

Interfaith Families Project

November 2004 www.iffp.net

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301-270-6337

FROM THE BOARD

Behind the Scenes

When I arrive at Sligo on an IFFP Sunday morning, I experience a rich mélange of feelings. I am cheered by the sight of our greeters at the table in the lobby. I am both surprised and nervous as I enter the increasingly full cafeteria for coffee, kibitzing, and the Gathering. I am surprised pleasantly by the size to which our community has grown. I am nervous because of the size to which our community has grown, and the strain this growth has begun to exert and increasingly will exert on our facilities at Sligo. Most of all, I am amazed by the relative ease with which an always interesting and often moving Gathering proceeds, followed by a whole gaggle of classrooms coming to life with the buzz of inquiring minds and spirits – both younger and older – while simultaneously the Adult Group(s) are providing engaging opportunities for discussion, sharing, and learning.

As I enter my amazed state, I have to remind myself that this marvel does not occur by magic; rather, many people work both hard and well behind the scenes to make this happen. Some of these people are our paid staff: Rev. Heather, Rabbi Harold, Rev. Barbara, and Susan Ryder. Some of these people are volunteers too numerous to name – beginning but not ending with our wonderful teachers. All of these people deserve our appreciation, far more than we customarily offer. So, on behalf of the entire community, let me express that appreciation here and now.

In addition to the preparations that go into each Sunday's activities, there are a number of behind the scenes activities which are shaping and re-shaping the IFFP of the coming months and years. Let me just describe one of those activities here. It is the single most exciting IFFP moment of each month for me.

Once a month, Rev. Heather and Rabbi Harold get together for lunch at Georgetown University. For the last two of those meetings, I have been privileged to have fly on the wall status. At the meetings, two gifted spiritual leaders are working out a series of relationships, with implications not only for IFFP but extending far beyond IFFP. They are discussing upcoming Gatherings, and how to integrate further the contributions of our Christian and Jewish traditions. They are discussing how we can use the sacred texts of our dual traditions to enhance our spiritual life and our education. They are discussing traditional rituals, and how to adapt them to the IFFP context. They are discussing the theologies and practices of Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism. What I think I am witnessing is an extraordinary joining of two conversations. One is a conversation traditionally carried on primarily in academic circles about how to bring Judaism and Christianity into respectful proximity. The second is a conversation which has been the history of IFFP as we try to figure out how to celebrate our two traditions while respecting the great diversity of beliefs which characterizes our member families. Watching the abstract meet the concrete, putting ideas and practices together, is a source of genuine excitement and hope. One of the challenges we have undertaken at these lunches is to take this show on the road, i.e., to create interactions during Gatherings, Adult Groups, and perhaps elsewhere, where all of us can both witness and participate in these on-going conversations. It is my hope that you will begin to see this happening increasingly in the coming weeks.

- Steve Jackson, IFFP Board Chair

NOVEMBER – DECEMBER 2004

Nov. 7 (Sun.)	Sligo Middle School Meditations on Peace <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contemplative Service, 9:30 a.m.• Bagels, 10 a.m.• Gathering, 10:15 a.m.• Sunday School/Adult Group/Yoga, 10:45 a.m. (note on yoga, p. 6)	Nov. 19 (Fri.)	Shabbat Potluck Dinners At members' homes	Nov. 21 (Sun.)	Sligo Middle School Thanksgiving <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contemplative Service, 9:30 a.m.• Bagels, 10 a.m.• Gathering, 10:15 a.m.• Sunday School/Adult Group/Yoga, 10:45 a.m. (note for teachers, p. 2)**
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Dec. 4 (Sat.) 5 p.m.	Holiday Party, Variety Show, and Advent Wreath Making Schweinhaut Center 1000 Forest Glen Rd., Silver Spring (details on page 4)	Dec. 5 (Sun.)	Sligo Middle School Advent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contemplative Service, 9:30 a.m. Bagels, 10 a.m. Gathering, 10:15 a.m. (last chance to pick up your Advent Wreath Kit) Sunday School/Adult Group/Yoga, 10:45 a.m. Sunday School Teachers' lunch with Rabbi Harold (details on page 4)
Dec. 12 (Sun.)	Sligo Middle School Hanukkah * <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contemplative Service, 9:30 a.m. Bagels, 10 a.m. Gathering, 10:15 a.m., led by Rabbi Harold Sunday School/Adult Group/Yoga, 10:45 a.m. * The actual first night of Hanukkah is December 7 th .	Dec. 19 (Sun.)	Sligo Middle School Christmas * <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contemplative Service, 9:30 a.m. Bagels, 10 a.m. Gathering, 10:15 a.m. Sunday School/Adult Group's Potluck Brunch/Yoga, 10:45 a.m. * The actual day of Christmas is December 25 th .

