

# Interfaith Families Project

July/August 2004

www.iffp.net

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## FROM THE BOARD

One year ago, I drew upon the great rhetorical flourish of one of America's great visionaries, Warren Harding, to wish for a "return to normalcy" at IFFP. What we achieved was something that might be called "a transition towards normalcy." We have created a solid foundation for an exciting future at IFFP.

First, we faced the possibility in the middle of this past year of a substantial, if manageable, deficit in our community's finances. With careful stewardship by the Board and staff, and with the success of our outreach efforts, we have ended the year with a substantial surplus. This means that the basic arrangements of fees and staffing adopted by the Board last year are now in place and proven capable of sustaining our community needs.

Second, in the latter part of the year, we completed our hiring plan, hiring two people to join Heather and Susan Ryder in providing professional support, guidance, and leadership for our community. Adding Rabbi Harold White as Spiritual Advisor fulfilled our goal of complementing Rev. Heather Kirk-Davidoff's leadership of IFFP with a distinguished Jewish Spiritual Advisor. Rev. Barbara Silversmith's appointment as the new Director of Religious Education continues our tradition of hiring exceptional people with outstanding backgrounds and experiences to work with us in our journey of discovery.

Third, we have begun the process of experimenting with additions to our existing program, primarily to encourage new opportunities for small groups of IFFP members to get together. Some of these will be reflected on the calendar for next year, which we will post on the website soon. Some of these will be continued by the efforts of small groups of members, supported by Susan in the IFFP office, to arrange soirees, picnics, hikes, museum visits – anything which might bring a group of IFFP members together.

In the middle of August, we will be sending out registration packets for the upcoming year. The Board voted in June to increase membership fees by 3% over last year, and to freeze religious school tuition at the same level as last year. We hope that you will find the time to return these forms as soon as possible after you receive them, fully understanding how crowded the end of summer can be.

We still have one more summer activity planned, with the re-scheduled pool party late in August. I hope to see some of you there, and look forward to seeing all of you when we reconvene in our normal fashion in September for fellowship, spiritual exploration, religious education, and good food.

- IFFP Board Chair

## SEPTEMBER 2004

12 (Sun.)	Welcoming Gathering & Picnic with Rabbi Harold White and Rev. Heather Kirk-Davidoff, 10:00 a.m.	19 (Sun.)	Rosh Hashana* Gathering and Fall Open House <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bagels, 10:00 a.m.</li><li>• Gathering 10:15 a.m.</li><li>• Sunday School/Adult Back to School Discussion, 10:45 a.m.</li><li>• Class Picnics for Pre K &amp; K, noon</li></ul> <p>* The actual day of Rosh Hashana is 9/16.</p>
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25 (Sat.) 5 p.m.	Yom Kippur * Reflection  Members' homes Break the Fast Potlucks  Details will be in the Sept. newsletter.  *This is the actual day of Yom Kippur.	26 (Sun.)	Yom Kippur Gathering <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bagels, 10 a.m.</li> <li>• Gathering led by Rabbi Harold White, 10:15 a.m.</li> <li>• Sunday School/Adult Group/yoga 10:45 a.m.</li> <li>• Class Picnics for Grades 1 &amp; 2, noon</li> </ul>
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## FALL EVENTS

### Welcoming Picnic

After our Gathering on September 12, Rabbi Harold White and Reverend Heather Kirk-Davidoff will join us for a potluck picnic at the nearby park (we'll move the picnic indoors if the weather does not cooperate). Dishes will be assigned alphabetically. Please check the bulletins and the September newsletter for more information.

### Fall Open House and Back to Sunday School Day

September 19<sup>th</sup> will be a busy day at IFFP. We will have our Rosh Hashana Gathering, our Back to Sunday School presentation with our new DRE, Barbara SilverSmith, our Fall Open House, and our first Sunday School Class Picnics! We will be sending out information about our Open House, but please start mentioning it to any interfaith families you know. Prospective members will attend the Gathering, hear part of the Sunday School presentation, and then have an orientation and visit to classrooms.

### Sunday School Class Picnics

Many members have expressed interest in having more frequent social activities on a smaller scale that allow more opportunity to meet and speak with other members. It's also a given fact that kids are more willing to attend Sunday School when they have friends in their class. So, this fall and spring, all Sunday School classes will have class picnics at a nearby park after Sunday School.

