

Interfaith Families Project

Mar.- Apr. 2007 www.iffp.net P.O. Box 5413, Takoma Park, MD 20913 iffp@verizon.net 301-270-6337

THE SEASON OF LENT – A TIME TO SLOW DOWN



Traditionally, Lent is the season when Christians decide to give up something in order to prepare their lives/hearts for the coming Easter season. It is a time of reflection, prayer, and consideration. Last year, I gave up “hurrying” for Lent. At first I thought I would never be able to do it and that it was just some sort of crazy fantasy I had. Surprisingly, for most of the forty days I was able to slow down and intentionally not be in a hurry. The effects were profound. I found that I had to plan my days somewhat differently so that I wasn’t rushing from one thing to the next. I began practicing “walking meditation” as I walked from the parking lot to the store or from home to

work. Slowing down, I could watch the sights around me, drinking in the beauty of the blue sky, grand trees, and the spring flowers beginning to emerge from winter sleep. When I would arrive at my destination I felt calm and even rested. After Lent ended, I found myself not being so intentional about slowing down. It was as if the intention of the Lenten season somehow held me in a way that allowed me not hurry.

Ash Wednesday, which was February 21, began this year’s period of Lent. Once again, I felt clear about my desire to give up “hurrying.” I’ve already been feeling the effects of the slowing down and the first weekend of the Lent season, I spent on a 2½ day silent retreat to continue this slowing process. We are in the midst of our fifth year of war with Iraq. The powerful effects of global warming are being felt everywhere. Our culture continues to buy and buy and rush and rush. Will the silence or slowing help me forget the woes of the world? I don’t know, but I want to invite all of us to take this season of Lent and let it hold us in a new way as we prepare for the newness to come. Ask yourself what it is you’d like to give up in order to open yourself up to a deeper sense of yourself and your sense of God. Maybe it’s letting go of the IPOD on the Metro while you ride to work so that you can sit quietly and breathe slowly. Maybe it’s slowing your pace down – just a little. Whatever it is, may this season hold you in a more profound and loving way.

Here’s a poem from St. Teresa of Avila to help you move towards that sense of slowing:

May nothing upset you.
May nothing frighten you.
May patience be your goal.
May God alone fill you.

Joyfully and gratefully yours,

— Rev. Julia Jarvis, Spiritual Director

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING, SUNDAY APRIL 22ND

This is going to be an exciting membership meeting and we would like to have full member participation. As Board Chair **Danny Weiss** notes in his column elsewhere in the newsletter, the really important thing about the annual meeting is to hear from you. The wonderful community of IFFP depends on the involvement of its members.

CALENDAR: MAR. – APR. 2007

March 4 – *Purim!!*

Gathering – Story of Esther
Purim Carnival

March 11 – Gathering – Rabbi Hoffman, “Tikkun Olam”

Sunday School
Adult Group

March 18 – Gathering – Led by Sixth Grade

Sunday School class
Sunday School
Adult Group

March 23 (Friday) – Men’s Night Out

March 25 – Gathering – Ellen Jennings, Lent
Sunday School
Adult Group

March 31 (Saturday) – Passover Seder

April 15 – Gathering – Rev. Julia, Easter
Reflection

Sunday School
Adult Group
Grieving Group

April 22 – Adult Group Gathering

Membership Meeting
Kid’s Gathering & Kids Community Service

April 29 – Gathering – Rabbi White & Rev. Julia “Rituals”

Baby Naming Ceremony
Sunday School
Adult Group
Spring Open House

Please note: Mornings with the Rabbi and
Centering Prayer are being discontinued because
of low attendance

CALENDAR DETAILS

March 11 Gathering – Tikkun Olam

We will be joined by Rabbi Pam (Liba) Hoffman, who was one of the first women rabbis to be ordained at Rabbi White’s seminary. Rabbi Hoffman has been working with Rabbi White at Georgetown. She will participate in our “Tikkun Olam” (healing of the world) Gathering and will lead the adult group on Jewish Meditation.

Men’s Night Out, March 23

We plan to hold this year’s event on March 23 at the Lucky Strike Lanes at Gallery Place (www.bowluckystrike.com) located in the same building as the Regal Theaters above the Gallery Place Metro. Lucky Strike is a very modern, hi-tech bowling alley. They also have a complete bar and restaurant and pool table so we’ll have dinner/snacks/drinks there. Two lanes have been reserved from 7-9pm. The cost of each lane is \$65/hr. Shoe rental is \$3.95. (Obviously, more participants lowers the per person cost.) We hope to have lots of IFFP men come out for this evening. To RSVP or if you want more info, please contact **Andy Katz** or **Nat Mund**.