CALENDAR NOTES

** We have changed the Teacher Appreciation event from a breakfast a.m. on Nov. 21st to a [lunch with Rabbi Harold](#) on December 5th.

Worship Committee

The Worship Committee is responsible for forming and leading our Sunday morning Gatherings. We currently are planning our second meeting of the year. If you have any ideas, concerns, praise, or suggestions for the committee, drop one of the members a note before the meeting. The Worship Committee consists of Larry Bostian, Marci Shegogue, Pete Flynn, Dan Griffin, Ward Cooper, Mark Shellenberger, Jen Liebreich, John Peacock, and Heather Kirk-Davidoff.

Contemplative Service

Beginning on Sunday, November 7th, we will add a "Contemplative Service" before the Gathering. We got this idea last year when we tried an experiment with an "adult only" Gathering and found that we relished the quiet of those few child-free moments. While we love the energy of the kids at our main Gathering, stepping away from the hustle of our family lives can be helpful in our attempts to cultivate an adult spiritual life. If this is a need in your own life, come by Sligo 45 minutes early and let's see what we might create together in classroom 115. We will continue to hold Contemplative Services throughout November and December as interest warrants. Childcare will be available.

Gathering Themes

November 21st -- Thanksgiving: We'll focus our Gathering on Gratitude, and we'll let our Sunday School kids lead us in reflecting on everything that we're thankful for. Rev. Heather will add a few words, using Psalm 100 and Philippians 4:4-9 as her inspiration.

December 5th – Advent: Rev. Heather will reflect on "Anticipation," considering the role that emotion plays in both Jewish and Christian religious life, and in the "prophetic imagination" of Jesus' words and action. We'll refer to a number of passages from the prophet Isaiah in our Gathering.

December 12th – Hanukkah: Rabbi Harold will lead our Gathering, reflecting on the story of Hanukkah and the questions it provokes in regards to religious diversity and patriotism. Our scripture reading will be selections from 1 Maccabees.

December 19th -- A Service of Lessons and Carols: This year, IFFP again will use the format of a traditional Christmas Eve service for our final Gathering of the year. Our service will consist of eight carols, sung by the congregation and/or the choir, alternating with both traditional scripture passages and some non-traditional poems and readings.

- Heather Kirk-Davidoff, Spiritual Director

NOVEMBER EVENTS

IFFP Holiday Choir and Band Rehearsals – New and Returning Singers and Musicians Welcome

It's that time of year again -- time to get all you talented singers and musicians together to sing and play for our Advent, Hanukkah, and Christmas Gatherings (December 5th, 12th, and 19th)! We will have TWO Saturday morning rehearsals, on November 13th and 20th. Each will be at 10 a.m. at the home of Dan Griffin and Rebecca Weiss. We'll be singing mostly the same music from last year, with a few new tunes thrown in for fun!

If you are interested in being part of this awesome experience, please email me with: (1) your name, (2) what instrument you play or what part you sing (soprano, alto, tenor, bass), and (3) whether you are able to make the rehearsal times and the Gathering dates listed above.

The only requirement for singers is that they have to be able to carry a tune! As for the musicians, I'm looking primarily for flute, violin, guitar, bass, drums and percussion, but may be able to use other instruments on specific songs. Please respond as soon as possible so I can get us all organized and ready to sing! Hope to hear from you! Please respond even if you have participated in the past so we know how many to expect.

Bring your instruments, music stands, and any music that you have from last year to the rehearsals. I'll bring lots of copies of music (new and old). If you have a suggestion for music, please contact me before the first rehearsal so I can clear it with the worship committee and make copies.

