

# Interfaith Families Project

March 2004

[www.iffp.net](http://www.iffp.net)

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## FROM THE BOARD

### Two Experiments

At its February meeting, the Board approved two temporary alterations to our regular Sunday morning routine, each to occur once before the end of this year, if possible. The first experiment will be to cancel Adult Group one Sunday and have a brunch for adults in its place. The second experiment will be to reverse the regular schedule one Sunday. It will begin with the kids going to Sunday School while Adult Group meets. After Adult Group ends and before the kids rejoin their families, the Gathering will begin. Kids and teachers will then rejoin the larger community for a Family Gathering. After the Gathering, coffee and bagels will be available for half an hour. Details were left to the deliberative wisdom of Heather, Sherri, Larry Bostian (chair, Worship Committee), and Sam Lawson (guru, Adult Group).

These experiments grow from the Board's desire to respond to key challenges facing IFFP—none more important than finding additional ways for small groups of members to meet and explore shared interests. When IFFP was smaller, this happened naturally both at IFFP events and on the streets of Takoma Park. With a larger and more geographically diverse community, we need to cultivate different opportunities for natural community building.

Complementing these two Sunday-morning experiments, the Board also discussed ways to encourage member-initiated events. We want to facilitate any member s who wish to invite others to join them in some activity. The listserv is available to publicize member-initiated events, and in the coming months the Board will consider steps to increase the number of these events. Heather and Terry Fischer's excursion to see The Passion of the Christ is an example of this kind of activity, as are Larry Bostian's plans — sometime in the not too distant future — to mount an IFFP expedition to examine some of the great religious art hanging at the National Gallery of Art.

While the Board is considering steps that we can take immediately, we are also looking ahead to next year. Hiring, budgets, and calendars are all rising on the horizon. So is the need for new Board members. We look forward to hearing from you on any of these (or other matters). You will certainly hear more from us on all of these matters in the near future.

—[Steve Jackson](#), IFFP Board Chair

### IFFP BOOK CLUB

Who wants to form an IFFP book club? If you are, please offer book suggestions and indicate if you would prefer to meet during Adult Group or at another time or place. We hope to select a book and meeting date a month in advance. If you're interested, please contact Cheryl Leanza.

### MARCH 2004

7	The Sh'ma/The Beatles • Bagels, 10 a.m. • Gathering, 10:15 • Sunday School/ Adult Group, 10:45	12 Fri	Men's Night Out	14	Prayer • Bagels, 10 a.m. • Gathering, 10:15 • Sunday School/ Adult Group, 10:45	21	<a href="#">Purim Festival</a> , 10 a.m.	27	<a href="#">IFFP Seder</a>	28	Last Supper • Bagels, 10 a.m. • Gathering, 10:15 • Sunday School/ Adult Group, 10:45
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### APRIL 2004

18	Easter • Bagels, 10 a.m. • Gathering, 10:15 • Sunday School/Adult Group, 10:45			23-25	Women's Retreat		30			Young Couples Potluck
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## SUNDAY SCHOOL

### Remarks from the Director of Religious Education

As my second month as interim Director of Religious Education draws to a close, I feel it is time to begin reporting to the community on a monthly basis in the Newsletter. Although in the coming month I will focus my thoughts more directly on the Sunday School, I want to use the month's space to share a little about myself and my background. Many of you are familiar with this information, but many more of you have wondered about the perspective from which I come. So here goes:

I have about 15 year's experience working with kids and developing youth programs in both faith-based and nonsectarian organizations. This experience began in earnest after I graduated from college and moved to Florida to work in a wilderness-based educational and rehabilitative program for youth at risk, and eventually broadened to more macro-level program development while in the Peace Corps in the southern African country of Namibia. There I implemented a UNICEF life skills program in the southern region of that country. I have a Master's degree from Yale University Divinity School and a Master's from Columbia University School of Social Work, and I am currently finishing my third year in a PhD program in Biblical Studies at Catholic University. This program is a philological approach to rigorous analysis of the biblical texts without the trappings of historical theology or socially conditioned doctrine. I consider my primary vocational calling to be that of teaching and am focusing my studies on the ancient languages and the intertestamental period of mission and faith development. By this time next year I hope to be in the throes of a dissertation on the guiding paradigm of covenant in the Gospel of John.

I have had the good fortune to pursue my passion for working with kids by teaching COA and COA Prep for the past three years. I am a Christian in continual discernment and constant wonder over the way God works in this world, and I have much gratitude for the experience and perspective I have gained in my time with IFFP thus far. As I begin to wrap my head around my new position, I am more and more excited about the prospects of the Sunday School for our interfaith kids and look forward to the continued development of its curriculum and mission. Let me end with a word of thanks to all of you for your support and encouragement in these new steps. It has been a fun ride, and I look forward to the coming months!

