote of 8 to 4 on 30 March 1989.) Announcement was seen as a form of celebration that was inconsistent with the Conservative Movement’s traditional efforts to discourage intermarriage. With rare exceptions, that ruling has been followed at Adath Shalom. However, Adath Shalom never saw any need to establish its own policy on the question of whether intermarriages or births of children from intermarried couples could be announced in the synagogue.

Rationale

It is relevant to note that in February 2017 the USCJ held an all-congregation vote to permit non-Jewish individuals to join member congregations. To be clear, though the new “standard” for USCJ was approved by a large majority of member congregations, each congregation is free to adopt, reject or just ignore the new ruling. Adath Shalom Congregation supported the new ruling in the formal voting process, but to date has not adopted the ruling.

The policy described below is independent of any question about membership in Adath Shalom Congregation, and is not to be seen as a step toward a new membership policy.

Though Adath Shalom Congregation cannot at this time admit non-Jews to membership, it does nevertheless seem appropriate to “soften” the limitation that currently exists for those members who are in mixed marriages, or whose children may be in a mixed marriage, by permitting celebration of life cycle events, including announcements of marriages and births of children who would not be Jewish by birth. The main rationale for this new policy is to reinforce the concept of Adath Shalom Congregation as a family-like organization of people who want some formal religious expression in their personal lives as Jews and, further, to share that experience with others in the same organization.

Secondarily, the policy to accept announcements in the synagogue should be seen as a way to encourage non-Jewish partners in a mixed marriage to more active participation at Adath Shalom, with the goal that their children receive a stronger Jewish education. At a minimum, it should lead the Jewish members in such a relationship to feel closer to Adath Shalom as their religious community.

As of April 7, 2019, announcements of celebrations of life cycle events of members and their families, regardless of religion, are acknowledged at Adath Shalom. This policy allows, among other things, announcements of inter-marriages of members of Adath Shalom Congregation and of their families in the synagogue or in the synagogue bulletin and announcements of births of children in families that may not be formally Jewish, as defined by contemporary halakhic standards.