
Interfaith Families Project

Feb. 2006

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FROM THE BOARD

The big news from the Board this month, of course, is that we hired a new Spiritual Director, the **Rev. Julia Jarvis**. Julia was IFFP's first Director of Sunday School and then first Spiritual Director between 1998 and 2002. She is currently the director of adult education at Christ Congregational Church and the interfaith chaplain at Springvale Terrace Assisted Living Facility, both in Silver Spring.

Julia was selected after a five-month search process in which IFFP received more than 10 applications, far more than we received when this position was previously open. The IFFP Search Committee deserves great appreciation from all of us for the time and careful attention they put in to this process. In addition to myself, the committee consisted of **Jim Gold, Marci Shegogue, Maggi Cowlan, Jennifer Burpee Liebreich, and Lisa Henderson**. The Board carefully examined the final candidates recommended by the Search Committee and it was the Board that made the final decision to hire Julia.

Julia's "start date" is March 1, although she will begin working before then with the Worship Committee, the Board, and with **Ellen Jennings** and **Susan Ryder**. Julia is hired to work 20 hours per week.

In looking over the current IFFP membership list, it appears that more than half of our families were members of IFFP for a part or all of Julia's previous tenure with us. But it is also very clear that whether we knew Julia then or are just meeting her for the first time now, this is a new beginning and a new phase for IFFP and for Julia, both of whom have changed and grown over the years.

Each member of IFFP, in addition to learning from our programs and services, plays an important role in shaping and guiding IFFP as we move forward. That is one of the things that make our community vibrant and fascinating. We have staff, and we have leaders, but, more than anything, we have each other. And it is the members on whom IFFP really depends -- the teachers, the volunteers, the committees, the Board members who change from year to year, and the people who share their thoughts and feelings on Sundays.

I look forward to beginning this next phase together. Thank you.

- Danny Weiss, Board Chair

FEBRUARY – MARCH 2006

Feb. 12	Sligo Middle School <i>Beatles Sunday</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gathering, led by Ellen Jennings, 10 am• Refreshments, 10:30 am• Sunday School/Adult Group, 10:45 am• COA Evening Meeting	Feb. 26	Sligo Middle School <i>Mardi Gras</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gathering, led by Ellen Jennings, 10 am• Refreshments, 10:30 am• Sunday School/Adult Group, 10:45 am• COA Field Trip
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Mar. 5	Sligo Middle School <i>Lent</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathering, led by Rev. Julia Jarvis, 10 am • Refreshments, 10:30 am • Sunday School/Adult Group, 10:45 am • "New member" event, noon (page 3) • COA Evening Meeting 	Mar. 10 (Fri.)	Men's Night Out <i>Takoma Park</i> Note date change See pages 3-4 for more info
Mar. 12	Sligo Middle School <i>Purim Celebration</i> See page 4 for more info	Mar. 18	Young Couples Activity Dinner and Hockey Game See page 4 for more info

UPCOMING IFFP ACTIVITIES

Gatherings

February 12 - Beatles Sunday

Be sure to attend the always-popular Beatles Sunday Gathering on February 12th, in which we'll make a joyful noise with the music of the Fab Four. Seriously, many of the Beatles' songs touch on universal themes, like getting by with a little help from our friends.

February 26 – Mardi Gras

March 5 – Lent

Stay tuned! Read your weekly bulletins for more information about upcoming Gatherings.

Adult Group

February 12 – Choose one of two tracks:

Track 1 (in the cafeteria)

Dovetail conference overview and follow up led by **Sue Katz Miller**

"Neither priests nor rabbis are adequately trained to give interfaith families what they need"

--Eugene Fisher, US Conference of Catholic Bishops

Come to Adult Group this Sunday to hear about this, and other bold declarations made at the Dovetail conference last month. Discuss how IFFP fits into the local and national context. Should we spin off IFFP affiliates in Baltimore or other cities? Can we share what we have learned with Muslim interfaith families? Did you know that there's another independent interfaith families group in the DC area now? Do IFFP members want to go to a synagogue Shabbat on a monthly basis together, or mount our own occasional Shabbat?

Track 2 (in the Media Center)

Interfaith 101

Part 1 of a special, two-part adult discussion, "Interfaith 101." This small group discussion will provide an opportunity for those who are new to interfaith relationships or new to IFFP to get to know each other and discuss issues in interfaith relationships. Led by **Ian Spatz**, long time IFFP member and former adult discussion group leader, the topics will include honoring each others' traditions, issues with parents, life events (including marriage and parenthood), and celebrating holidays. The discussion will allow plenty of

time to learn from each other and get to know each other. Try to attend both sessions but feel free to come to just one.