- Marci Shegogue, Worship Committee Member and Holiday Choir/Band Director

Shabbat Potluck Dinners – Friday, November 19th

Shabbat Potlucks are great ways for new (and old) members to gather in an informal setting. For those of you who haven't attended one before, they consist of several families who meet on a Friday evening at one of the family's homes for a potluck dinner. There are no mandatory rituals, but we can provide copies of the blessing over the candles, wine, and bread for those who are interested and need them. Contact Jessica Vistnes by November 12th if you are interested in being either host or guest on Friday, November 19th. Indicate where you live and the ages of any children, and she will match up families.

- Jessica Vistnes, Celebrations Coordinator

DECEMBER EVENTS

Holiday Gift Collection (Community Service)

Many thanks to Antoinette Eates, who has volunteered to coordinate our Holiday Gift Collection. Thanks also to those who have offered to assist her: Lisa Henderson, Barbara Gottlieb, Eileen Kraus-Jakobsberg, and Lora Dunne. This year, we will be working with Mothers Offering Maternal Support ([MOMS](#)). The MOMS Program is part of the [Mental Health Association](#), a private non-profit organization in Montgomery County. They offer direct services such as mentoring (Rev. Heather volunteers), support groups, educational services and activities to an at-risk population of adolescent mothers and their babies. Since so many of the programs that these young women relied on in the past have been cut, their lives, especially at the holidays, have become more difficult. Hoping to offer some assistance, MOMS hosts an annual Holiday Party on December 16th, where they provide gifts to all of their clients and their children.

The young mothers have requests for their children (newborn to age 4) that include items such as children's books, clothing, educational toys, hat/glove sets, diapers, baby formula/food, coats/snowsuits, stuffed animals, and blankets. For themselves, they ask for toiletries, long-sleeve shirts, schools supplies, personal care items, hat/scarf/glove sets, sweat shirts/pants, small appliances, and gift certificates. The MOMS' coordinator will send a specific list of requests to Antoinette. We will display these items on an "Angels' Tree" at the Gatherings, so that families can choose whether they prefer to purchase gifts for the children or the teen moms. We need to keep track of the gifts you are bringing, so there also will be a notebook available at the Welcoming Table for you to enter your selection. The gifts can be brought to our Holiday Party on December 4th, or to the Gathering on December 5th or 12th.

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator, and Antoinette Eates, Board Secretary

Holiday Party, Variety Show, and Potluck Feast, Saturday, December 4th

The IFFP winter extravaganza Holiday Party will take place on December 4th at 5 p.m. at the Margaret Schweinhaut Center (1000 Forest Glen Road, Silver Spring, Md.). This year, we will enjoy good food, a variety show, and optional Advent wreath-making. The feast is a potluck event, and we will have complete kitchen facilities. IFFP will provide paper goods, wine, and other beverages. If your family's last name (use female head of household if they are different) begins with:

- * A-G: Bring dessert to feed 10-15
- * H-O: Bring side dish to feed 10-15
- * P-Z: Bring main dish to feed 10-15

Please don't forget serving implements (labeled) and, whenever possible, bring food in disposable pans because it greatly expedites clean-up. RSVP by phone by November 27th. If you would like to volunteer to handle set-up and decorations and/or clean-up, let Jessica know when you RSVP. Extended family and friends are welcome - just tell us they are coming. We will need to know the numbers for table set-up, etc.

- Jessica Vistnes, Celebrations Coordinator

Holiday Party Variety Show, December 4th

Get out your costumes, singing voices, tapping feet, and instruments. This year we hope to see some of the great talent we have in our community during our wonderful Holiday Party. Any talent is welcome, especially songs, skits, jokes, and routines centered on the joys and pleasures of being in an interfaith family during the Hanukkah and Christmas season.

You can do a solo, perform in a group, or have a family skit or musical performance. Kids can get together to perform; adult members of bands can come together for a rocking IFFP holiday songfest; women who sing in groups can favor us with a tune. The Schweinhaut Center has a perfect stage for our performers and we'll have the IFFP sound system to back you up. We have lots of very talented members of all ages, so start planning your debut or encore performance now! Just so we can keep track and make a program, please contact Susan at 301-270-6337, or by email at iffp@verizon.net, about your performance.