Passover Seder, March 31st, 5:00 p.m.

Celebrate Passover with IFFP on Saturday, March 31st, at 5:00 p.m. at the Schweinhaut Center, site of our Holiday Party, 1000 Forest Glen Road, Silver Spring. **Rabbi Harold** will lead our wonderful, child-friendly, family Seder. We’ll use our own family oriented Haggadah, written by **Fredie Adelman** and past member **Brent Mitchell**. Several afikomen will be hidden for the kids to find; there will be Seder plates decorated by **Elizabeth Gelfeld’s** first grade class and there’s always great food! It’s a lovely way to welcome Passover this year.

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

FOOD ASSIGNMENTS FOR THE SEDER

* A-G - Main dish. If last name of female head of household begins with A-G, bring a main dish to feed 15 people.

* H-P - Dessert. If last name of female head of household begins with H-P, bring a dessert dish to feed 15 people.

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

Please RSVP to Jessica by March 23rd. We must know the headcount for this event, as this celebration involves even more specific organization than the Holiday Party.

— **Jessica Vistnes**, Celebrations Coordinator

Spring Open House, April 29

We need everyone's help to get the word out about our Spring Open House. The Fall and Spring Open Houses offer interested families the best opportunity to learn more about IFFP – to attend a Gathering, meet with board and staff to hear more and ask questions about our programs and activities and to visit Sunday School classes. Please tell all your interfaith friends and acquaintances about this event, and of course, invite them to join us for any IFFP Gathering or celebration.

There are hundreds of interfaith families in the Metro area who would love to know that IFFP exists as a support for their family. Please forward our e-mail invitations to other list serves, interfaith friends, and groups you belong to and put the invitation in school newsletters. If you have new and unusual ideas for spreading the word, please let me know, Sury3@aol.com. We're always open to creative suggestions.

— **Susan Ryder**, Program Coordinator

ADULT GROUP

IFFP ADULT GROUP TOPICS MARCH – APRIL 2007

We have an exciting line up of Adult Groups planned as we head into spring. Among planned sessions:

On March 11th and 18th, two tracks of Adult Group will run concurrently. Interfaith 101, led by Board Member **Ian Spatz**, will meet March 11th and 18th in the Media Center.

In the Cafeteria, on March 11th **Rabbi Hoffman** will join us to lead a discussion on Jewish Meditation. And, on March 18th, IFFP Member **Jimmy Mrose** will lead a discussion on “What Is Faith? Why Have Faith?” the Adult Group session that was cancelled by the snow on February 25th.

On March 25th, please join us for a special “trialogue” discussion between our own **Rabbi Harold White**, **Rev. Julia Jarvis** and **Sr. Patricia Parachini**, from Georgetown University, on the meaning of Easter from three perspectives (Jewish, Protestant Christian, and Roman Catholic).

Turning to April, on the 15th, we are tentatively planning an IFFP Committee Fair where members will have an opportunity to learn more about the work of each IFFP Committee by “shopping” among committees in the Sligo cafeteria.

On April 22nd, the Membership Meeting will convene in lieu of Adult Group.

As always, feel free to send ideas for Adult Group to me or any member of the Adult Group Committee.

— Colette Matzzie, Adult Group

FUTURE PLANNING

Women's Mothers' Day Spring Retreat, May 11-13, 2007 (Friday-Sunday)

We have a great weekend planned at **Angel's Watch** in Berkeley Springs, WVA. **Eileen** has sent an email out to the women who signed up for the Women's Retreat, relaying details and asking for payment. If you didn't get an email from her and you thought you were on the list, please email her. For info, contact **Eileen Kraus-Jakobsberg** or **Stephani Abramson**.

Coming of Age Ceremony "Coming Up!" May 6, 2007

On Sunday, May 6 our Coming of Age class will hold their group Coming of Age Ceremony at Takoma Park Elementary School. The ceremony will begin at 10 a.m. and be followed by a reception at noon. All IFFP families are welcome and encouraged to attend (especially those with 6th and 7th graders!). More information will be forthcoming and RSVPs requested as we get closer to the date.

