

# Interfaith Families Project

September 2004 [www.iffp.net](http://www.iffp.net)

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## FROM THE BOARD

With public schools in full swing and private schools gearing up for action, it must be time for IFFP to begin our regular Gatherings. This year will be marked, as always, by a large measure of continuity mixed with new people, new programs, and exciting possibilities.

The continuity rests partly on the resumption of the basic activities which have helped distinguish IFFP in the past: the terrific religious school, an evolving Gathering for the whole family, Adult Group discussions among ourselves and with outside speakers; and celebrations large and small for this most unique community. More importantly, the continuity rests on the almost 100 member families who will be returning to IFFP again this year. Some have been members since the beginning; some for a year ago or less. Regardless of their tenure, we welcome each and every family to this new year at IFFP and look forward to enjoying and building the IFFP community with you.

New people are not only found among our membership, but also in key staff positions. On September 12<sup>th</sup>, our Gathering will be led by both Rev. Heather Kirk-Davidoff, our Spiritual Director, and Rabbi Harold White, our Spiritual Advisor. For Rev. Heather, this is a time for building on the strength of last year. For Rabbi Harold, this is a time to begin his service to IFFP directly, building on the great service he has provided to many members of IFFP in officiating at their weddings. For IFFP, this is a time to enjoy the benefits of religious and spiritual guidance rooted most deeply in both our Christian and Jewish heritages. On September 19<sup>th</sup>, Rev. Barbara SilverSmith, our new director of religious education, will lead our Back to School Adult Group discussion. With our hiring of Rev. Barbara, IFFP has continued its tradition of excellence in our staffing – a very high bar set by earlier Boards and which the current Board has tried its best to continue. We look forward to welcoming Barbara, learning with her, and continuing to build the best school for inter-faith religious education anywhere.

New activities include contemplative gatherings for adults, multi-track Adult Groups on certain Sundays, and a fall women's retreat in addition to the well-established spring retreat. We look forward to hearing from you about the activities of IFFP and how well they are meeting your needs and interests. We also look forward to hearing from you about where you would like to volunteer to contribute to IFFP's ambitious program. Much of what we do depends on your willingness to help out, and we look forward to working with you to make it all happen.

With best wishes for this New Year and warm regards,

- IFFP Board Chair

## SEPTEMBER – OCTOBER 2004

Sept. 12 (Sun.)	Welcoming Gathering & <a href="#">Picnic</a> with Rabbi Harold White and Rev. Heather Kirk-Davidoff, 10:00 a.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Rev. Heather will give the reflection: "Moving."</li><li>- Scripture: Matthew 22:1-10 (The Parable of the Wedding Banquet)</li><li>- Rabbi Harold will lead our prayers.</li></ul> <a href="#">Mixed grade class picnic</a> in evening – contact office for details.	Sept. 19 (Sun.)	Rosh Hashanah* Gathering and <a href="#">Fall Open House</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bagels, 10:00 a.m.</li><li>• Gathering 10:15 a.m.</li><li>- Rev. Heather will give the reflection: "Always Beginning."</li><li>- Scripture: Genesis 18:1-15 (The Birth of Isaac)</li><li>• Sunday School/<a href="#">Adult Back to School Discussion</a> led by Rev. Barbara, 10:45 a.m.</li><li>• <a href="#">Class Picnics for Pre K &amp; K</a>, noon</li></ul> * The actual day of Rosh Hashanah is Sept. 16.
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Sept. 25 (Sat.) 5 p.m.	<a href="#">Yom Kippur * Reflection</a>  Members' homes Break the Fast <a href="#">Potlucks</a>  *This is the actual day of Yom Kippur.	Sept. 26 (Sun.)	Yom Kippur Gathering <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bagels, 10 a.m.</li> <li>• Gathering led by Rabbi Harold, 10:15 a.m.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rabbi Harold will give the reflection.</li> <li>- Scripture: The Story of Jonah</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Sunday School/Adult Group/yoga, 10:45 a.m.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rabbi Harold will lead the adult group in a discussion on the relationship between religious ritual and moral action, based on Isaiah 58:6-9, one of the readings for Yom Kippur.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <a href="#">Class Picnics for Grades 1 &amp; 2</a>, noon</li> </ul>
Oct. 3 (Sun.)	Succoth Gathering* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Bagels, 10 a.m.</li> <li>§ Gathering led by Rabbi Harold, 10:15 a.m.</li> <li>§ Sunday School/Adult Group led by Rabbi Harold/yoga, 10:45 a.m.</li> <li>§ <a href="#">Class Picnics for Grades 3 &amp; 4</a>, noon</li> </ul> * The actual day of Succoth is Sept. 30.	Oct. 17 (Sun.)	<a href="#">National Children's Sabbath*</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Member Breakfast, 9:00 a.m.</li> <li>• Contemplative Service, 9:30 a.m.</li> <li>• Bagels, 10 a.m.</li> <li>• Gathering, 10:15 a.m.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rev. Heather will give the reflection: "Wrestling."</li> <li>- Scripture: Genesis 32:22-32</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Sunday School/Adult Group/yoga, 10:45 a.m.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Class Picnics for Grades 5 &amp; 6</a>, noon</li> </ul>