February 26 - Choose one of two tracks:

Track 1 (in the cafeteria)

Forgiveness and Salvation

Where are we going after death and what can we do to affect our Salvation? If we err, what do our traditions teach about forgiveness? The answers are many and the discussion should be lively. **Sam Lawson** and **Kent Dirckx** will lead our discussion.

Track 2 (In the Media Center)

Interfaith 101

Part 2 of a special, two-part adult discussion, "Interfaith 101" (see February 12th).

March 5th

Torah study and the prophets led by guest speaker, **Peter Weiss**.

The father of IFFP Board Chair **Danny Weiss** will talk about the twists and turns of his own spiritual journey from an assimilated Jewish community in Vienna before World War II to a "prophets" Bible study group in New York City 8 decades later. Peter Weiss, a trademark lawyer by day and human rights and constitutional rights lawyer by night, is finding his own connection to Judaism in a world that is often turbulent and violent but which, he will tell us, really can be made into a better place with a little help from those of us who live here.

- Sam Lawson, Adult Group Coordinator

IFFP weather cancellation policy

IFFP follows Montgomery County Public Schools for closure due to weather. In case of icy conditions, snow, or storms, call 240-777-2706 or check the website, <http://www.mcps.k12.md.us>.

WE WILL SEND OUT A LIST SERVE ANNOUNCEMENT IF THE WEATHER SUNDAY MORNING IS QUESTIONABLE. PLEASE CHECK THE LIST SERVE BEFORE LEAVING HOME.

New Member Event, March 5th

All "new members" (anyone who joined IFFP this school year) are invited to stay after Sunday School and Adult Group on March 5th for a new member get-together. This fun event will be structured to allow adult discussion. Look for details from the New Member Coordinators later this month.

**A Music Themed Men's Night Out:
Date Changed to March 10th**

Calling all IFFP Men (listen to the drums beating in the distance).

What type of music or particular songs are an important part of your life? This year's Men's Night Out activity on Friday, March 10th, will give you an opportunity to share the music that influences or inspires you. Punk or Prokofiev . . . Mozart or Mingus, the Men will gather to listen and discuss the refrains that sustain our brains (and souls).

We ask each participant to choose meaningful song(s) (think "desert island songs" - the music you would want to have with you after washing up on a deserted island), and share them with the group. There are two ways to share your selections. Bring a list of your desert island songs (or types of music) and, if you want, either forward the name of your top song to **Andy Katz** (katzas@NU.COM) or plan on bringing the song with you to the event. Andy has volunteered to burn your choices onto a CD to create the first annual IFFP Men's Desert Island Disc, with a working title "IFFP Men In Action: Songs for Great Spiritual Contemplation and Yard Work." If you don't want to bring the music, Andy will look either in his extensive music collection or on the Net so we can play your choice at the event. We will listen to your top choice, and everyone will have an opportunity to discuss the reasons behind his selection. We will gather at a **Larry Ravitz** family-owned house located in Takoma Park at 8:00. Please RSVP and forward any questions, suggestions, or words of praise to the Men's Night Out Committee, care of pjakobsberg@wabtec.com. Also please note that *the date for the event has been changed from Friday, March 17th, to Friday, March 10th.*

- Phil Jakobsberg, Board Member

Start Planning your Purim Costumes Now! Our Purim Festival is Sunday, March 12th!

Purim's almost here! It's a fun-filled, joyous holiday when we can dress up with our kids and enjoy the spirit of the holiday. Help them choose who they want to be: the beautiful, brave queen Esther, the wicked Haman, the brave hero Mordechai, or king Ahasuerus. Please **bring groggers and lots of hamantaschen to share**. This is a day all the family will enjoy.

We'll start with a short Gathering and retell the Story of Esther, the Megillah, as you shake those groggers (noisemakers) to drown out the name of the evil Haman. Then the Sunday School classes and COA will provide lots of fun with games, Purim mask making, pie throwing, face painting, and more! Run under the parachute, dance the hora, march in the costume parade, and enjoy visiting with other IFFP members.

Invite friends and family, and join us for a festive day. We ask everyone to please pitch in to help resurrect the cafeteria after our festival. We look forward to seeing everyone and having fun—please remember to bring your hamantaschen, costumes, and groggers.

