Lifecyle Seminar for Rabbis  
Spring 2015  
RB-PRAC 220

Rabbi Dan Judson  
Djudson@hebrewcollege.edu  
617-559-8638 [office]

Course Description: In this course we will explore the basic sources and development of the major Jewish lifecycle rituals - brit milah, bar/bat mitzvah, weddings and conversions. We will look at the various ways contemporary clergy perform these lifecycle rituals, as well as the counseling surrounding each lifecycle.

Requirements: Please do reading assignments as outlined in the syllabus. Readings will be posted on schoology. Source texts will be studied together in class. There are three written assignments:

Written Assignments:

1. Write a 2-3 page statement responding to the following question: A couple comes to you as the rabbi of a synagogue – mother is 6 months pregnant and Christian, father is Jewish. They say that they want to raise the child as Jewish with a respect for Christianity. They say that they have deep concerns about brit milah. They are willing to circumcise but want to do it in the hospital on the second day done by their ob/gyn. They are not members of your shul but are also interested in joining after the baby is born. You say to them…. The congregation can be any kind of synagogue you choose. Due by March 6

2. Write a wedding drasha – 3 pages – using the method we discussed in class. Please interview and write a drash for a real couple. The couple can be already married, but the goal of the exercise is to have you practice gathering information as well as crafting it into a drasha. Due March 27 – we will be sharing them in class.

3. The following is a she’ela asked to the CCAR by a Rabbi in CA. “Recently, a woman in her mid-twenties has come to me seeking conversion. Her maternal grandmother had been a practicing Jew. Her mother was raised as a Jew but converted to Christianity when she married. The woman in question was baptized as a Lutheran and brought up in that church. Her sister has meanwhile maintained a Jewish identity and refused to undergo confirmation as a Lutheran. Their father's sister, while maintaining her native Christianity, married a Jewish man. Thus, there has always been a Jewish influence in this family, most evident at Passover, when the entire family would attend seder at their uncle's home. The woman in question has met a Jewish man whom she wishes to marry. Is she a Jew by the traditional, "matrilineal" definition? Even should this be the case, I believe that a full conversion is warranted, given that she was raised and confirmed as a Christian?”

How would you respond to this question? What kind of ceremony, if any, would you require of such a person? What kind of conversion counseling would you do with her,
and what kind of curriculum would you study with her [if any]. Please respond in 2-3 pages. Due last class.

Course materials: Please bring a Tanakh and/or Rabbi’s Manual to those classes indicated in syllabus (any denomination’s manual will do).

Schedule:
1. Introduction to the Jewish Life Cycle
Biblical sources for brit milah
[bring Tanakh]

2. Rabbinic/medieval sources on brit milah
Reading:

3. Issues and Counseling in Brit Milah
Readings:
   3. American Academy of Pediatricians Circumcision Policy Statement
   4. CCAR statement on matrilineal descent
   5. Selected CCAR and RA tsheuvot

1st Response paper due

4. Performing Brit Milah & Brit Bat Ceremonies
Guest: Rav Claudia Kreiman
[bring Rabbi’s manual]

5. Pre-marital Counseling for weddings
Reading [or buy on amazon.com as I make .1 cents on each copy sold]:

6. The Wedding Ceremony and The Development of Wedding Liturgy and Customs [bring rabbi’s manual]
Readings:
2. Solomon Freehof, “The Huppah”
3. “Marriage on the Sabbath: A Responsa by Moshe Isserles” Music of the wedding
   [bring rabbi’s manual]

7. Performing Marriage Ceremonies
   Guest: Rabbi Darby Leigh

8. Marriage Ceremony Cont.
   [Wedding drasha due by this class]

9. Music of the wedding
   Guest: Cantor Brian Mayer

10. Rabbinic Sources on Conversion
    Reading:
        2. “Conversion for Marriage in Modern Times,” in *The Jewish Political Tradition*

11. Counseling for Conversion
    Guest: Rabbi Michelle Robinson, Temple Emanuel
    Reading:
        1. CCAR, RA, RRA, RCA Guidelines on Conversion
        2. Selected CCAR and RA tsheuvot on conversion

12. Conversion Rituals – best practices [class to be held at Mayyim Hayyim]
    Guest: Carrie Bornstein, Executive Director, Mayyim Hayyim

13. Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation and ceremonies
    Reading:
        1. *Putting God on your Guest List* [excerpts]
    Guest: Rabbi Andy Vogel