\* For information on the National Children's Sabbath, go to the Children's Defense Fund website:  
<http://www.childrensdefense.org/religiousaction/childrenssabbaths/default.asp>

## IFFP STAFF

### Welcoming Rabbi Harold White

We are thrilled to have Rabbi Harold White begin his year as our new Spiritual Advisor. Rabbi Harold is one of the Washington area pioneers in interfaith work. Dating back more than 30 years ago, he was one of the few, if not the only, rabbi who would perform interfaith wedding ceremonies and promote interfaith communications. Many IFFP members know him and were married by him. We will welcome Rabbi Harold at our Welcoming Gathering, September 12, and he will lead our Yom Kippur and Succoth Gatherings, September 26 and October 3. We all look forward to having him at future Jewish holiday gatherings.

### Monday Afternoon Staff Meetings

As you may remember, last year we had weekly staff meetings. We had two main goals at these meetings: First, to coordinate our work, share information, and solve problems together. Second, and equally important, to support one another, to learn from one another, and to become a team.

We will continue the successful tradition with weekly staff meetings on Monday afternoons at 1:45 p.m. this year. If any of you would like us all to know something, or to work something out, call [Rev. Heather](#), [Rev. Barbara](#), or [Susan](#), or send us an e-mail before 1:45 p.m. Monday.

## EARLY FALL EVENTS

### Welcoming Picnic

Our welcoming picnic, immediately following the Gathering on September 12, will give new and returning IFFP members the chance to chat with Rabbi Harold, Rev. Heather, and Rev. Barbara, and with fellow IFFP members. We will proceed to a nearby playground area. (The rain plan is to picnic in the building where we meet.) The park has enough open area for Frisbee,

races, and other games, and a sidewalk for rollerblades, bikes, hot wheels, & tricycles! Anyone interested in organizing races or games, please contact Susan, [iffp@juno.com](mailto:iffp@juno.com) or 301-270-6337.

There are picnic tables but not enough for everyone - bring picnic blankets. Also, there are no bathrooms, so please plan accordingly (use the facilities at the building or you'll be racing back, carrying kids!).

IFFP will provide paper goods, beverages, and ice pops (no kitchen). As usual, the food assignments are based on your family's last name (use the female head of your household if the adults have different last names). If your last name begins with:

- A-J: Bring side dish or salads
- K-Z: Bring main dish
- Board Members: Bring dessert (other than popsicles)

- Celebrations Coordinator

### **Open House**

Please spread the word. On September 19, IFFP will host an open house for people who are interested in learning more about our interfaith community with an eye toward joining us. Guests will have a chance to attend the Rosh Hashanah Gathering that morning, to see our Sunday School Program in action, and to hear more about other IFFP Programs. The event will begin at 10 a.m. and end at noon. If you have friends who are interested in having a look, please suggest they contact Susan in the IFFP office at 301-270-6337 or [iffp@juno.com](mailto:iffp@juno.com). Also please kindly pass the word along through list servs, e-mail, and by posting the open house flyers (included in the IFFP Fall membership packets) in your community.

- New Member Coordinator

### **Yom Kippur Gathering**

Our Yom Kippur service will be held this year on Saturday, September 25<sup>th</sup>, at 5:00. Contact the office for the location. The service is about an hour long, and is designed to be accessible to school aged children through adults. Younger children are welcome, although child care is not provided.