— Ellen Jennings, Director of Religious Education

FROM THE BOARD



Membership Meeting: The Board is preparing for the annual IFFP membership meeting, scheduled to take place on April 22 at Sligo Middle School. I strongly encourage each of you to attend this meeting. There will not be regular Sunday school classes that day. Instead, there will be special activities for your kids that will afford you the opportunity to participate in the meeting. The membership meeting is a critical time to learn more about the direction of IFFP and to voice your support for or concerns about decisions that are being made on your behalf. In particular, the Board will present the proposed budget for the upcoming 2007-2008 IFFP year and will seek your approval for it. The Board will also present the slate of candidates to serve on next year's Board, also for your consideration and approval. Generally, each year three people leave the Board and three new people join. This year, we are slightly out of rotation and four people will leave and four will join. This is my last year on the Board. Rebecca Weiss is in line to become the next Board chairwoman. We will forward to you in advance the proposed budget and slate of Board candidates. I cannot stress enough how helpful it is to IFFP's strength to have a large showing at this meeting. Rev. Julia will lead off the meeting with a brief Gathering. We will conclude the meeting at noon. I look forward to seeing you there.

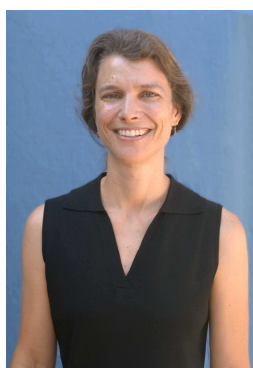
Rabbi Harold: I am excited to announce that Rabbi Harold White will be dedicating more time to IFFP in the coming school year. Rabbi White is by far the most supportive Rabbi of interfaith families in the Washington area. He has expressed a strong interest in being with us more often and in a greater variety of ways than in the past. The Board weighed the costs to IFFP and the benefits to our members and voted to increase our contract with the Rabbi. The Board considers this an important step in outreach, growing our membership and in providing our current members greater services and enrichment. The Rabbi is interested not only in participating more in gatherings and adult groups but also in interacting with our members in new ways, including several interesting and informative venues outside of IFFP's regular structure. This move will

add to IFFP's budget, but we also think it will be an enormous asset as we seek greater public outreach and outside grant support for IFFP, which the Rabbi is committed to helping us secure.

Fundraising: As of early March, we are on track to reach our goal of \$10,000 in voluntary contributions from members toward IFFP's annual budget, but we are not there yet. If you contributed, thank you very much. If you intend to do so but have not yet mailed in your check, please do so as quickly as possible. In addition to internal fundraising, a committee of IFFP volunteers and Board members are working on seeking foundation grants and other outside financial support for IFFP to allow us to expand our services and quality and keep IFFP affordable to our membership. If you are interested in participating in this fundraising committee, please contact Ian Spatz on the IFFP Board.

— **Danny Weiss** – Board Chairman

NOTES FROM THE DRE



It's been a strange winter: 75 degrees in January, 15 degrees in February, rain, snow, sleet, ice, sun, wind, "wintry mix." There's just no certainty, is there?

No, there isn't – unless you count the paradox that the only certainty (death and taxes aside) is change!

This is something we all have to grapple with (and I certainly do my share of grappling!). Nonetheless, I'm grateful to say that there have actually been a few "fixed stars" in my life over the past several years, and among these wonderful luminaries are some IFFP teachers. Of course, all of our teachers are superb, and many of them are well known to you. But some of them are less visible, either because they don't teach a specific Sunday School grade or because they do things for our Sunday School that don't often happen on a Sunday morning. I hope you'll join me in letting each of these stellar people know how much their work means to IFFP. Catch them in the hall, give them a smile, heck, give them a hug – just let them know, in some way, that you appreciate all that they do!

Robin Allen – Robin has been a member of IFFP for almost two years, but she's been contributing to IFFP for a lot longer. Robin is a PhD Behavior Specialist and began assisting with the IFFP teacher trainings over four years ago. Ever since then, she's been an essential part of our teacher training team. Robin is also a visual artist and has not only created a variety of wonderful visuals for our Sunday School classes but is also the creator of our beautiful IFFP welcome collage. Finally, Robin co-teaches the Mixed Grade class and supervises these students in their "usher" role at the IFFP Gatherings. Oh yes: she also assists me with the Coming of Age class. Thank you, Robin!