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

Advent Wreath Making

In past years, we have set aside a Sunday for making Advent Wreaths, but this year we thought it would be a fun event to have at our Holiday Party. We will set up Advent Wreath Making in the large room adjacent to the room with the tables and stage. Please, everyone, bring lots of evergreens to use for decorating the wreaths. If you would like to reserve an Advent Wreath Kit (includes the foam wreath, candles & holders, ribbons, wires, ornaments & other decorations) for \$10.00, to make at the party or to take home and make, please e-mail Susan at iffp@verizon.net and or send a note and check to IFFP, P.O. Box 5413, Takoma Park, MD 20913. You may pick up your wreath kit at the party or at the Gathering on December 5th.

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

Teachers' Lunch with Rabbi Harold, December 5th

Our teachers are continually learning, and after Sunday School on Sunday, December 5th, over a catered lunch at Sligo Middle School, Rabbi Harold will join us to answer our teachers' questions (You are welcome, but not required, to send questions to Rev. Barbara beforehand as you think of them). He will give particular time and attention to the "December Dilemma," as we prepare to celebrate Christmas and Hanukkah. At the lunch, we also will give each teacher a well-deserved, useful gift to show our community's appreciation of his or her important service. TEACHERS, PLEASE RVSP TO THE OFFICE BY DEC 1st!

- Barbara SilverSmith, Director of Religious Education

December Dilemma Outreach Event: Don't Light the Menorah so Close to the Christmas Tree, Thursday, December 9, 7:30-9 p.m.

This December 9th, at La Madeleine Café, 11858 Rockville Pike, we plan to repeat the successful December Dilemma outreach event that we held last year at the Mayorga Café. There are many interfaith families in the metro area who really need and welcome support and suggestions for dealing with the December holidays, so much so that the Washington Post included our PR blurb in the Health Section last year! IFFP has held numerous discussions over the years dealing with the joys and difficulties of celebrating Hanukkah and Christmas in an interfaith family, but last year was the first time we made it public! Rev. Heather and Rabbi Harold will lead the

discussion this year, along with a panel of IFFP members. Folks attending can order food and drinks. The event will be publicized through newspapers, list serves, flyers, posters, etc.

We hope that many of you will be willing to be on our panel of presenters, and share your family's stories of coping with and enjoying these holidays. Please contact Susan, iffp@verizon.net, if you will be able to participate. We will have flyers available at the November 7th and 21st Gatherings for members to distribute and post in offices, stores, schools, and libraries (there will be a library sign up list at the greeting table). Please, everyone, take at least three flyers to post and help spread the word!

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

ADULT GROUP

Teens are Welcome at Adult Group

Although we call our post-gathering discussion group "Adult Group," teens are definitely welcome to join us! While the younger children are in Sunday School during this time, the older kids (COA prep and up) are not. Of course, the teens may grab at the chance to sleep late, and the parents may see Sunday mornings as an ideal time for their teens to catch up on homework. However, many members miss the opportunity to attend the gatherings as a family. Others may wish their teens could hear the insights, humor, and struggles of fellow members and of Rabbi Harold and Rev. Heather. Still others may wish that the rest of us had the chance to learn from their teens' exciting new ways of looking at the world.

If any of these sounds like you, or if you often continue the adult group discussion at home and have to catch your teens up on what they missed, I urge you to bring your teens to some or all of the adult groups. Last year, when Alec was in 7th grade, we began bringing him to a few adult groups we thought would especially interest him. We are glad we did and we encourage others to try it.

I know that the "adult group" label has deterred some of you. Please don't let it! This is not just our family's offbeat idea. I've checked with Heather, Sam, and Ian, our adult group leaders, and they all agree – not only can the sessions be interesting for the teens, but also their participation can be educational and refreshing for the rest of us.

- Holly Cooper, Newsletter Coordinator

Topics for Adult Group Meetings

The results are in! On October 3rd, we surveyed the adults in attendance at Adult Group, asking everyone to vote for their top choices of topics for our Adult Groups series and large-group sessions for the coming year. We included the same survey in last month's newsletter. We gathered 52 completed surveys, and while we recognize this represents about half of our adult membership, we guessed that it was a representative sample.

