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. Please write a 2-3 page response to Julia Appel’s question which appeared this summer on JAFTER:

“I am contemplating doing baby namings for baby boys born to Jewish mothers who have chosen not to circumcise. I understand from my (radical Jewish) midwife that this is the most common request she gets from her patients who are Jewish and looking for a rabbi.

1) Would you/do you do these? Why or why not?
2) If you do them, does your ceremony differ from your girl baby naming ceremony? If so, in what ways?

My current thinking:

On the side of YES: Baby is Jewish regardless of circumcision, because born to Jewish mother. In my city, no one apparently will do these baby namings -- kiruv opportunity for parents who really want to affirm their child's Jewish identity but disagree with circumcision. Serve the radical Jewish community, who often and especially here have no rabbis who they can relate to. And on a basic level, way to work freelance.

On the side of NO: I do want parents to circumcise their Jewish boys. It's our way of life for thousands of years. Echoes of Roman persecutions and how Jews have sacrificed their lives in order to be able to carry out this important ritual. It's in the Torah. I don't want to encourage the practice of not circumcising.
If I do them, I would require there be no other religion's baby rituals (e.g. no baptism the next day) and family committed to raising child Jewish, same policy as other baby namings/brises I do.

Your thoughts, friends?”

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 November 19 – 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. September 10
   Introduction
   Biblical sources for brit milah
   [bring Tanakh]

2. September 24
   Rabbinic/medieval sources on brit milah
   Reading:
   1. Shaye Cohen, Why Aren’t Jewish Women Circumcised: Gender and Covenant in Judaism [excerpts]
3. October 8
Issues 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 by October 15

4. October 15
Performing Brit Milah & Brit Bat Ceremonies
Guest: Rav Claudia Kreiman
[bring Rabbi’s manual]

5. October 22
Pre-marital Counseling for weddings
Reading [or buy on amazon.com as I make .1 cents on each copy sold]:

6. October 29
Pre-Marital Counseling for weddings cont.
Readings:
2. Solomon Freehof, “The Huppah”
3. “Marriage on the Sabbath: A Responsa by Moshe Isserles” Music of the wedding

7. November 5
Performing Marriage Ceremonies
Guest: Rabbi Darby Leigh

November 12 is a yom iyyun

[Wedding drasha due by this class- November 19]
8. November 19
Marriage Ceremony Cont.
9. December 3
Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation and ceremonies
Reading:
   1. *Putting God on your Guest List* [excerpts]
Guest: Rabbi Andy Vogel

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

11. December 17
Counseling for Conversion
Guest: Rabbi Michelle Robinson, Temple Emanuel
Reading:
   1. CCAR, RA, RRA, RCA Guidelines on Conversion
Selected CCAR and RA tsheuvot on conversion