David Quigley – David has been our "roving" Hebrew teacher for the past 2½ years. He's built upon the great program Peter Gray started five years ago and has created a wonderful, historically and culturally-based approach to beginning Hebrew. David goes into the 4th and 5th grade classes almost every Sunday and meets with the sixth graders every couple of months (based on their field trip schedule). He begins with the letters of the alphabet (aleph, bet!) in 4th grade, and by 6th grade the students are learning to read Hebrew prayers. David has said this may be his last year teaching Hebrew, but I think we should all let him know how much we'd like him to continue. Thank you, David!

The next two teachers are honored in a separate article, entitled "Making IFFP Work." Let me add just a couple of words here.

Carol Muskin – Carol has been an indispensable part of both the IFFP Sunday School and the IFFP Community Service committee for many years. This year she combined these roles and became the Sunday School Community Service Coordinator, helping Sunday School teachers plan community service projects

and activities for their classes. Carol is also our “roving” substitute teacher. Finally, for two of the past several years, as a COA Prep parent, Carol has helped to organize and assist with that class. Thank you, Carol!

Marci Shegogue – Marci is an ever-present musical “presence” at our IFFP Gatherings on Sunday mornings, and she also does an amazing amount of work helping to create the Gatherings as part of the IFFP worship committee. Marci is also our Sunday School’s “roving” music teacher. Every Sunday, Marci meets with both the 3s and 4s classes, singing songs and doing movement activities with them. On alternate Sundays, Marci also meets with our 2nd and Mixed Grade classes. Music is a very important part of our IFFP curriculum, and Marci gives our younger kids a chance to “make a joyful noise” almost every week in class. Thank you, Marci!

As winter wanes and we move toward spring, I encourage all of us to spend some time reflecting on change. What are we trying to hold on to? What might we begin to let go of? Lent is a wonderful season for this. It’s a time in the church year for introspection and reflection, an invitation to “go within” and explore our own dark even as the days lengthen and the earth moves toward the light.

Here is one activity you might want to try with your kids:

Materials needed: paper strips, pencils, and a metal bowl or pot. Begin by talking a little bit about Lent – it’s a season of preparation for Easter, which is a time of rebirth and renewal. During Lent, Christians often either give up something that isn’t so good in their lives (a behavior or habit) or make a commitment to begin doing something positive in their lives. After talking about what each family member might want to give up or begin to do, have each person write (or dictate) these things on a piece of paper. Note: it’s possible both to give up something AND begin to do something! Then put the “give up” pieces of paper in the bowl and bring it outside. Tell the kids that you’re going to burn the strips of paper, so that the “give up” things will be gone for good (well, at least during Lent!). Afterwards, go in the house and put the “begin to” pieces of paper in a special place. Bring out these pieces of paper once a week during Lent and have family members “check in” about their progress.

You might want to use the following prayer as a part of this ritual and throughout the season of Lent:

All will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well. (Julian of Norwich)

May it be so,

— **Ellen Jennings**, Director of Religious Education

MAKING IFFP WORK

It hardly bears mention, but IFFP is the sum of its parts, and its parts are comprised of both its paid staff and its members. Of particular importance to an organization like IFFP are its volunteers, members who provide time and expertise to the running of the organization. Over the next several issues, we plan to introduce you to some of these folks, most of whom you know, but about whom you may not realize how much they do for our organization. This month, new member **Heidi Friedman** introduces you to two of them:

* * * *

You may not know **Carol Muskin** and she might not know you, but she probably knows your children. Like many of us, Carol and her husband **Chuck Pierret** joined IFFP to send their kids (**Leah** and **Daniel** 7th grade, and **Joel** 9th grade) to Sunday School. But, as a teacher, Carol has probably attended as many of those classes as her children. Since joining in 2000, Carol has taught IFFP’s 4th, 5th and 6th grade classes, often with her own children in attendance. While many IFFP teachers choose not to work in their children’s classes, Carol has enjoyed learning the curriculum along with her children. She reports that this often works well in

the younger grades; however, by the time children are in middle school, they would rather be taught by young adults or other parents. More recently Carol has served as IFFP's official substitute teacher. In this capacity she gets to see a broader age range and meet even more families. She has also enjoyed branching out beyond the IFFP Sunday School to serve on the Comfort and Community Service Committees

Carol's commitment to education, volunteering, and children is not confined to IFFP. She set out to be a teacher of history and English and now teaches curriculum development and instructional methods to teachers in training. She is also a Girl Scout Troop leader and an active member of the PTA. Working just part-time in teacher education allows her to spend many valuable hours in her volunteer pursuits. IFFP's children and parents are grateful that she spends those hours on – and with – us!