In usual IFFP form, every single choice offered received first choice votes from at least one person. There were some clear preferences, however, with the top five choices being (in order): Personality & Spirituality, Introduction to Judaism, Introduction to Christianity, Jewish/Christian perspectives on Evil, and Ways to Pray.

Our Adult Group Committee has been having an extended virtual meeting ever since we received the surveys, considering how to respond to both majority and minority interests. Our committee consists of Susan Priester, Sam Lawson, Cheryl Leanza, Matt Glockner, Jen Liebreich, Kent Dirckx, and Heather Kirk-Davidoff. Here's the line-up we've worked out for the coming months:

November: Our current series will continue through November 21st. Members can choose between "Interfaith Families 101" led by long-time IFFP member Ian Spatz or a study of Mark's Gospel as a "political manifesto" led by Spiritual Director Heather Kirk-Davidoff. You are welcome to alternate between series, or to stay in one for all four sessions. On November 21st, our Book Club also will be meeting, giving members three choices that day!

December: In December, we'll return to our large group format:

- On December 5th, members of our Worship Committee will lead a discussion about the language we use during our Gatherings, considering what we can say together, what we can say separately but in each other's presence, and what we cannot say at all. We'll use the text of the hymn "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" as our starting place.

- On December 12th, Rabbi Harold will share his insights about “What Christmas can mean to a Jew, and what Hanukkah can mean to a Christian.” We’ll then engage in open discussion about his comments, and other December holiday-related issues.
- On December 19th, we’ll have a potluck brunch to which everyone is most welcome.

January: In January, we’ll have two three-part series from which to choose. Rev. Heather will lead a series on “Personality and Spirituality” during which we’ll take a couple of common personality tests (such as the Myers-Briggs) and consider what it might mean to have a “spiritual type.” At the same time, we are hoping to run a series on “Judaism 101” taught by an outside teacher. The January series will meet on January 9th, 23rd, and 30th.

As always, we are interested in any suggestions you might have about speakers, topics, or themes we might pursue. You can email your ideas to any member of the Adult Group committee.

- Heather Kirk-Davidoff, Spiritual Director

YOGA

Classes will continue only if you pay now

Yoga fans: We have had sparse turnouts the first sessions, despite the number of people who signed up. Only four people showed at the first session and one at the second. On October 31st, our most recent session, six people participated. Of these 11 people who have attended yoga to date, only a few actually had signed up. Further, we’ve received just three checks for a multi-session fall yoga series for IFFP. I am informed by the IFFP Program Coordinator that we need at least 10 subscribers in order to cover the costs of the teacher and room rental etc.

Please signal your continued interest by paying NOW for the remaining 5 sessions (November 7th & 21st, and Dec. 5th, 12th, & 19th.) Make your checks out to IFFP for \$75 (i.e., 5 x \$15) and give them to Paul or Pamela on November 7th. Those who have dropped in on October 7th, 19th, or 31st -- you know who you are -- should pay for those sessions as well so our treasurer is happy and flush. We hope there’s more turnout and checks, as we need a quorum of interested folks to continue. Please let others who may be interested know.

-Paul Miller and Pamela Shewmaker, Yoga Coordinators

TEEN GROUP AND COMING OF AGE CLASS

Teen Group

We continue to dream and scheme about a possible new direction for our Teen Group -- a community service trip, either during Spring Break or over a week in early summer. We’ve been investigating possible ways to do this, and we’re going to gather on Sunday, November 7th, to discuss what we’ve learned. We’ll meet in the Sligo cafeteria after Adult Group (about 12:15 p.m.) and order pizza to eat together. All teens and their parents are most welcome to come.

Coming of Age Class

Our Coming of Age Class has begun the process of identifying topics and resources for the kids’ individual projects. These projects are shaped by the particular interests of each participant, but all of them involve community service, some investigation of Jewish and Christian traditions and scriptures, and work with a mentor. As we identify topics for each kid’s project, we’ll begin to approach various IFFP members about the possibility of mentoring a COA project. Stay tuned!