Rev. Heather is currently forming a group of teens and adults to craft and lead this service. If you are interested in being a part of this group, or if you have suggestions for the service, drop her a note at [revhkd@comcast.net](mailto:revhkd@comcast.net).

- [Heather Kirk-Davidoff](#), Spiritual Director

### **Yom Kippur Break-the-fast Potlucks**

On Saturday, September 25, join other IFFP families and break the Yom Kippur fast with easy-to-prepare breakfast-type meals at our third annual Yom Kippur Break-the-fast Potluck Dinners. The dinners will take place right after the Yom Kippur Reflection, which starts at 5 p.m. Contact the office by September 18<sup>th</sup> if you are interested in hosting a potluck or attending one. Please provide your address and the names and ages of your children and our celebrations coordinator will match up families.

- Celebrations Coordinator

### **Yoga Class**

Our popular yoga classes, led by our wonderful teacher, will be offered again this year. Our teacher has been an inspiration and guide to those new to yoga as well as experienced students. As before, yoga class will meet in a classroom each Sunday when there is Sunday School while the kids are in their classes. We hope that all former participants will return for another great year and that other members will come for this rejuvenating and spiritual experience.

There will be a sign-up sheet at the welcoming table at the Welcoming Gathering (Sept. 12th) and Back to School Day (Sept. 19th)— but you're welcome at any class whether you've signed up or not. The first class is September 26th. Classes cost \$15 and

budding yoginis are encouraged to sign up for a package of 6 to be attended any point in the year. Six classes are \$90, and attending eight of the nine class sessions will cost \$120.

- Yoga Coordinators

## GET INVOLVED

### **Worship Committee Seeks New Members**

The Worship Committee of IFFP envisions and plans our Sunday morning Gatherings as well as other special worship services during the year. We are currently looking for 2 or 3 new members. Our next meeting is on Wednesday, September 8<sup>th</sup>, at 7:30 pm. If you're interested in giving it a try, you are most welcome. Drop [Rev. Heather](mailto:revhkd@comcast.net) an e-mail for location and directions, [revhkd@comcast.net](mailto:revhkd@comcast.net).

### **Would You Like to Give a Reflection This Year?**

If you'd like to work with Rev. Heather to compose a reflection for our Gathering based on a scripture passage and your own ideas and experiences, please let her know! Over the years, IFFP has been blessed by some wonderful member reflections, and we'd like to continue that tradition.

### **Community Service Chair Needed**

Our community service chair has been a great asset to IFFP over the years, arranging and coordinating endless community service activities for community service days, kids' community service, etc. Last year was his last in this position and we need someone interested in service projects to chair this committee. Susan in the office helps with coordination of details, communication, etc. and there are always a good number of members who sign up to help and work on the projects. If this is your year to carry on his torch, please contact Susan, [iffp@juno.com](mailto:iffp@juno.com).

### **Updated List Serv Instructions – These Replace Last Month's Instructions!**

The IFFP list serv is our only way to contact all the members with important announcements, bulletins, updates, and information requests. We would like to have 100% of our community read our weekly bulletins on Thursdays to keep up with timely information. You can sign on to the list serv by sending a blank e-mail to [iffp-subscribe@topica.com](mailto:iffp-subscribe@topica.com). Send it from the same e-mail that you use for IFFP newsletters (if you haven't given Susan an e-mail address already, do so now). You will receive a confirmation e-mail with instructions to follow to complete your registration. There is no charge to join or use the list serv.

Members also can pass on non-commercial information to other members by sending an e-mail to [iffp@topica.com](mailto:iffp@topica.com). Please include "off topic" in the e-mail heading if your message is not related to an IFFP matter.

If you want to see past list serv postings, go to <http://lists.topica.com> and log in. (Use the same e-mail address that you use for the IFFP list serv.) Then click on "my topica." The screen should show that you have joined "IFFP Membership" (and any other topica list servs you are part of). Click on IFFP Membership. Click on the button to the right that says "read messages." Then you can search the past postings.

If you have difficulties using the list serv, contact our office.