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

Young Couples Activity, March 18th

The next young couples' event will be on Saturday, March 18th, at 5:30 pm. We will be going to dinner in Chinatown followed by a Washington Capitals hockey game. Tickets for the game will be \$30 each. If you are able to go, please pay **Kerri Mullins-Levine** in advance at IFFP or by mail by **Sunday, February 12th**. If you did not receive the invite or have any questions, please email me at kmullinslevine@yahoo.com.

Young couples include anyone who is dating, engaged, married without children or with children who are not old enough for Sunday School.

- Kerri Mullins-Levine, Young Couples Coordinator

Spring 2006 Women's Retreat, April 28th – 30th

YES! The time has come for all good women looking for rest and recuperation to let us know of your interest in the Spring retreat April 28th and 29th!! Please let one of us know by Friday, February 10th, if you would like to participate: lrsapin@aol.com, or Tova@gwu.edu We need a solid count by the end of this week in order to reserve those gorgeous, sunny, seaside abodes.

- Linda Sapin, Retreat Co-Coordinator

NOTES FROM THE DRE

Greetings Everyone,

I'm delighted that my friend and colleague, **Julia Jarvis**, will soon be rejoining the IFFP staff as Spiritual Director. Julia and I worked together as SD and DRE from 2001 to the end of 2002, and I happily await her return!

Sunday School: The Sunday School year continues to sail along at a rapid clip. So much for those snow days we scheduled into the calendar! Thanks to our wonderful teachers, the kids are doing some great things. During the month of January, the 6th graders experienced a Quaker meeting for worship, the 2nd graders listened to one of our former COA students talk about what it means to “come of age,” and the 3rd graders hunted through the Bible, looking for female characters (they're there, but a certain point was made...). Our Mixed Grade class earned so many points for fabulous classroom behavior that they'll be going on a fun outing in February, the 4th graders did a wonderful job reading the Beatitudes and singing “O Freedom” at our Justice Gathering, and the Kindergartners shared many ideas about “who God is,” “what God does,” and “where God lives.” I'll share some tidbits about the other grades next month!

Curriculum Review: Over the past month, I've continued to work with the Curriculum Review Committee (**Rebecca Weiss, Carol Muskin, Elizabeth Gelfeld** and **Anne Stewart**) on creating a new mission statement and revised goals for our Sunday School Program. We've now completed them and will soon ask the IFFP Board for its approval. Following that, the committee will begin the long process of reviewing the themes and curricula of each grade. I hope to include our new mission statement and goals in the March newsletter.

Parent Feedback: I want to encourage parents to keep in touch with their children's Sunday School teachers. If you have any questions or concerns, please share them. And, if you'd like to have my input, please feel free to contact me as well. It's very important that we get your feedback!

Finally, I'd like to share a wonderful statement made by one of our kindergartners during our “God” discussion last Sunday. I asked the question, “Do you ever talk to God?” And the answer was, “Yes, cause other people have God in them.” Think about it!

Peace to you and yours,
Ellen

HOLIDAYS – TU B'SH'VAT

What is Tu B'Sh'vat?

Tu B'Sh'vat, the “15th of Shevat,” falls in the middle of the Jewish month of Shevat, under a full moon in midwinter. Ancient farmers believed that this is the day the sap begins to rise in the fruit trees of Israel and the land starts to awaken from its winter dormancy. The 15th of Shevat usually occurs sometime between the end of January and the middle of February on the Western calendar. In 2006 Tu B'Sh'vat falls on February 13.

Tu B'Sh'vat, the New Year of the Trees, is one of the few Jewish holidays that isn't connected to an historical event. It celebrates our hope and intention to make the world more green and healthy. Tu B'Sh'vat is not a holiday to be celebrated at home or in a synagogue, but, rather, outdoors where the trees live. It's a time to eat fruit, plant trees and notice how much trees bring to our lives.

In Israel, Tu B'Sh'vat has a special meaning. When Jews returned to Israel a hundred years ago, the country was mostly swamp and desert, with few trees. The Jewish National Fund began to create forests in Israel by encouraging Jews from all over the world to have a tree planted in Israel in their name. There are now over 165 million trees in Israel!

One meaningful way to celebrate Tu B'Sh'vat is with a seder (a dinner with special foods and a ceremony). 500 years ago, the Kabbalists, a group of Jewish mystics, created a Tu B'Sh'vat seder to celebrate the connection of all living things to the earth. As with the Passover seder, the number four is important, in this case because it represents the four seasons, the four elements (earth, air, fire and water) and the four corners of the earth. The Tu B'Sh'vat seder is celebrated at nightfall with candles, flowers, and fragrant greens. It begins with readings that reflect the earth and winter, continues by celebrating water and spring, air and summer, and concludes by honoring fire and autumn.