By the time of our COA ceremony in May, two members of our class will already have become Bar Mitzvah—Cheney Ravitz and Eric Sachs studied independently with tutors to achieve this goal. Other kids in the group are interested in exploring what it means to become Bar or Bat Mitzvah, and how that might intersect with their COA projects. Rabbi Harold is also interested in this conversation, and has offered to have lunch with the COA students and their parents after the Gathering and Adult Group on Sunday, December 12th. We plan to stay for about an hour and order pizza. The Adult Group topic that day also will be of interest to the COA kids, so they are most welcome to come for the whole morning.

- Heather Kirk-Davidoff, Spiritual Director

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Class Picnics a Big Hit

The long, perfectly beautiful Indian summer helped us to have all the class picnics as scheduled, with no rain dates needed! This informal time, play area, and inevitable food-sharing over at the Sligo Creek Park enabled children in the Sunday School classes to get to know each other better. Parents, as well, got to know each other and the teachers better. Now that a new directory has come out, it will be easier to contact classmates and arrange beyond-IFFP get-togethers throughout the winter. We are planning class picnics again in the spring, which surely will come, as night follows day.

Halloween Hunt a “Howling” Success

Students in our Sunday School followed clues and found displays and prizes while learning about the religious origins and cultural overlays of All Hallows' Eve, All Saints' Day, and All Souls' Day. Thanks to the Burman family for providing the “tombstones” and to the Muskin-Pierret family for providing the candy skulls for our All Souls'/Mexican Day of the Dead display. We all had fun and learned something, too!

Questions Children (and All Ages) are Asking

This is a time of year, as everything seems to be dying, when I ask these “big” questions. And, as the leaves fall from the trees, the horizon becomes clearer, so the sharp winds can blow the cobwebs from my brain. My own pastor, Terry Schoener of the Woods Church in Arnold, gave a sermon on this type of question which was so helpful to me that I want to pass its essence on to you. He noted that when the Jews were exiled and enslaved in Babylon, they asked three questions “... that actually all human beings in all times ask. First, order: ‘Is life in this universe crazy chaos, or is there an order and a plan?’ Second, goodness: ‘Is life in the universe amoral, no morality to it at all, or is there objective goodness?’ And third, purpose: ‘Is life mere duration, or is there a purpose of which I can be a part?’”

Order - Of course, children ask these questions in their own way. Fear of the dark, of parents' big arguments, or of the war-torn world they hear about on the news, all can make them wonder if there is anything they can count on. We people of faith look to the very first words of the very first book of our Bible, Genesis 1, which claims: “In the Beginning, God...” created order out of chaos. Here at IFFP, as teachers, parents, and community members, we are partners in God's ordering.

Goodness - Children often cry, “It isn't fair!” But sometimes they have questions that they don't speak, such as “Did Grampa die because I got mad at him?” They hear about Olympic athletes doping, and see horrible pictures of torture at Abu Ghraib prison. There seems to be much in the world that is chaotic, if not evil. Yet in that first chapter of Genesis, God again and again called creation good. At IFFP, we want to expand on that truth, by telling children the stories of good people (heroes of the faith), by showing them good art, and sharing with them good music. And we tell them, each of them again and again, that they are, individually, good souls.

Purpose - “What are you going to be when you grow up?” we ask, and children wonder. My own sister, Dr. Sherry Smith, went back to her grade school reunion this summer specifically to celebrate one of her classmates, named Hope, who actually had been called (to my sister's horror) “Hopeless” by their exasperated 3rd grade teacher! Hope has, over the years, taken care of a series of foster children who adore her. God had plans for “hopeless” Hope. Moreover, God made us in God's image -- we are creators, then, as well. At IFFP, we intend not only to tell children about the roles they can play in the great circle of life, but also to help them discover God's calling for purpose in each of their lives.

How have you come to trust God's order, goodness and purpose in your life? I'd love to know!