- Newsletter Coordinator

## NEW MEMBERS

We welcome several new members into our IFFP family: One family, with two children in Sunday School, already has volunteered to do the Refreshments Set Up for our Gatherings. Another new member, who came to IFFP through a returning member, already has participated in several events and done presentations in Sunday School classes. Another new member and her son, in

kindergarten, came to our spring open house and joined for the summer. She is already co-coordinator of our yoga class. We hope that you all will have a wonderful year at IFFP!

## SUNDAY SCHOOL

### Back to School Discussion

Remember how you felt, on the first day of school? Was it a mixture of anticipation of meeting a new teacher, excitement of seeing who else was in the class, and pleasure in using those new school supplies? Or was it a combination of depression at being confined after a summer of freedom, dread of the class bully, and fear of failure? Since most of us were very successful at school and therefore liked it, the emotions were most likely more positive. We want to have a positive start to the IFFP Sunday School year by explaining the curriculum and discipline policy, giving you an outline of your child's class and biographies of the teachers, and having you fill out the necessary forms -- emergency, field trip permission, and "About Your Child" (including allergies, etc.). Most important, we want to hear from you -- questions, concerns, and ideas. Join me in the cafeteria after the Gathering. For us all this year in IFFP Sunday School, I am expecting ALL THE BEST!

Looking forward to talking with you,  
[Barbara SilverSmith](#), Director of Religious Education

### What Will Your Child Remember?

"But Mom, I have faith in your faith," said my agnostic son Brant, a few months ago, during our family discussion in the midst of another Sudanese crisis which made him (a Presidential Management Intern at the U.S. Agency for International Development) heartsick once more. It was startling to hear how much strength and hope he draws from what he sees in my faith.

Now that Brant is a parent, he is, as probably are most of you, concerned about what and how to transmit a worthy heritage to his child. Honestly, though I have a badge showing 7 years of perfect Sunday School attendance (broken only because we got a weekend cabin in the Indiana Dunes), I remember 5 things about all those classes. First, I remember every song we ever sang—and most of them contain good theology. I've sung them to myself, in the everyday challenges of life, and I sing them now to my grandson Abraham! Music is a great gift.

I was awarded a book for learning the most Scripture verses, but now I can recall just a few key ones. However, the second thing I do recall is teachers who really cared about us—and I can give you all their names, to this day. They were not trained educators --housewives, mostly, who followed the printed plans. But they willingly tried the latest technologies (in those days, it was a flannel board!) because they really wanted to transmit the timeless stories as best they could. Thus, third, I remember those stories, the basis not only for so much Western art and culture, but real keys to meaning (e.g., the Prodigal son parable) in my own life. Furthermore (and fourth), those teachers were part of a very significant community of support, aiding each other in those everyday challenges of life. My parents could not afford therapy, which was not part of their culture, anyway—but they had help from these friends anytime and all the time.

Fifth and finally, I remember the food! I loved the ice cream socials on the church lawn where I enjoyed Mrs. Armstrong's cherry lattice pie as much as rolling down the hill in front of the building. But even more vividly, I remember the snacks in the Sunday School room. What mattered, I believe, was the RITUAL. My classmates and I (and in IFFP, it's very important that children of "mixed marriages" find one another) would sit at the corner table, say grace, and become "companions"—literally, those who shared bread, though it was usually animal crackers and apple juice. I cannot overestimate the power of table fellowship in Judaism and Christianity.

So, here is where you come in. We need everyone to reinforce the importance of IFFP Sunday School, which is not "Religion Lite," but a concentrated curriculum of values. Also, so that our dedicated teachers can center on teaching, we need 2 parents from each grade to serve as the "Room Parents," a simple job of 2 parts: coordinating the rotation of those very important weekly snack contributions by all the other parents, and overseeing the class picnic (see article elsewhere).

Every parent should bring his/her calendar on September 19, to sign up for snack provision! As I begin my time with you as DRE, I am enthused and energized about working and learning together this year in our IFFP Sunday School!

