

Interfaith Families Project

June 2004

www.iffp.net

P.O. Box 5413, Takoma Park, MD 20913

iffp@juno.com

301-270-6337

FROM THE BOARD

IFFP Year 2003-2004: Lessons Learned

As the Board prepares for its June meeting, we are looking ahead to next year: The main items on our agenda will be finalizing a budget for next year—with only a small increase in fees contemplated—and finalizing next year's calendar of activities.

Before moving on, it might be worthwhile to consider a few of the lessons we have learned this year. At least a couple on the positive side of the ledger and a couple on the need-to-improve side seem most important to acknowledge:

- ü As a community, we continue to excel in finding ways to create a place where people who have chosen not to run away from either their Jewish or Christian heritages can gather together, educate their children, and explore these for themselves.
- ü As a community, we continue to be blessed (in whatever theological or secular way you find comfortable to understand this word) by our ability to find and hire outstanding staff. A tradition that began with Julia and Ellen, continued with Heather, Susan, and Sherri, has most recently brought us Harold White and Barbara SilverSmith.
- Ø As a community, we need to find more and better ways to communicate in both large groups and small. As the group grows, phone trees become more and more impractical, and e-mail is becoming overwhelmed by spam. Not only are the means of communication an issue, so is the content. When the Board is contemplating changes, everyone at IFFP should know what changes are being contemplated and why. We will rarely find consensus on major changes, but we can do much better at making sure information is much more widely shared.
- Ø As a community, we need to find more and more diverse ways in which to allow members to interact with each other. For newer members, the experience of joining a group with more than 90 member families is qualitatively different than the experience of just a few years ago, when a new family joined a group of 40 to 50 member families. To make sure that all families are able to develop roots and branches within the IFFP community, we need to continue to explore ways in which to get together.

One product of the Board's learning this year was the decision to initiate some summer activities this year for IFFP. With a hike at Sugarloaf Mountain in June, a pool party in July, and a Summer Olympics in August, we hope all families will find it possible to join with us to keep the bonds of community strong all year long.

—[Steve Jackson](#), IFFP Board Chair

JUNE 2004

| JULY 2004

19	National Gallery of Art Excursion, NGA Rotunda, 2 p.m.	22	IFFP Book Club , 7:30 p.m. (see p. 2)	27	Hike & Picnic Sugarloaf Mountain, 11 a.m. (see p. 2)	25	Pool Party & Cookout Daleview Swimming Pool, Silver Spring, 4-7 p.m. (see p. 2)
----	--	----	---	----	--	----	---

SUMMER SOCIAL EVENTS

IFFP has planned three 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 will also allow the new families who have joined for the summer to get acquainted with the IFFP members before fall.

* Hike & Picnic, Sugarloaf Mountain—Sunday, June 27, 11 a.m.

Meet at the West View Parking Area. We'll leave our picnic lunches in our cars (might want to bring them in an ice chest), go for a hike, then have a picnic lunch, then more hiking for those who wish to stay for the day. The West View Parking area has picnic areas, portajohns and, sometimes, a "snack shack." The choice of trail will be determined by the number of small children and their hiking abilities (or parent's carrying stamina). Sherri Brown and Heather Kirk-Davidoff, experienced Sugarloaf hikers, will act as our guides to trails and picnic sights.

Sugarloaf Mountain (http://www.patc.net/hiking/destinations/sug_loaf.html), located west of Germantown, is a privately owned mountain (the Strong Family Trust), free and open to the public, with beautiful views and scenic trails. It is striking not for its size but because it stands in the midst of flat Maryland farmland.

Directions: From the Beltway take I-270 west 22 miles to Rte. 109, Poolesville. Head south 5 miles to Rte. 95 (Comus Road—with Comus Inn on the corner). Turn right onto Rte. 95, drive 4.2 miles to the Stronghold entrance "plaza," and continue until you reach the West View Parking Area. The route to Sugarloaf is clearly marked on the interstate and local roads.

* Pool Party & Cookout, Daleview Pool, Sunday, July 25, 4 -7p.m.

Bring your kids, bathing suits, towels, and side dishes for a fun evening at the Daleview Pool (901 Daleview Dr., Silver Spring, 301-434-9555, www.daleview.org). IFFP will supply hamburgers, franks, and veggie burgers/dogs for grilling. Daleview is in a secluded area. It has a regular pool, kiddie pool, pool tables, trees and shade, picnic tables, and grills.