—[Sherri Brown](#), Interim Director of Religious Education

## TEENS

### Upcoming Activities

- Sun., March 21 — Teens Purim Booth at IFFP Purim Carnival
- Sat., March 27 — Charoset-making for IFFP Seder

### Teen Group Leader Needed

IFFP is searching for a Teen Group Leader to begin August 2004. Help facilitate our dynamic group of 20 teens as they explore social, ethical, moral, and religious issues/choices through engaging experiences and discussions. Work includes coordinating group community service projects, participation in IFFP events, and organizing religious and social gatherings. See the "Teen Group" link on IFFP Web site ([www.iffp.net](http://www.iffp.net)) for a list of past activities. A challenging and rewarding job for someone who enjoys teens and wants to make a difference. For more information, contact current Teen Group co-leaders Jen & Rob or Heather.

## IFFP AFFAIRS

### IFFP LISTSERV

**To subscribe:** Send a blank e-mail to [iffp-subscribe@topica.com](mailto:iffp-subscribe@topica.com)

**To post a message:** Send e-mail to [iffp@topica.com](mailto:iffp@topica.com)

**To read past postings:** Access [www.topica.com](http://www.topica.com) and click on "My Topica"

(You must register first time at "My Topica")

## IFFP SITE SEARCH

During the past two weeks of intense searching for a new site for IFFP activities and Sunday School, I have spoken to approximately 50 private schools and colleges, several Seventh Day Adventist churches, and other facilities in Montgomery County and D.C. with no positive result. The majority of schools do not rent their facilities. The ones that do (and only a couple of them would meet our needs) are either already rented, rent only on occasion or for school-related events, or are too small. Others rent from churches. A few, even if available, would be too expensive. Georgetown Prep, for example, costs \$150/day per classroom; Montgomery College-Rockville is affordable for classes (\$28/class), but the Arena costs \$638 for 3 hours; the Jewish Day School charges about double Sligo's fees and already rents to Machar on 18 to 20 Sundays, so we would have to coordinate schedules.

The search has not ended, but most possibilities have been contacted (basically every private school listed in the yellow pages for Montgomery County and D.C.—see below). The Lab School would have been ideal—same price as Sligo—but it has a contract with a Baptist group through at least next year. We will re-contact the Lowell School, with which we had formerly negotiated. If anyone has any suggestions, please contact me at [iffp@juno.com](mailto:iffp@juno.com)/301-270-6337. —Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

Academy for Ideal Education	French International	Lone Oak Montessori	Sheridan Potomac College
Apple Montessori	Friends Community	Maret School	Sidwell Friends
Barrie School	Frost School	Maryland College of Art & Design	Spring Bilingual
Bethesda Community	Georgetown Prep	Montgomery College	St Patricks
British School of Wash.	Good Counsel	(Rockville/Takoma)	Stone Ridge
Bullis School	Green Acres	Montrose Christian	The Heights
Casa de Montessori	Holton Arms	Montrose Christian	Thornton Friends
Community Academy Public	Holy Cross Institute	Newport School	Washington Christian Academy
Charter	(Kensington-Forest Glen)	Nora School	Washington International
Edmund Burke	John Nevins Andrew	Norwood School	Washington Waldorf
Emerson Prep	Kingsbury	Oneness Family	Woods Academy
Evergreen School	Lab School	Rock Creek International School	
Field School	Landon School	Seventh Day Adventist Church	

## CELEBRATIONS

### Purim Festival — Sun., March 21

Esther, Haman, Mordecai, Ahasuerus: Who will you be on Purim? This year we are pleased to have Rabbi Harold White, senior Jewish chaplain and theology lecturer at Georgetown University, lead the gathering and tell the [story of Esther](#). Then fun breaks loose with games and craft booths, Israeli folk dancing, holiday food, and music. Please, everyone, bring lots of hamantashen, juice, and noisemakers (graggers, whistles, clappers, bells, horns) to boo Haman. Any volunteers to lead folk dancing? Please contact the office. We ask everyone to pitch in and help clean up the cafeteria after our festival.

### IFFP Seder — Sat., March 27

Celebrate Passover with IFFP on Sat., March 27, 5 p.m. at the Schweinhaut Center, site of our Holiday Party. Our Seder is a wonderful, child-friendly family and community experience. Brent Mitchell and Freddie Adelman, spent six months creating our IFFP Haggadah. We will have Seder plates to be decorated by the kids at the Seder, charoset made by our Teen Group and other intrepid chefs (right), and other traditional Passover foods and songs.