- [Barbara SilverSmith](#), Director of Religious Education

### **You Are Invited to Your Child's Sunday School Class Picnic**

You are invited to come and meet your child's Sunday School teachers, the new Director of Religious Education, and the other parents of children in your child's class, while the children themselves have more time to enjoy each other. This offering is in response to members' requests for more time to interact informally and build community. Each family is asked to bring its own food, drinks, a blanket to sit on, and any necessary paper or plastic goods. The Mixed Grade class will meet Sunday evening, September 12 (contact the office for further information). The other class picnics will take place on Sundays at noon. The picnics will occur on the following schedule (note the rain dates):

Sun., Sept. 12 - Mixed Grade Class (contact office for details)  
Sun., Sept. 19 - PreK and K  
Sun., Sept. 26 - Grades 1 and 2  
Sun., Oct. 3 - Grades 3 and 4  
Sun., Oct. 17 - Grades 5 and 6  
RAIN DATE Sun., OCT. 31

The picnics will continue in the spring:  
Sun., March 6 - Pre K and K  
Sun., March 13 - grades 1 and 2  
Sun., April 10 - grades 3 and 4  
Sun., April 24 - Grades 5 and 6  
RAIN DATE Sun., May 15

Please mark your calendars with these dates as priorities, as have I!

Looking forward to our time together  
[Barbara SilverSmith](#), Director of Religious Education

## COA AND TEEN GROUP

### **Coming of Age**

This year's Coming of Age class is gearing up for the Fall. After some negotiating, we've just about agreed on a time and a place to meet, and an attendance policy. Every COA student and parent signs a contract at the start of the year—you should receive these in the mail next week. Signed contracts are due at our first class on September 19<sup>th</sup>. Contact the office for the time and location. We also are working on scheduling a rafting or camping trip to kick our year off.

Rev. Heather will be teaching this year's class, and while she will continue to make use of the curriculum IFFP has developed over the past several years, she will bring to each class a focus on decision making. We'll examine ways in which our Jewish and Christian ethical and spiritual traditions speak to the manner in which we make both personal and communal decisions. In addition, each student will complete an individual project that will be presented to the IFFP community on Sunday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>.

- [Heather Kirk-Davidoff](#), Spiritual Director

### **Teen Group**

Our first meeting of the IFFP Teen Group will be on Friday, September 10<sup>th</sup>. We'll gather for a Shabbat Dinner (as well as a short Shabbat refresher course), discussion, and planning for the year. We're in the market for one or two new adult leaders for our Teen Group, and if you'd like to hang out with the teens a bit before deciding if you'd like to commit, you're most welcome to join us for dinner. Contact the office for the time and location.

- [Heather Kirk-Davidoff](#), Spiritual Director

## IFFP BOOK CLUB

The book club has selected books and coordinators for the Fall. If you are interested in helping or have a suggestion, please contact the office. We are trying our best to balance the books included. We have created a tentative list of books for the rest of the year that will be balanced overall, but we are open to new suggestions. Crack open those books!

Here is the schedule. Any IFFP member is free to attend only one meeting or all of the meetings. Most meetings will be on weekday evenings, but we will have one meeting on Sunday morning as part of the new "tracking" system that will offer activities different from Adult Group.

September: Davida's Harp by Chaim Potok -- Wednesday, September 29. Please RSVP to Susan at the office, [iffp@juno.com](mailto:iffp@juno.com) or 301-270-6337.

Book description: For Davita Chandal, growing up in the New York of the 1930s and '40s is an experience of joy and sadness. Her loving parents, both fervent radicals and from different faith backgrounds, fill her with the fiercely bright hope of a new and better world. But as the deprivations of war and depression take a ruthless toll, Davita unexpectedly turns to the Jewish faith that her mother had long ago abandoned, finding there both a solace for her questioning inner pain and a test of her budding spirit of independence.

October: The Gifts of the Jews, How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels by Thomas Cahill -- Wednesday, October 20.

Book description: Thomas Cahill, author of the best-selling *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, continues his Hinges of History series with *The Gifts of the Jews*, a light-handed, popular account of ancient Jewish culture, the culture of the Bible. The book is written from a decidedly modern point of view. Cahill notes, for instance, that Abraham moved the Jews from Ur to the land of Canaan "to improve their prospects," and that the leering inhabitants of Sodom surrounded Lot's lodging "like the ghouls in *Night of the Living Dead*." *The Gifts of the Jews* nonetheless encourages us to see the Old Testament through ancient eyes--to see its characters not as our contemporaries but as those of Gilgamesh and Amenhotep. Cahill also lingers on often-overlooked books of the Bible, such as *Ruth*, to discuss changes in ancient sensibility. The result is a fine, speculative, eminently readable work of history.

