



North American Federation of Temple Youth

An affiliate of the Union for Reform Judaism

Interreligious Understanding: Hearing God's Presence **2004-2005 NFTY Study Theme**

Background Information

In the Torah Jews are taught to accept others, without prejudice or bias. The Torah states "You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your kinsman, but incur no guilt because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself: I am the Eternal" (*Leviticus* 19: 17-18).

Historically, the Reform Jewish Movement has been the leading body within the Jewish religious community committed to the development of effective Interreligious relationships so that diverse faith groups may live together in harmony in our unique society and work cooperatively in the pursuit of social justice based on the ideals that spring from our common heritage.

The Union for Reform Judaism has been deeply involved with our counterparts within the Protestant and Catholic communities in the civil rights movement, and in the preservation of religious freedom, the protection of civil liberties, and the struggle to gain economic justice and equality before the law for minorities and women. Considerable resources have also been devoted to the creation of programs and educational materials to help clergy and congregants reach other religious groups in order to eliminate the misunderstandings and prejudices of the past.

It is now clear that intensive moral and social issues have surfaced, which are leading toward a renaissance of Interreligious communication and cooperation. The emergence of the Moral Majority and extremist attacks on the United States Constitution, the profound suffering caused by economic problems, growing concern for peace within the religious community and other factors are now lifting the Interreligious dimension of education to a higher level of urgency. Issues such as growing poverty, unemployment and reproductive rights are increasingly being addressed by Interreligious coalitions of concern.

We as a Reform Jewish youth Movement have devoted our year of informal study to Interreligious Understanding to avow our dedication to learning about and thusly opposing religious intolerance. Now think about your life for a second; your home and your school community. Think back on all of the unjustified comments or even violent occurrences that have happened due to racial intolerance which you have heard or witnessed. Now think about the larger picture, North America. Think about the history of the United States and Canada, countries whose past is tarnished by religious injustice. It is for these reasons that we as NFTYites must do everything in our power to combat such a societal plague. With the NFTY Study Theme, we are all given an opportunity to fight against this religious intolerance by educating each other, on the local TYG level and in our NFTY regions. By educating the teenage Reform Jew on this subject, possibilities for global harmony are truly boundless.