



**A Resolution to Declare the NFTY 2004-2005 Study Theme:
“Interreligious Understanding: Hearing God’s Presence”**

WHEREAS historically, the Reform Jewish Movement has been a leader in the Jewish community on issues of intergroup relations;

WHEREAS the Union for Reform Judaism’s 1968 statement – that “the openness of contemporary religious life offers new opportunities for interreligious contact that carry us into areas other than interreligious social action” – is still immediately relevant today;

WHEREAS there is even today, as the Union for Reform Judaism stated in 1984, a “critical need for the development of interreligious coalitions, communication, and cooperation on the national and local levels...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 prophetic ideals that spring from our common heritage”;

WHEREAS all proponents of interreligious understanding, including the Reform Movement and all its affiliates, have the responsibility to respond justly and proactively to the rampant xenophobia and religious intolerance which currently pervade our society;

WHEREAS the recent debate surrounding Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* revealed the tragic reality that Jewish and Christian communities in America are inadequately educated about each others’ religions;

WHEREAS the case of Gibson’s *The Passion* is only the most recent of an overabundance of evidence proving this dearth of interreligious understanding – extending well beyond the subject of Jewish-Catholic Relations to include Jewish-Christian relations in general and, of course, Jewish-Muslim relations – has reached an alarming degree, which requires a careful, proactive, and immediate response;

WHEREAS Union for Reform Judaism President Rabbi Eric Yoffie highlighted Interreligious Affairs as an important priority for the future of our Movement, and in November 2003 launched the Presidential Initiative *Open Doors, Open Minds: Synagogues and Churches Studying Together*, asserting that these difficult times challenge us to “reach out to our neighbors and listen for God’s presence in their voices”;

WHEREAS many bold congregations have launched interreligious programs and dialogues with great success;

WHEREAS these successful programs, some of which were awarded the Irving J. Fain Award by the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism (CSA), involved primarily adult participants;

WHEREAS though the roots of Interreligious Affairs may indeed be overwhelmingly theological, the massive trunk, the intricate branches, and the countless leaves of this living subject are available and applicable to us all and demand our engagement;

WHEREAS the Reform Movement’s Commission on Interreligious Affairs, composed of delegates from the North American Federation of Temple Brotherhoods/Jewish Chatauqua Society (NFTY/JCS), Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), the Union for Reform Judaism, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, holds no seats for NFTYites, and therefore, is inevitably limited to serving primarily the adult arms of the Reform Movement;

WHEREAS we believe that interreligious dialogue is as much a concern and responsibility of our Movement’s youth as it is of laymen and the rabbinate, if not more so, since an investment in fostering interreligious relations among the younger generation will pay off ten-fold in the future;

WHEREAS Interreligious Affairs is a topic that goes relatively ignored in the curricula of many if not most Reform Religious Schools;

WHEREAS NFTY programs are among our Movement's most effective means of informally educating its youth on issues of great importance;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the NFTY Study Theme for the 2004-2005 year be "Interreligious Understanding: Hearing God's Presence";

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the NFTY leadership urge the leadership of the Commission on Interreligious Affairs to raise the level of youth involvement in the Commission on Interreligious Affairs of Reform Judaism to that of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, which offers NFTY leaders 4 delegates on its Commission;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the NFTY leadership and NFTY staff over the summer and throughout the 2004-2005 NFTY year, develop and make available the necessary resources on Interreligious Affairs so that NFTY regions, TYGs, and all NFTYites with little to no knowledge on this important subject can run extraordinarily successful programs and build important bridges between religious communities, from start to finish of the 2004-2005 NFTY year;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that these resources include: basic summaries of the major religions and denominations in North America; a "How-to" guide for NFTY regions and TYGs to establish first contact with their neighborly church or mosque; regular off-the-shelf programs exclusively for Jewish participants on pertinent interreligious issues (i.e., non-dialogical programs); resources for regions or TYGs to engage in meaningful interfaith social action projects; a comprehensive Reading List of graspable, interesting books relating to the subject of Interreligious Understanding; a website devoted to helping NFTYites utilize the web to learn about interreligious subjects and news.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the healthy dialogues and interreligious friendships that will result from NFTY's commitment to Interreligious Understanding be sustained on local, regional, and North American levels, well beyond the duration of the 2004-2005 year, so that generations of NFTYites to come will benefit from this study theme and richly experience for themselves sacred glimpses of the "other."