This is a potluck event, and there will be good kitchen facilities—so bring your favorite Passover dish. IFFP provides paper goods, wine, and other beverages. There will be a matzo ball soup/ritual foods coordination effort. If any of these are your specialty, contact Jessica Vistnes.

### FOOD ASSIGNMENTS

\* A-G - Dessert. If last name of female head of household begins with A-G, bring a dessert to feed 15 people.

\* H-P - Side Dish. If last name of female head of household begins with H-P, bring a side dish to feed 15 people.

\* Q-Z - Main Dish. If last name of female head of your household begins with Q-Z, bring a main dish to feed 15 people.

Please RSVP by March 20. We must know the headcount for this event, as this celebration involves even more specific organization than the Holiday Party.

— Jessica Vistnes, Celebrations Coordinator

### Sephardic Charoset

*Brent Mitchell has included this recipe in our Haggadah. Our Teen Group will make the European charoset most of us are familiar with, and we invite adventurous families to make this charoset so we can sample both kinds.*

1 lb. dried raisins  
8 oz. pitted dates  
2 c. water (or enough to cover)  
¼ c. sugar  
¼ c. chopped walnuts or pecans

Place the raisins and dates in a bowl with enough water to cover. Let stand one hour. Drain.

Add the sugar and whirl the mixture in a blender, a few spoonfuls at a time.

Transfer to a heavy saucepan and simmer over low heat until fruits are cooked and liquid absorbed (about 20 minutes).

Remove from heat. When cool, add nuts.

## REFLECTION

When people ask me about my reaction to Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, the first word that comes to mind for me is dread. I dreaded seeing the movie for weeks before it was released and went only out of a sense of professional responsibility. I spent a fair amount of the movie in the lobby with a group of other women who didn't feel that 20 minutes of scourging was something they needed to watch, and I dreaded having to go back into the theater. After seeing the movie, I dreaded having to talk about it with other people and especially in our IFFP Adult Group. And yet, at just about every social gathering I have been to over the past month, I have been asked my opinion of the movie. Have you had the same experience?

My reaction stands in marked contrast to that of some of my friends. Many pastors I know, regardless of their views on the movie itself, are grateful for the opportunity it has given them to talk about the meaning of Jesus' suffering and death with friends, neighbors and people on the street. Some Jewish friends of mine are panicked that the film may lead to a rise in anti-Semitism in the world and are anxious to engage anyone who is willing in a conversation about the problems of the movie. Each day for the past several weeks I have received multiple e-mails about the movie, some saying it's incredibly positive, and others saying it's incredibly negative.

At times I've felt like I live in an inarticulate no-man's-land between two worlds that don't even speak the same language. I've wondered whether I'm really equipped for interfaith conversation, or whether my whole technique so far has been to smooth things over, to de-emphasize the differences between us, to focus on the holidays and rituals which involve good food and good songs and forget about the hard parts. Maybe being married to a Jew raises the stakes so high that I am even less able to say anything about a movie that seems to pit us against each other.

But this really is at the heart of what makes it hard to be Jews and Christians together: A core part of the Christian story has been used, throughout history and even today, to justify violence against Jews. I firmly believe that the story does not need to be told in that way, nor does it need to have that effect. But since it has been mis-told and misused, it is impossible to ever again talk about Jesus' death without also dealing with the question of Jewish guilt. The answer to a massive mis-telling of the story is to re-tell the story in a way that makes sense according to both the ancient and the contemporary realities.

I believe that it is possible to tell the story of Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion in a way that is respectful of Jews. But the more Jews and Christians are seen as inhabiting different religious worlds that are fundamentally incomprehensible to each other, the less likely it is that the story will be told that way. This movie has reminded me once again that it matters to Jews how the Christian story is told. It's not like this is just a Christian story that we can share like we share an intriguing ethnic dish. This story is about all of us—we are all characters—and if we don't want to make one group of us the villains, we're going to have to think very carefully about what role we all do play. I have something to say about this—about how my deep acquaintance with Judaism has helped me to understand Jesus' life and death in a fuller and richer way.

So I'm trying to engage in conversation with my friends and neighbors and people on the street about this movie. I'm trying to listen, to ask questions, and to find an opportunity to share my own perspective. I think that Christians who know and love Jews have a special responsibility to engage the world with a different telling of the story. I want to practice doing that more, and I hope that some day at IFFP we can find a way to talk about it together. I don't think we have quite figured out how to do that yet, and Mel Gibson's movie doesn't make it any easier. But I can imagine we could get there some day. And then, who knows, maybe one of us, or one of our kids, will make a different movie.

—[Heather Kirk-Davidoff](#), Spiritual Director and Community Leader