The yearly calendar will include a schedule of picnics, by grade, with two grades a week heading to the park. We'll start with Pre K & K on September 19<sup>th</sup> and Grades 1 & 2 on September 26<sup>th</sup>. If your family has two kids who have picnics on the same day, the children get to choose who gets mom and who gets dad! Just bring a picnic lunch with you when you come to the Gathering, then meet in your child's classroom at noon, and proceed to the park. We hope that this will allow parents to meet other families who have kids of similar ages and encourage the children to get together outside of Sunday School.

### Yoga Class

One of our members has volunteered to coordinate our wonderful yoga class. It will resume Sunday, September 26, so that everyone will be available to attend the Back to Sunday School presentation by our new Director of Religious Education, Barbara SilverSmith, on Sunday, September 19. If you have any questions regarding the class, please contact the office or the yoga coordinator.

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

### Contemplative Service Experiment

This fall, Heather is planning on experimenting with a second worship service on the Sunday mornings when IFFP gathers. The service will be held in one of the smaller rooms, and will run from 9:30 until 10:00 am. The format will be similar to the one we used for the adult part of our "Backwards Day" Gathering -- some simple singing, some silence, some readings, some more silence, and perhaps a reflection given by Heather or by an IFFP member. This service will be intended primarily for adults. Quiet children are welcome, but childcare will be available for those who prefer to start their day moving and yelling! We'll try this service from October through December and then assess. If you are interested in helping to design or lead this Contemplative Service, drop Heather a note at revhkd@comcast.net.

- Heather Kirk-Davidoff, Spiritual Director

## FALL UPDATES

### Join the List Serv

The IFFP list serv is our only way to contact all the members with important announcements, bulletins, updates, and information requests. All members should sign on to the list serv by sending a blank e-mail to: [iffp@topica.com](mailto:iffp@topica.com). We would like to have 100% of our community read our weekly bulletins (Thursday) to keep up with timely information.

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 email heading if your message is not related to an IFFP matter.

### IFFP Directory

We know how useful our directory is and that everyone would like to receive it early in the year. However, in order to do that, we have to have correct information for every family. At the first three Gatherings in September, we will have copies of the information in last year's directory for everyone to look at and correct. Please make this a priority so that we can have the directory in October. Anyone who would like to email your correct information to the office is welcome to do so at any time in August. We need your name, address, home phone number, any office and cell phone numbers (indicate if you choose to include these in the directory, or if they are only to be used for office purposes), children's names, and both spouses' e-mail addresses. Send your information to Susan, [iffp@juno.com](mailto:iffp@juno.com) and [Sury3@aol.com](mailto:Sury3@aol.com).

### Name Tags

Fall is quickly approaching and we'd like to have name tags for all members. If you know that your name tag was lost, incorrect, or broken last spring and that you need a new one, please email Susan at [iffp@juno.com](mailto:iffp@juno.com) and [Sury3@aol.com](mailto:Sury3@aol.com). We will order name tags for all new members and members who joined in the spring and may not have gotten them.

### Registration Packets

Our new fall season of Sunday School and activities is almost here. Registration packets will be going out in mid August. We urge everyone to please fill out the registration form and volunteer form and return them to the office by September 1. We especially need your registration form and check by September 1 (volunteer forms can follow if you wish), so that teachers know who and how many students will be in their classes. We also want to have this information as soon as possibly for the directory and volunteer committees.

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

## MEET OUR NEW DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Greetings from an interfaith "ecu-maniac" (ecumenism meaning the practice of promoting better understanding and cooperation among the differing religious faiths around the world),

In every place I have lived, my immediate neighbors have been Jewish. This included a young rabbi and his family in Lexington, Massachusetts, where my family was invited into the Sukkot booth, etc. My mother was a non-practicing Roman Catholic; my father had been baptized Lutheran and raised Baptist. As we grew up in the Chicago area, where my parents had a rustic cabin on the Southern shore of Lake Michigan, my parents took us to the neighborhood church, which was Dutch Reformed. In college, I attended a Presbyterian church. I became a United Methodist after my marriage to a grandson of a Nazarene bishop, when we chose United Methodism because of the quadrilateral (more about that in a later issue). No wonder I feel comfortable officiating at "mixed" marriages, and have done some challenging cross-cultural weddings around the globe.

I started my studies for the ordained ministry as the only woman student in the Roman Catholic diocesan seminary in Cleveland, and attended several different seminaries, including Claremont and Emory, under the guidance of the dean of the United Methodist seminary on the Northwestern campus in Evanston, Illinois. My supportive family eventually moved to Evanston with me so I could be in residence for a year. I have served congregations in Youngstown, Cleveland, and Oberlin, Ohio, as well as San Luis Obispo, California, where I was also the campus minister for the United Methodists at Cal Poly. In all these positions, and in all of my life, teaching and learning have always been central.