Please RSVP by July 1 (to iffp@juno.com) so that we can plan on food quantities to purchase, who will bring side dishes, desserts and drinks, and whether we'll need an additional lifeguard. Also, when you RSVP, please indicate the number of adults and children who will be coming, and whether you are members of the Daleview Pool. There will be a \$5 fee per person (over age 1) for non-pool members (new IFFP summer members have already paid).

Daleview Pool is located near the intersection of Piney Branch Rd. and University Blvd. East. If you are going north on University from Piney Branch, turn right onto Buckingham, right onto Linton, and left onto Daleview Drive.

* IFFP Summer Olympics & Picnic, Sunday, August 22, 11 a.m. (site to be determined)

Join us for fun, games and challenges for both kids and adults! We'll practice our skills, then have a potluck picnic and lots of visiting for this last event of the summer.

* Monthly Summer Hikes

At the Women's Retreat, it was suggested that we form a hiking group that meets one Saturday morning a month in different locations. It can be all women, men and women, or families. If you are interested in participating, please contact me the office (iffp@juno.com).

—[Susan Ryder](#), Program Coordinator

IFFP BOOK CLUB

The idea for an IFFP Book Club originated with Cheryl Leanza who will host the first Book Club meeting at her home on Tuesday, June 22, at 7:30 p.m. [The Da Vinci Code](#) by Dan Brown has been chosen for this discussion. Anyone interested in attending (who has not already responded), please contact Cheryl.

Report from the DRE

This is my last Newsletter submission as IFFP Interim DRE, and I am happy to close with a report of the fabulous teaching staff we have lined up for the Sunday School in the fall:

- Hebrew: David Quigley
- Music: Marcie Shegogue
- Pre-School: Carolyn Dobek, Ruth Moss, Kathy Flitter
- Kindergarten: Diane Katz, Dan Kirk-Davidoff
- 1st Grade: Elizabeth Gelfeld, Bobby Gelfeld, Karen Kenton, Amy Stern
- 2nd Grade: Robin Thieme, Jaclyn Gilbert
- 3rd Grade: David Habenstreit, Diane Jentilet, Lauren Sollod
- 4th Grade: Anne Stewart, ???*
- 5th Grade: Eric Burman, Erin Sweeney
- 6th Grade: Brent Mitchell, Freddie Adelman, Cindy Pohoryles
- Mixed Grade: Ellen Jennings, Mary Wichansky
- Roaming Sub: Carol Muskin

* Please note, however, that we still need to fill in one blank in particular: A teacher to assist veteran Anne Stewart in the 4th grade. In order to meet an expressed need of the teaching staff—allowing teachers the opportunity to participate in occasional Adult Groups and Yoga—Carol Muskin has kindly offered to leave the 4th-grade classroom to serve as a roaming substitute. We hope to offer teachers this opportunity next year, but it leaves a hole in 4th grade. If anyone is interested in stepping in to this role and becoming a part of this amazing team, please let me know as soon as possible.

I am also currently interviewing candidates to work with the 7th-grade COA Prep class. Our fearless leader Heather Kirk-Davidoff has committed to teaching our 8th-grade COA class. So you can clearly see that we really do have an outstanding teaching faculty for our religious school and we are truly blessed by their dedication and generosity.

I would like to close by thanking both last year's teaching team and this incoming team, as well as all the IFFP staff, board, and membership, for making my six months as interim DRE both memorable and truly productive. Although next year I will be focusing my time on my academic and professional teaching vocation, I will stay connected with this amazing community. I will be representing IFFP at the national Dovetail conference in August on a panel presentation about our COA program ([see page 5](#)), and I hope to be available for both COA and Adult Group teaching next year.

—Sherri Brown, Interim Director of Religious Education

Mixed Grade Class

This fall IFFP will offer a Sunday School class for upper elementary/middle school-aged kids who have special learning needs. The class will meet at the regular Sunday School time and will be taught by Mary Wichansky, a psychologist, and Ellen Jennings, a religious educator. Both teachers have a lot of experience with special needs children and their families.