If you leave an IFFP gathering humming a tune, you probably have **Marci Shegogue** to thank. Marci joined IFFP with her family (husband **Rich, Jamie**, 5½, and **Camryn**, 9½) and began volunteering almost immediately. First attracted to IFFP as a home for a naming ceremony for newborn Jamie, Marci planned that ceremony and hasn't stopped since. Marci's love of music runs throughout IFFP and the rest of her life. She is a member of the Worship Committee, for which she puts together the program for each gathering. At the gathering she sings and plays piano. Then it is off to the classrooms and the younger members of IFFP. Marci brings music, movement and joy to the 3s and 4s, the second graders, and the mixed grade class. (Don't worry about the kindergarteners, Marci's equally musical and energetic husband Rich teaches music in that class. **Elizabeth Gelfeld**, another musical member of IFFP, teaches the 1st graders.)

Marci's life in music began in her childhood as did her volunteerism. She and her 3 siblings formed a singing group as kids and entertained at nursing homes and parties, and won local talent shows. She and Rich met performing Cabaret at University of Maryland in College Park and continue to share their love of music and the theater with their daughters, IFFP, and the community. Marci teaches early childhood music at Sandy Spring Friends School in Sandy Spring and the Black Rock Center for the Arts in Germantown. She also serves as a music director for many community and professional theater productions, most recently for *Fiddler on the Roof* at Congregation Har Shalom in Potomac.

Where does Marci find the time and energy she so willingly gives to IFFP? It's hard to imagine but we're certainly grateful for her many contributions.

— **Heidi Friedman**

MEET OUR NEW MEMBERS

In earlier newsletters, we introduced several new families who have joined IFFP this year. Below we introduce four more new families to our community. Please extend a welcome to them.

Amy and Dan Richards

Dan and **Amy** are native Marylanders. Dan, the youngest of three, grew up in a Reform Jewish household in Silver Spring, where Jewish culture and traditions were emphasized. Dan works as an attorney for the U.S. government on national security issues. Amy, the oldest of four, grew up in an Irish Catholic family in Potomac. Amy works part-time as the "Acting" Deputy Director at the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Dan and Amy met in 1997 at an interagency meeting on the former Soviet Union and corruption, so they like to say that criminals brought up together. Dan and Amy live in Chevy Chase, and have two children, **Noah**, who will be five in March, and **Gabriella**, "Ellie," who is three years old. Noah is currently in the IFFP pre-school. Amy and Dan joined IFFP because they wanted an inter-faith community where our common values of faith, social justice, compassion, and education would be emphasized.

Heidi and Tom Friedman

Heidi grew up in rural central New Jersey and **Tom** was an Air Force brat, spending most of his childhood in Texas but also living in Tennessee, Georgia and Japan. Tom was raised southern Baptist and Heidi Jewish but **she** did not receive formal religious training. Heidi has a Ph.D. in epidemiology from Johns Hopkins and has worked at NIH for most of her career with an interlude as a faculty member at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences across the street from the NIH campus. She currently works in grant review at NIH. Tom, who has undergraduate degrees in Political Science and Computer Science and has Masters coursework in public policy, stays home with their two children, **Madeline**, 3½, and **Grace**, 15 months. Tom and Heidi came to IFFP because, like most IFFP families, they wanted a place for the girls to learn about Judaism and Christianity. As an “uneducated Jew,” IFFP provides a very comfortable community in which Heidi feels that she can learn and grow. Some of their interests include swing, country western and ballroom dancing, and before they had children, they took up sailing. These days, Heidi admits that they primarily enjoy watching their girls grow.

Jonathon Krell & Karen Eisner-Enriquez

Jon grew up in Chatham and Swampscott, Massachusetts, in a Reform Jewish family. He works for the Children’s Law Center in Washington, D.C. as a Guardian Ad Litem. Karen grew up both in Latin America and the United States in an interfaith family where she celebrated Christmas and Easter, and occasionally Passover. Karen stopped working as a mediator and conciliator with the Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division of D.C. Superior Court to become a full-time Mom after she and Jon adopted their 19-month old son, **Abraham**, from Guatemala.