I was a founding member of the Future Teachers of America in junior high, and particularly enjoyed teaching a variety of courses in everything from an experimental junior high in Newton, Massachusetts, to a community college, also in the Boston area. As Minister of Education in California, I led the teaching team in revitalizing our program from pre-school through adult, with learning centers, covenant groups, etc. A lifelong learner, I have three master's degrees and have completed all the course work for a Ph.D. in American Studies (family history) at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. I've done considerable writing for publication – newspaper columns, magazine articles, etc. While people of all ages and backgrounds fascinate me, working with children has always been a particular joy for me. Developing an experimental confirmation course was also a good challenge.

At the moment, a primary joy is Abraham Cordell Silvers, my first grandchild. He is the son of my son Brant Silvers, a returned Peace Corps volunteer who now lives in Adams Morgan and works for US-AID, and his wife Gaylea, a science teacher who was raised Roman Catholic in the Kansas farm country and who is also a returned Peace Corps volunteer. My daughter Brooke also served in the Peace Corps in West Africa and is married to another returned Peace Corps volunteer, Mr. Ed LOVE (yes, really!). He was raised Episcopalian, and they attend that church. Both of them are in Seattle earning their Ph.D.'s—they commute to the University of Washington in their kayaks. Brooke is an oceanographer who was just out in the research submarine Alvin, doing her research! I am also a water-lover, and enjoy using my canoe and kayak regularly on the Severn River, where I live with my cat, Mabel Dodge Luhan (there is another story behind her name). My other hobbies are folk dancing, gardening, hiking, book grouping, and travelling.

I have done extensive workshop and retreat leading, and am looking forward to learning and growing with all of you.

- Barbara SilverSmith, Director of Religious Education

## SUMMER EVENTS

IFFP planned get-togethers to bridge the gap of the summer months and provide additional opportunities to meet families we see but don't know and to visit with those that we do. These outings also allow the new families who have joined for the summer to get acquainted with the IFFP members before fall.

### **Summer Social Event Change for August 22**

Due to the rainy, cool weather this past Sunday and Monday, our pool party had to be canceled. It has been decided that we will reschedule the pool party for Sunday, August 22, 4-7 p.m. (rain date Sunday, August 29), instead of having the Olympics. This way we hope to have even more families come to the pool party and then have our Welcoming Picnic on Sunday, September 12. (Announcements regarding food for the potluck picnic will be in future bulletins and the September newsletter). If you are interested in organizing races, games, etc. for the Welcoming Picnic, please contact Susan, [iffp@juno.com](mailto:iffp@juno.com) and [Sury3@aol.com](mailto:Sury3@aol.com).

Please RSVP for the pool party by August 15. As we planned for the canceled pool party, IFFP will supply hamburgers, franks, veggie burgers, rolls and paper goods. We ask the families who are coming to supplement the meal by bringing side dishes, desserts, and drinks (to be organized closer to the event).

Also, we're always looking for good places to have events such as these and appreciate suggestions of parks, recreation areas, playgrounds, and picnic grounds (email Susan).

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

### **Summer Hike**

In late June, thanks to leaders Sherri and Heather, a handful of IFFP families, friends, and dogs hit Sugarloaf Mountain for a summer Sunday's hike. Sugarloaf is a small mountain that stands alone in the rolling countryside south of Frederick, MD. Since some of us arrived a bit late (what? IFFP'ers late?), we walked to the summit in small groups, the kids leading the way, to enjoy the views and watch a class of youthful mountain climbers learn, literally, the ropes. Sugarloaf is a small mountain even by local standards, so the hike itself was brief. Anyone up for the Shenandoahs, next time?

- IFFP Member

## IFFP BOOK CLUB

On June 22, one of our member couples hosted the first IFFP book club to discuss the Da Vinci Code. Five other members, including both men and women, attended. Over a couple of hours we had a lively discussion, keeping in mind all the time that that author Dan Brown took considerable liberties with history to tell his tale. Among the things we considered were the connection between pagan symbols and Christianity; whether it mattered whether Jesus was married; the relationship between religious doctrine, other societal conventions, and the role of women; the political considerations surrounding Constantine's adoption of Christianity; Christian adoption of pagan religious symbols as the new religion sought to obtain converts; the book's meaning for Christians and Jews; and the evolution of Christianity from a subset of Judaism to a separate religion.

