

# Intergroup Relations: Increased Effectiveness in Pursuit of Social Justice - 1985

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## Issue

- 1) Weakened avenues of communication and intergroup relationships and increased lack of understanding between Jews and Christians, blacks and whites, the advantaged and disadvantaged.
- 2) Better communications and understanding among the various religious, ethnic, cultural and racial groups is of particular importance to the Jewish community. It is also essential for NFTS, representing the women of Reform Judaism, to take the initiative to reestablish its leading role in the interreligious community, a role that has been increasingly taken over by secular groups.

## Background

When self-interest, hostility or fear separate people, the chance of solving mutual problems is diminished. If we understand each other and if we can work together toward common goals, we are more likely to solve our problems and minimize tensions and suspicions.

Reform Judaism has a longstanding commitment to the development of effective intergroup and interreligious relationships. Since its establishment NFTS as the women's agency of Reform Judaism has actively developed and participated in interreligious and intergroup activities that helped women promote understanding, develop mutual respect and effectively work together to accomplish mutual goals.

For many years, NFTS was the initiator and preeminent contact with church women's groups, who saw in Sisterhood their peer group in the Jewish community. Many programs for mutual understanding took place on the national level as well as positions adopted relating to areas of common concern. Locally NFTS affiliates felt a special responsibility for initiating, sponsoring and cooperating with church women's groups beginning with social agendas such as interfaith activities and, through the years, expanding to include educational and informational programs and coalitions for advocacy and action programs. For a variety of reasons local relationships have deteriorated, interreligious programming has diminished and bonds have been loosened.

NFTS recognizes that contemporary needs can be most effectively met through coalitions—a means through which divergent groups can address areas of mutual concern in a manner that allows the participating groups to maintain their individual characteristics while they understand more about each other's organization's social values and/or religious ethics. Coalitions are associations of equals with each member bringing unique perspectives to the issues of mutual concern. While differences are recognized and treated with dignity and respect, the emphasis is on the study and/or remediation of a particular issue or problem.

By our tradition "We are bound to commit ourselves to creating a more just, more whole world. This can take place only through the interactions ... between communities, and so Jewish teachings have always been concerned with personal morality, social responsibility and 'political' questions of leadership, power and control of poverty" (Jonathan Wolf, "Social Action" in *The Third Jewish Catalogue*, Sharon and Michael Strassfeld, eds. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1980, p. 47).

## Resolution

*For more information about WRJ and Social Justice, visit [www.wrj.org/social-justice-home](http://www.wrj.org/social-justice-home)*

To recreate and strengthen associations for mutual understanding and action, NFTS:

- 1) Urges its member Sisterhoods to take the initiative to establish dialogue and networking with religious, interracial or issue oriented women's groups and associations;
- 2) Urges its member Sisterhoods to be sensitive and responsive to invitations and opportunities to relate to other groups;
- 3) Urges its member Sisterhoods to undertake programs that will help others understand Jewish values and experiences and for the Sisterhoods to be open to learn about the values and experiences of other groups;
- 4) Calls upon its member Sisterhoods to take the initiative to identify problems and issues in their community which affect many people and groups; and, to undertake study and action programs to address mutual issues whether by themselves or in cooperative effort with other groups.