They came to IFFP upon hearing of its wonderful program through friends, **David and Angela Quigley**. Jon and David used to work together at the same law firm in D.C., so they have been able to see over the years the satisfaction the Quigley’s have felt at being part of the IFFP community. Jon and Karen’s interests are many: Jon plays the guitar, paints, sculpts, and creates video projects for family and friends. Karen gardens, renovates old houses, knits, quilts, makes jewelry, and is a disaster volunteer with the American Red Cross. They have two ten-year old Labrador Retrievers that they take camping and hiking when the weather permits. Abe is a budding musician and comic.

Howard & Libby Kronthal

Howard and **Libby** are both from the Washington, DC area. Libby, who was raised Catholic, grew up in Gaithersburg, Maryland. Howard, who was raised Reform Jew, grew up in Fairfax, Virginia. Libby graduated from Towson State University in 1994 with a degree in Visual Communication, and currently works in advertising and graphic design. Howard received his Bachelor’s of Science in Environmental Studies from Washington College in 1998 and spent two years in Kazakhstan with the Peace Corps. He now works as a Realtor in Maryland and Virginia.

The couple learned about IFFP by doing a Google search on the web prior to getting married. They were drawn to IFFP because of its sense of community and the resources offered to young couples and families. They enjoy the adult groups and special forums and the “down to earth,” friendliness of the group. While they currently live in Alexandria, Virginia, Howard and Libby hope to move to West Virginia where they are currently building a home. They love the outdoors, and to be able to ski, hike and camp close by. Nonetheless, they plan to continue to attend IFFP at least once a month when they come down to visit family in the area.

If you would like to welcome and support new members, please contact **Tova Sanders** or **Melinda Frederick**.

— Melinda Frederick, New Member Coordinator

IFFP WOMEN'S GROUP

Still Meeting Monthly

On February, the IFFP Women's Group met at Strike Bethesda, where we had a great time bowling, eating, drinking (I recommend the chocolate martini), and talking. If you've been wondering what exactly the IFFP Women's Group is, read on.

We meet once a month, usually in the evening of the second Thursday of the month. We all appreciate the chance to get to know some of the terrific women of IFFP and to see each other without the time constraints of getting kids to Sunday School, soccer practice, etc. While a different member of the group plans the activity for each month, in true IFFP fashion all the gatherings have included food and conversation. We have enjoyed getting together in members' homes (including for a dessert party one month – yum!), going on a hike followed by lunch and a trip to a spa, and seeing and discussing movies. Our next meeting will be Thursday evening, March 8th. We'll send you all details in one of the weekly bulletins.

While we encourage members to come every month, all women in IFFP are welcome to come to one or more of our meetings. If you have questions or want to join us, contact [Stephani Abramson](#) or our bowling champion [Rebecca Weiss](#).

— [Holly Cooper](#), IFFP Women's Group member

IFFP TEEN GROUP

An Awesome Group of Teens

Our teen group continues to meet and have a blast together. In early January, Mark Corrales met with us to teach us how to drum and sing. Our teen pro drummers, Nick Loeb and Jack Bostian, showed us the way and by the end of the evening, we were impressing Mark with our abilities!

Brownies and more brownies were a big hit too. Thanks to Zoe and Olivia for sharing their home with us that evening.

Late January, we met at Julia Lewis's house to talk about how to deal with the stresses in our lives. Yoga teacher Karen Soltes met with us and we all did sun salutations (everyone picked it up right away!) and we ended the evening with Karen, doing Yoga Nidra (which means sleep). Most of us did sleep too. Julia's parents, Alison and Steve fixed us a wonderful pasta dinner which was inhaled by all. Ruthie (Julia's sister) provided us with great entertainment.

In February, we met at Julia Skolnik's house to make 50 brown bag lunches for men who are homeless in Montgomery County. We put in individual valentine cards for each man sharing a message of peace and hope for them. We ended the evening with pizza and a rousing game of charades. Of course my team (Rev. Julia) won but we don't need to mention that again. A big thanks to Ellyn/Jon/Kathlyn (Julia's parents and sister) for helping us with the sandwiches. Later that night, I took the 50 brown bag lunches out to the shelter in Rockville. The guys greeted me with blessings and told me to tell the teens how deeply grateful they were for those lunches.