The class will have the same overall Sunday School goals as the rest of the Sunday School Program. However, there will be less reading, more story telling, and a strong emphasis on experiential learning (with ritual, art and music). The teachers will also endeavor to interweave social skills instruction and community-building into the curriculum.

Right now we have five children, ages 9 to 13, whose parents plan to enroll them in the class. We're open to having several more children, though we want to keep the numbers low. If you have a child or know of a prospective family with a child who has special needs, please contact me.

—[Ellen Jennings](#), Curriculum Consultant

SATELLITE GROUPS

IFFP families live in Washington, D.C., and many of its suburbs, from Falls Church, Va., to Damascus, Md. Because members outside of Takoma Park/Silver Spring—and especially members in the outer fringe areas—have expressed a desire to have more opportunities to interact with other IFFP members, we are establishing Satellite Groups. Families in each area have received contact information for other members in their area. Then, informal social gatherings can be organized, with Heather attending the first one.

A few groups have already been established: Virginia; Bethesda/Chevy Chase/Kensington; and Gaithersburg/Germantown/Damascus. The Virginia Group had a lovely get-together in May at the home of Susan Kaplan and Paul Colarulli, and hopefully will continue to get together on a regular basis. The Bethesda/Chevy Chase/Kensington Group had a potluck picnic on June 12 in Rock Creek Park. The Germantown Group is in the planning stage.

We want to include every family in an area grouping that encourages communication and a sense of community and gives Heather a chance to visit with members in small, relaxed groups. We hope to add groups in Washington, Silver Spring, and Rockville/Potomac, etc., by the end of summer. If you have any questions or suggestions, please contact me (iffp@juno.com).

—[Susan Ryder](#), Program Coordinator

COA GROUP

2003-2004 COA Ceremony

If you take six kids with their own natural talents, interests, and willingness, add a program for guiding them along the journey from childhood to adulthood, and throw in a lot of love and care from adults in the community, the results can be pretty extraordinary. The COA Ceremony at Lowell School on May 23 was proof of what a difference young people can make.

As with students in previous COA classes, each student described a year-long research and community service project on a subject near and dear to his/her heart.

- Steven Dobek and Rachel Boylan explored art as a means for expression of faith—Steven by looking at how people throughout the ages have used art to express their deepest religious feelings, and Rachel by expressing her personal exploration of faith through a multifaceted “scrapbook.”
- Sam Ricci took a look at skateboarding, a subject with seemingly little connection to spirituality, and found a way to look at the universal question of why some people use what they've got for good while others use it for evil.
- Casey McGrath used her experience struggling with a learning disability to discover that what looks like a disability can serve as the sand that makes the pearl.
- Alison Scharman's exploration into immigration led her to understand, first, more about her own family's roots and then to a greater understanding of why people immigrate to this country.
- Fiona Kohrman used her COA project as an opportunity to connect with Rubia, an organization that helps women and girls in Afghanistan. Community service projects ranged from helping younger kids in after-school programs or summer-theater programs to sorting clothes for immigrants to raising almost \$300, collecting warm clothes, and producing a promotional documentary for the non-profit.

Heather Kirk-Davidoff and I led the ceremony. I wish to express my gratitude to the entire IFFP community for my time with IFFP. On June 1, I returned to my hometown of Birmingham, Ala., after 16 years away!

—Sharron Mendel, COA Leader

TEEN GROUP

Teen Commencement

Four members of the IFFP Teen Group “commenced” with joy and a little bittersweetness at the final Gathering of the year. This fall Izaak Orlansky and Rebecca Feiden go north to Wesleyan University in Connecticut, Luke Bostian goes west to the University of Michigan, and Cori Cohen heads east to the University of Maryland.

Rob and Jen Liebreich, Teen Group leaders, said a few words about each graduating teen and presented them with gifts from the community: Mudhouse Sabbath, a book about creating Shabbat/Sabbath experiences in a busy college lifestyle (Mudhouse is a coffeeshop at UVA that Jen and Rob like to frequent), and a mug for long nights ahead (pens/pencils/caffeine...). This is a tight knit group of young adults whom the whole IFFP community will miss dearly next year.