We also discussed the possible future topics and times for the book club. The group seemed interested in a wide range of books from fiction to non-fiction. For example, the discussion about the facts in the Da Vinci Code caused some attendees to want to read more about the history of the early Christians and Jews. Plans for the book club's continuation are ongoing, including having book club as a Sunday-morning track. The interested members are going to discuss future plans further over email. If you want to participate in the discussion, please contact the office or the book group coordinator.

- Book Club Coordinator

## COMMUNITY EVENTS

### **Takoma Park Havurah**

For the last two years, the Takoma Park Havurah, a group of about 30 people, has been meeting for a Sabbath evening observance and vegetarian/dairy potluck dinner at various homes in the Takoma Park area. We generally meet on the first Friday of the month, about 7 p.m. Sometimes we've done full Kabbalat Shabbat services, sometimes just a few blessings and a meal, and sometimes we've sung a lot of songs. We've enjoyed attending, and thought there might be many more people in our community who'd like to come. If you are interested or if you have questions, please contact the office.

- IFFP Member

## DOVETAIL CONFERENCE

### **California Bound**

IFFP Spiritual Director Heather Kirk-Davidoff, Religious Education Director Barbara SilverSmith, former COA leader Sherri Brown, and I will represent IFFP at Dovetail's National Interfaith Families Conference on August 6-8. Heather is co-leading a workshop on Creating Interfaith Services. Sherri will be on a panel discussing Coming of Age Classes and Ceremonies. Dovetail granted her a travel fellowship to attend the conference--other groups are hungry to hear about our COA program, which is unique in the country. I will be on panels on Interfaith Education, and on Learning from Older Interfaith Children (I am one). Barbara will be networking with the staff from other interfaith religious education programs from around the country. I attended the last two Dovetail conferences, and have been volunteering on the program committee for this conference. IFFP might want to begin considering whether we would like to host this national conference in two years, or sometime in the future.

- IFFP Member (former IFFP Board Co-chair, adult interfaith child)

## JOYS AND CONCERNS

We congratulate one of our member couples on the birth of their new daughter on July 12! Their-3-year old is happy to be a big sister.

### **How to have your news included in our Joys and Concerns**

This year, the newsletter will include joys and concerns -- happenings such as births, engagements, serious illnesses, deaths, birthdays, new jobs, graduations, and kids' awards or accomplishments. By including news of important events in members' families, we hope both to continue to build our sense of community closeness and to ensure that all staff and members know about important changes in our lives. Note that we will not automatically include items from the Joys and Concerns portion of our Gatherings, so that members can share their news by their preferred method(s). If you want an item included in the IFFP newsletter, please email Susan at [iffp@juno.com](mailto:iffp@juno.com) and [Sury3@aol.com](mailto:Sury3@aol.com).

- Newsletter Coordinator

## REFLECTION

### **How do the Yellowstone Wolves Connect with IFFP?**

A few years ago, all the plant and animal species that existed in Yellowstone National Park when Europeans arrived at America's shore still could be found in the park -- except the wolf. It had been hunted into extinction there. But because of the persistent dream of people like Renee Askins, as chronicled in her book [Shadow Mountain](#), now several "imported Canadian" packs flourish there, and sometimes can be glimpsed in remote areas of the park. I was thrilled to observe some of these wolves last month in the Lamar Valley -- and thought of IFFP, because I saw all the adults raising all of the pups! Shared responsibility for our youth is one healthy aspect of our rich, diverse IFFP community.

Askins also writes: "I have come to believe in the importance of place and its potency in our lives. I feel with certainty that everything follows from place, that place makes us who we are, that landscape carves out a certain character and community and that ultimately the places in which we choose to live govern the unfolding of our lives." We all find ourselves living in the pluralistic Washington, DC, area. What impact is this having on our IFFP students?

I see another IFFP-Yellowstone parallel: because the wolves are back, the elk aren't as free to linger at the creek banks, where they had eaten the greenery down to the point where other wildlife had less shelter, causing those populations to decline. Now, with the reintroduction of the wolf, the balance and harmony of nature have once more been restored. Personal/spiritual and social/communal harmony and balance, as we continually add new folks to IFFP, surely are also desired outcomes of religious education at IFFP.

I am eager to talk with more of you about how you understand the process and goals of our already excellent program, thanks to our gifted, dedicated teachers and leaders. Indeed, the biggest "room" in our Sunday school should always be the room for improvement.

Hopefully,

- Barbara SilverSmith, Director of Religious Education