The first weekend in March Rev. Julia and the most of the teens will go to Pearlstone Retreat Center near Baltimore. Our retreat will be led by Jakir Manela, who led the retreat for us last fall at the Am Kolel Sanctuary Retreat Center. The kids will be celebrating Purim with another teen group at Pearlstone. Later on, the kids will also be doing tai chi, dancing, torah study, night hikes, and much more.

In April the teens are inviting the COAers (and soon to be part of the IFFP Teen Group) to play laser tag. We will also be writing blessings for the COA ceremony May 6 and participating in the ceremony.

Much more to come and to be discovered with each other! I want to especially thank Grace Lerner who has attended every teen group with great enthusiasm and presence. We wish both Grace and Zoe wisdom and patience as they begin the arduous task of deciding which college they will attend next year.

— Rev. Julia Jarvis, Spiritual Director

YOUNG COUPLES

The next young couple's event will be dinner at Buca Di Beppo on March 24 at 7:00pm. Buca Di Beppo is a family style Italian restaurant in the Kentlands in Gaithersburg, MD. All young couples are welcome to attend.

Young couples include anyone who is dating, engaged, or married without children or with children under pre-school age.

— Kerri Mullins-Levine, Young Couples Coordinator

LETTER FROM BELGIUM

This has been a year of big changes in the Jessica Mullaney-Dan Landman household, having spent the last four months moving to and getting adapted to our new life in Brussels, Belgium, where Dan has become the Senior Trade Representative of the U.S. Mission (the United States "Embassy") to the European Union. It took months to navigate the State Department bureaucracy and obtain the necessary approvals and clearances. Our new home away from home is a modern four story townhouse in a new and somewhat sterile neighborhood, but is comfortable and convenient to shops, bus/subway, a 12th century church and fortress and the city's biggest shopping mall. So we're not suffering too much.

The kids appear to be flourishing at the International School of Brussels, where classmates hail from all corners of the globe. Their French is improving, and we hope to find French language camp for Jeremy this summer. Both kids found soccer teams to play with this fall, and Merrill in particular had a great season on the Girls' Varsity team; their "away" games were in London (including several overnight stays), Paris, Frankfurt, the Hague, and Antwerp! Jeremy is also playing soccer and basketball with the Brussels Sports Association, and has become a very enthusiastic Cub Scout, earning lots of "belt loops" and the like for different skills and activities. We also find that Belgian TV leaves us lots of time for other pursuits!

One of our goals while we are here for the next three to four years is to see as much of Europe as school and work schedules allow. We've visited EuroDisney near Paris, a number of cities and lovely sites in Belgium, went to Utrecht for a family Bar Mitzvah, and spent Christmas in London with Dan's parents. It made the holidays much more homey and fun to have family here with us.

Speaking of visitors, we can't wait to see who will be next. We welcome visitors, and hope to see many more of you here over the coming months and years.

— **Jessica Landman**

JOYS! AND CONCERNS

IFFPs Joys

* Congratulations to **Griffin Lerner** on his Bar Mitzvah, February 17.

- * A hearty “mazel tov” to **Susan Ryder**, who will be traveling to Hawai’i mid-March for the wedding of her son Micah!
- * Our own **Ellen Jennings** has an ordination date of November 18th at Christ Congregational Church. Details to follow!

The prayers and thoughts of the community to

- * **Jen Liebreich** on the loss of her Great Aunt. She, Rob and Joseph traveled to Ohio over the March 3-4 weekend to be with family.
- * **Marika Partridge**, who broke her wrist falling on the ice.
- * **Susan Ryder**, whose daughter-in-law Christine fell while eight months pregnant and is now on bedrest.

COUPLES WORKSHOP SERIES

IFFP offered our first in a series of Couples Workshops for not-yet married couples as well as already married couples last May. This spring’s series, May 1, 8, 15 & 22, 7:00-9:00 p.m. will feature **Rabbi Harold White, Father Kelly of St. Martins of Tours, Rev. Julia Jarvis** and **Dr. Dan Griffin**, Family Counselor and IFFP member. The series may be held at the Friends Meeting House on Florida Ave. near the Dupont Circle Metro (final location will be announced).