November: *Mudhouse Sabbath* by Laura Winner -- Sunday morning, November 21.

Book description: The author grew up Jewish, practiced Orthodox Judaism in college, and converted to Christianity seven years ago. As she puts it, this is "...a book about those things I miss." There was a very positive review of it in *Lilith*, the Jewish feminist magazine: "...however much you may think you know about Jewish practices, there is much to be learned from the author's personal take on themes from hospitality to candle lighting to aging. One of the book's biggest draws is that it is written by someone deeply familiar with both the Jewish and the Christian faiths, who is able to interpret and explain these two worlds to one another."

December: *The Sparrow* by Mary Doria Russell -- Monday, December 13.

Book description: *The Sparrow* is a novel about a remarkable man, a living saint, a life-long celibate and Jesuit priest, who undergoes an experience so harrowing and profound that it makes him question the existence of God. This experience--the first contact between human beings and intelligent extraterrestrial life--begins with a small mistake and ends in a horrible catastrophe. This book is extremely compelling and moving and will stay with you long after you read it.

Possible books (among many) for the rest of the year: *The Known World* by Edward P. Jones; *God's Secretaries* by Adam Nicolson; *Towing Jehova* by James Morrow; or *Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal*, by Christopher Moore.

- Book Club Coordinator

## SUMMER EVENTS

### Pool Party

This summer, in response to a number of member requests, we scheduled social get-togethers for IFFP families once a month. The last of these events was a pool party and barbecue at the Daleview Pool in Silver Spring on Sunday, August 22nd. Unlike our original date for this event in July, we had perfect weather that day, and had a great time together. In attendance were some or all of twelve IFFP families. And although we briefly lost our buns in the men's changing room, a great cookout was enjoyed by all.

## COMMUNITY EVENTS

### High Holy Days Services at Georgetown University

Rabbi Harold leads services on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur at Georgetown which are free and open to the public. These popular services do fill up, however, so Rabbi Harold advises IFFP families to arrive at least 20 minutes before the start of each service. Childcare is available for pre-school aged children. Times and locations for all services are available on the Campus Ministry Information Hotline, 202-687-1882.

## DOVETAIL CONFERENCE

### Highlights for Heather

At first I was surprised at how small the Dovetail Conference in Berkeley was. I'm not sure what official registration was, but I would guess there were under 100 people there. But there are advantages to small conferences—I think I met just about everyone in attendance, and had long conversations with many of them. I enjoyed meeting people who were part of the leadership of other interfaith groups across the country, and I especially enjoyed talking to several couples who were dreaming of starting a group like ours in the towns where they lived. Their interest in the story of how IFFP was born and grew was challenging to me, and I left the conference thinking about how we might better share our knowledge, our practices, and our vision with other groups of families in between national gatherings.

Two presentations were also highly thought provoking. One was on the mental health of adult children of interfaith families—I've written more about that in my reflection column this month. The other was a new movie made by independent documentary film maker Jennifer Kaplan called, "Mixed Blessings: The Challenges of Raising Children in a Jewish-Christian Family." The film profiles four Jewish-Christian families, each of whom has made a different decision about how to introduce and include their children in Jewish and/or Christian religious life. I was struck by how honest the interviews were, and how diverse. While the film doesn't make a case for one approach to child-raising over the others, we had some great conversations after the film about which families seem to be happiest. We've purchased a shorter version of the film, and we hope to show it at an Adult Group sometime this fall. The full-length version is going to be showing at the DC JCC's Jewish Film Festival. I'll be interested in hearing any reviews!

- [Heather Kirk-Davidoff](#), Spiritual Director

### Highlights for One of Our Members

For me, the highlight of the conference was probably serving on a panel with three other adult interfaith children. The other panelists were all raised with both religions. For an hour and a half, we responded to a barrage of questions, many of them from reporters and representatives of Jewish institutions. "How can you be both?" "Are you confused?" etc. We may not have convinced everyone, but we were mighty articulate, and it was a passionate session. I realized that I feel so secure in my identity, with IFFP supporting me, that I find these debates pleasurable rather than stressful.