- Ellen Jennings, Director of Religious Education

The Raisin Activity

During this season of Tu B'Sh'vat, when we celebrate trees and their fruits, it might be a nice time to re-visit the "raisin activity" that we tried earlier in the year during our service that focused on Shabbat. When we tried this little exercise last fall, we used it as a way to slow down, savor each moment, and pay attention to all our senses. It helped to remind us to rest from our work, to take a break from creating and doing, and to honor that which is sacred in time and space by just being.

Take a single raisin and put it in your mouth. Feel the texture of the skin of the raisin with your tongue. Now chew it as slowly as you can and notice all the flavors you can taste. How has the texture changed? Does this raisin taste different when you chew it slowly than raisins usually taste to you when you eat them quickly? How long can you make one raisin last?

- Rebecca Weiss, Board Member

Yahoo List Serve

To get your weekly bulletin and other IFFP news, join IFFP's free list serve by sending a blank e-mail to iffplistserve-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. Please send a copy of your e-mail to **Jeff Kenton**, our list serve coordinator, at Jkenton@verizon.net.

You can send non-commercial e-mails to our membership from the Yahoo Groups website. If the message is not directly related to IFFP, please put "off topic" in the subject line.

UPDATES

Fundraising Update

Thanks so much to each and every one of you who responded so generously to our end of the year annual fundraising appeal. To date, more than 50 families -- over half of our members -- have contributed more than \$6,000 toward our goal of \$10,000 from 100 percent of our families. That is a tremendous response that confirms how important IFFP is to you. But it is critical that we meet our goal.

Fundraising beyond our annual dues and tuition is essential to paying the bills -- for staff, building rental, insurance, and other costs that contribute to our core programs and services. If you had intended to contribute but have not yet gotten around to writing a check, please consider doing so as soon as possible. If you made a pledge when you were contacted and have not yet contributed, please do so today. If you were not contacted or could not make a commitment at the time, please consider making a tax-deductible contribution of \$50, \$100, or more to IFFP today.

We know that you are asked to support many different causes; we hope that you will include your community at IFFP among them.

Thank you.

- Ian Spatz, Board's Fundraising Liaison, and Danny Weiss, Board Chair

Welcome to our New Members!

Please help welcome the newest members of our IFFP family, **Mary Beth Cisneros** and **Michael Rosenman**, with twins, **Anna** and **Caleb**, 3 years old, and **Elizabeth**, 1 year old.

Directory Updates & Corrections

Please contact the office for this information.

IFFP Board: *Chair:* Danny Weiss, DWeiss2205@aol.com • *Vice chair:* Betsy Keeler, betsy.keeler@dc.gov, Betsyharvey@starpower.net • *Secretary:* Mark Cohen, cohenmarkp@aol.com • *Treasurer:* Richard Harris, rharris@nasw.org • *Board Members:* Erica Burman, ericaburman@us.net • Phil Jakobsberg, pjakobsberg@wabtec.com • Sam Lawson, sam.lawson@sdlawson.com • Ian Spatz, kois@erols.com • Rebecca Weiss, becndan@aol.com

IFFP Coordinators: *Adult Group:* Sam Lawson, sam.lawson@sdlawson.com • *Celebrations:* Jessica Vistnes, jvistnes@ahrq.gov; and Geneva Collins, genevacollins@erols.com • *Coffee Mavens:* Marika Partridge & Larry Ravitz, tomarika@aol.com • *Community Comfort/Support Group Contacts:* Anne Stewart, annecstewart@aol.com; and Carol Muskin, cmuskin@umd.edu • *Community Service Workgroup:* Antoinette Eates, aeates@msn.com; and Barb Gottlieb, bgottlieb@womensedge.org • *Greeting Table:* Lisa Henderson, LKH1@starpower.net; and Erica Burman, ericaburman@us.net • *New Members:* Cheryl Leanza, cherylleanza@earthlink.net; Lisa Wilcox, Lisa.Wilcox@nasd.com; and Tova Sanders, Tova@gwu.edu • *Newsletter:* Holly Cooper, ward-holly.cooper@comcast.net • *Sound System Maven:* Robin Thieme, robin@thiemehome.com • *Website:* Felise and Mark Shellenberger, felise.shellenberger@comcast.net, mshellenberger1@comcast.net • *Worship:* Larry Bostian, llbostian@aol.com • *Young Couples:* Kerri Mullins-Levine, kmullinslevine@yahoo.com

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