This series will again focus on the challenges, and joys, of being part of an interfaith couple or family such as extended family, how to raise the children, and some of the personal, inner barriers and emotions that are involved, etc. Parts of sessions may be similar to the first series, however it will not be a duplication of last year’s series. We have the added benefit this year of having Father Kelly who has co-officiated with the Rabbi and has participated with both the Rabbi and Rev. Julia in conferences and workshops. Though our members have chosen to raise their children with both faiths, our discussions will be open for couples who have not yet made that decision.

Last year’s series was a great success and we’re happy that **Kathy and Trevor Vogelmayr** as well as **Debra Nagan** and **Michael Thompson** joined IFFP after attending the series. The Jewish/Catholic Family Network is planning to be involved with us in this series.

If you are interested in attending this series, please contact **Susan, Sury3@aol.com**. We would like to know if you would prefer a series for devoted to unmarried couples, a series for married couples, or one that combines both. Further details will be in bulletins and emails.

— **Susan Ryder**, Program Coordinator

WHY WE BELONG . . .

My husband Eric grew up as a Reform Jew-in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He was bar mitzvahed and took it seriously enough in his early teens. But, as he likes to joke, he soon discovered girls and that was the end of his interest in practicing religion.

As for my family, we were nominally Catholic. I say “nominally” because although I was baptized, took first communion and was confirmed, I don’t feel I was ever *really* Catholic. My memory is of a completely pro forma, content-free Catholicism from that late 1960s to 1970s folk mass era. I don’t have any stories of Catholic nuns, fish on Fridays, jovial priests, or church hall spaghetti suppers. I don’t know the rosary. We didn’t even own a bible. My immigrant parents dutifully took us to church every Sunday, put a dollar in the collection plate and that was that. Celebrating Christmas with all the German/Swiss trappings . . . that’s about as close to religious as it got in our house.

By the time Eric and I met and married neither one of us was observant or interested in converting. Religion remained a non-issue for years, unchanged even by the arrival of Abigail and Lydia. Our informal policy was if you want to take the initiative, then be my guest. But years passed and neither of us did.

There did come an age though, when our kids' playground friends started asking, "What are you?" and saying things like "God made people" and "If you don't believe in Jesus, you're going to hell." Regardless of what we believed or if we believed, society began to intrude. We wanted our children to be educated about religion and to feel comfortable in both Christian and Jewish settings. We also wanted them to experience being part of a community. So Eric started asking around about liberal synagogues. I checked out a nearby Unitarian Church. Nowhere felt comfortable.

A chance overheard conversation led us to IFFP in the spring of 2002. On my first visit, I liked that it met in a middle school cafeteria rather than in an overtly religious space. I liked the informality of Gathering and the friendly people and the laughter during gatherings. I liked the Sunday school's approach and the idea that everyone was coming from an equal place. It was comfortable. We joined and found more to like: the intellectual stimulation of adult group and being part of an ever-evolving "project;" a smart, worldly and caring group of people; the opportunity to sing in public (for years my girls were front and center). Bagels.

Five years later, all those things still hold. I've learned a lot about Judaism and know some of the prayers. The kids still like to come. Now when they're asked "what are you?" they say "I'm interfaith" and can explain that they belong to this community of families. They can talk about what they believe – and don't – with their friends. Quite simply, it's become our place.

— **Erica, Eric, Abigail & Lydia Berman**

MONTGOMERY COUNTY 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 SERV ANNOUNCEMENT IF THE WEATHER SUNDAY MORNING IS QUESTIONABLE. PLEASE CHECK THE LIST SERV BEFORE LEAVING HOME.

IFFP Board: *Chair:* Danny Weiss, • *Vice Chair:* Rebecca Weiss, **IFFP Coordinators:** *Adult Group:* Colette Matzzie • *Celebrations:* Jessica Vistnes • *Community Comfort/Support Group Contacts:* Anne Stewart and Carol Muskin • *Community Service Workgroup:* Antoinette Eates • *New Members:* Melinda Frederick • *Newsletter:* Peter Gray • *Website:* Mark Shellenberger • *Worship:* Larry Bostian • *Young Couples:* Kerri Mullins-Levine

IFFP Staff: *Spiritual Director:* Rev. Julia Jarvis, 301-270-6337 (office) • *Director of Religious Education:* Ellen Jennings • *Spiritual Advisor:* Rabbi Harold White • *Program Coordinator:* Susan Ryder, Sury3@aol.com