Another highlight was the Friday night Shabbat service in the beautiful chapel of the Pacific School of Religion, on a hill looking out to San Francisco Bay. The priest and rabbi who co-founded the Bay Area interfaith group led the service together. At one point, Rabbi Yeshua Familant pointed out that the final paragraph of the Kaddish (Oseh Shalom...) is simply a translation (from Aramaic into Hebrew) of the penultimate paragraph. I had been reciting the Kaddish all my life and had never figured that out, so it seemed like a tremendous revelation to me. A cerebral, Talmudic kind of revelation I guess.

Then, we switched to a completely non-verbal, spiritual channel. The elderly priest did a heartfelt liturgical dance, demonstrating a sign-language interpretation of the Lord's Prayer that used the entire stage. He used to dance it when he was in a monastery and had taken a vow of silence. We ended up holding hands in a circle, clergy of every stripe and interfaith families from across the country, sharing wine and challah. I really felt like I was in Berkeley at that moment!

- IFFP Member and Adult Interfaith Child

## JOYS AND CONCERNS

Dear IFFP Friends,

I want to thank you all from the very most bottom of my heart for your prodigious support to my son, me and especially my wife over the long course of her illness and in our celebration of her life once she died.

Your collective caring of all of us was of more help, practical & spiritual, than I can ever express; and this is not only because there was much you did that I really didn't even know about. There were so many ways you were involved up to the very end and even beyond. Most dear were the visits to my wife. My son and I will forever remember the choir's singing for her after the seder, and especially her huge smile, singing along and conducting with her finger.

She took such joy in the services, the women's retreat, her teaching and especially the full community. I also want to note, in particular, the lovely reception you all organized for after the memorial.

We look forward to our continued relationship with you. Thank you in her memory.

With great appreciation,

An IFFP family

## REFLECTION

### **Does religion make your family stronger?**

The presentation I most looked forward to at this year's Dovetail Conference was called, "Pursuing the Anecdotal: A Look at the Emotional Development of the Children of Interfaiths." The presenter, Dr. Barbara Fishbein, earned her doctorate studying adult interfaith children whose parents had made a number of different decisions about religion.

Dr. Fishbein surveyed hundreds of adults and grouped respondents according to their parents' approach to religion -- for example, adults from families where one parent converted, where both parents converted to a third religion, where religion was ignored entirely in the household, and where both religions were taught and celebrated. Using several psychotherapeutic tools, she looked at the mental health of the adult children of these families. Her purpose was to test the claim she had heard made in a number of settings that the children of families where there is more than one religion in the home are confused and unhappy.

Her conclusion? People were just as likely to be happy (or unhappy) in single-faith families as in dual-faith families. There were no significant differences between the groups Fishbein studied. There were factors that affected mental health, specifically the amount of discord between parents. But parents were just as likely to fight in single-faith families as they were in dual-faith families. If spouses don't fight about religion, apparently there are plenty of other things to fight about.

Fishbein's research was well-received at Dovetail, and I have to admit I was somewhat relieved to hear it. But the more I've thought of Fishbein's presentation, the more I've wondered. Is religion really value-neutral in a family's life? Her research seemed to suggest that it is, as families with no religious practice also scored the same as those where religion was practiced. Considering the amount of time and energy our family spends celebrating holidays, going to IFFP and other worship services, and talking about religion, I found this a bit discouraging.

But here's something more to ponder: one of the tools Dr. Fishbein used measured parent-child bonding, and she explained that research has repeatedly shown that children who are well-bonded with their parents grow up to be happier adults than those who lack that bond. I wonder if there are some parts of religious life which are designed, in part, to foster parent-child bonding. Religious holidays, worship, and life-cycle events, after all, are usually whole-family activities. Any family who has clustered around a table lit with Shabbat candles or sung carols by a Christmas tree might have something to say about the role that religion plays in parent-child bonding.

I don't believe Dr. Fishbein's research has been published yet, but I hope it will be soon. I'd love to look it over with you, and hear your thoughts about what she discovered, and what she might have missed, and what still deserves more study.

- [Heather Kirk-Davidoff](#), Spiritual Director