—[Jen Liebreich](#), Teen Group Co-leader

Teen Group Leader (Still) Needed

IFFP is still searching for a Teen Group Leader(s) 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, participating in IFFP events, and organizing religious and social gatherings. See the Teen Group link on the IFFP Web site (www.iffp.net) for a list of past activities. This is a challenging and rewarding job for those who enjoy teens and want to make a difference—and a great opportunity for members with no children or empty nesters. For more information, contact Teen Group Co-Leaders emeriti Jen and Rob Liebreich or Heather.

DOVETAIL CONFERENCE

Feel Connected to the National Interfaith Movement. Visit Berkeley this August!

Are you excited about meeting people from our “sister” independent interfaith groups in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco? Would you like to hear how other interfaith couples around the country are welcoming their babies, educating their children, mourning the loss of their parents? Would you like to hear the latest research indicating that interfaith children can have great self-esteem and mental health, no matter which religious pathway you choose for them? Would you like to hear an esteemed Jewish theologian and an esteemed Christian theologian talk about why Jews need to learn more about Jesus and Christians need to learn more Torah? Would you like to hear a popular murder mystery writer explain why he chose an interfaith couple as the protagonists of his book series?

Every two years, the Dovetail Institute, the only national organization supporting all interfaith families, has a national conference. It is an exhilarating experience. About a third of those who attend are young couples looking for guidance—some of whom go on to found new interfaith groups; a third are movers and shakers from the major independent interfaith groups around the country; and a third are rabbis, ministers, counselors, academics, and others who serve interfaith communities.

This year, the conference is Aug. 6-8 in Berkeley, Calif. Heather, Sherri, and I will be there to present IFFP's program on various panels, and we would love to have more IFFP people join us—to raise the national awareness of IFFP and to attend as many of the simultaneous sessions as we can, so that we can learn as much as possible from this opportunity. Young couples, teens, parents of teens, and COAers are especially needed. Do you have family in California you'd like to visit anyway? Contact me for more information (or check out the Dovetail Web site: www.dovetailinstitute.org). Please join us.

—[Sue Katz Miller](#) (former IFFP Board Co-chair, adult interfaith child)

“Religious Tourism”

I've got a suggestion for your summer vacation: Go worship somewhere.

I'm not just talking about touring the various historical religious sites of a new city you're visiting, although that has its value. I remember the relief of stepping off blazing hot streets in Florence and Rome into the cool, quiet sanctuaries of a dozen cathedrals.

But here is an even stronger memory: Almost 15 years ago, Dan and I took a trip through Sweden and Norway and one Sunday morning found ourselves in Bergen, on the west coast of Norway. Our tour book noted that St. Mary's Church in Bergen is one of the oldest churches in Norway, and so I decided to stop by that morning as part of a walking tour of the city. I walked into the church just as worship was starting, and sat in a pew and listened to hymns and a sermon I couldn't understand while soaking in the powerful spirit of the place. I found it deeply moving to realize that a congregation had been worshiping in that building just about continuously since the 12th century. That morning, the ancient stone walls of the church felt alive to me. For a brief moment, I felt like I was truly present in Bergen. I had moved from being a tourist to being a participant.

A few years later, we went to Savannah, Ga., for a friend's wedding at the height of the mania for that city caused by the book *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. The wedding was held at the Mickve Israel Synagogue, the third-oldest synagogue in the United States. It was a fascinating experience for both Dan and me; we had never seen a gothic-style synagogue with pews, a central isle, and an organ. We got to talking to the rabbi about the history of the synagogue and ended up discussing the history of Jewish immigration in the United States, the profile of 18th century Jews in London, and the evolution of the Reform movement in the South. We learned a lot more than we had during the previous day's tour of historic houses!

Since we hold our IFFP Gatherings in a middle school cafeteria, we might be particularly ready to notice the way in which sacred buildings interact with the ritual practices that happen inside them. With some preparation, we can even engage our kids in the process of “religious tourism.”

Prior to attending a service with your kids, wonder aloud what it will be like. You don't have to tell them everything that might happen—simply prepare them to be investigators by saying things like, “I wonder how we'll be able to tell when the congregation is praying?” “I wonder what languages they'll use in worship?” “I wonder if we'll be surprised by anything that happens?”

We take a break from our usual schedule of Gatherings over the summer, so if you're in town on a weekend you can take the opportunity to stop by a local congregation to see it in action. Go to with a neighbor, tag along with a friend. And take notes. It would be a great topic for adult group in the fall to compare experiences in other people's houses of worship!

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