- Barbara SilverSmith, Director of Religious Education

WOMEN'S RETREAT

Fall Retreat

Our first one-day retreat, October 23rd, followed the legacy of our Spring Retreats. It was a valuable, well-planned, well-attended retreat from our daily routines. Jessica Vistnes graciously opened her beautiful, spacious home to us. Barbara Gottlieb, Grace Goodman, and Adria Zeldin organized the day and arranged for facilitator Betty Thompson to lead discussions focused on a Harvest theme. We spoke in groups large and small of what we have harvested in our lives and the seeds that we have sown. Breakfast and lunch, brought by all of us, were delicious and diverse. Following lunch, Carol Muskin invited us to knead and braid the challah dough that she had brought, which, of course, was baked and devoured, hot out of the oven, during our afternoon session. During our break time, everyone went walking in the lovely tree-lined neighborhood and then danced in Jessica's large backyard. It was a very special time of closeness and sharing among a very special group of women.

Creation of an IFFP Women's Club

Once again, the IFFP women had a great retreat last Saturday, and demonstrated their desire to have more opportunities to get to know each other. The idea arose at the retreat to form a year-round Women's Club (Perhaps the Wild Hat Club - we'll have our own Red Hat Society!). Women would get together once a month for a meal, movie, tea, hike, museum trip, or whatever great idea they have. Each woman could plan the event for one month, according to times that work for most people. IFFP women have much to share with each other, and want to enrich our community. Even if only five women attend each month, it would be wonderful. Everyone interested in pursuing this idea, and suggesting club names, please contact Susan at 301-270-6337, or by email at iffp@verizon.net.

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

BOOKS WE ARE READING

IFFP Book Club

In October, the book club had a great discussion of Thomas Cahill's *The Gifts of the Jews*, hosted and coordinated by Barb Gottlieb. This lively analysis of the Old Testament holds that Judaism introduced to the world ideas and outlooks that broke with all existing ways of thinking at their time, and that eventually became the underpinnings of modernity: the notion of linear time (and thus future, change, and progress) in place of a cyclical worldview; the possibility, then, of moving upwards towards a triumphant conclusion; the importance of the individual; and the idea of a covenant between man and God.

It's a tenet of popular education that three is an ideal number for a discussion that draws on each person's personal experience. Imagine, then, a discussion of Cahill's thesis between a Protestant minister, a rebellious Catholic, and an atheistic Jew. Well that was us, and we had a great time considering Cahill's text, Biblical texts that some of us had not read before, and our own critical questions. We hope you'll join us at the next book club gathering!

In November, the book club will discuss *Mudhouse Sabbath* by Laura Winner. Andrea Herman will coordinate. For a change, we will meet on Sunday morning, November 21st, as an alternative to adult group. To purchase a copy of the book, go to: http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1557253447/qid=1098733679/sr=2-1/ref=pd_ka_b_2_1/104-2840664-9266357.

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

In December, we will discuss *The Sparrow* by Mary Doria Russell on Tuesday, December 14th. A great novel!

- Cheryl Leanza, Book Club Coordinator, and Barb Gottlieb, IFFP Member

IFFP Members' Book Recommendations

The Heart Is a Little to the Left: Essays on Public Morality, by Rev. William Sloane Coffin (1999, Dartmouth College press). The ever eloquent Reverend Coffin, now ailing from a stroke and other illnesses, collected some of his lectures in this fast read about some of his favorite topics. "The Spiritual and the Secular: Can They Meet?," "The Politics of Compassion," "The Dangers of Self-Righteousness," and "The Authority of the Bible" are some of the topics he covers. Coffin was chaplain of Yale Divinity School, the minister of the Riverside Church in New York, and has a long career of political activism, against the war in Vietnam and now against nuclear weapons. Of these essays Coffin says, "My primary hope in publishing them is that they might provoke further discussion; for if, without defensiveness, we can face and discuss rather than avoid or deny controversial issues, good results are all but inevitable."

- Danny Weiss, Board Vice-Chair

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY TRADITIONS

December Dilemma Stories

Last year, we began compiling December Dilemma stories written by our members. It would be wonderful to print and distribute a booklet that could be of use to the community and to others looking for suggestions and support during Hanukkah and Christmas. We would welcome and appreciate any articles describing your family's traditions around the holidays; whether you celebrate one of the holidays more than the other; extended family impact on the holidays; memories of holidays from your childhood that you treasure, etc. Please send them to Susan at iffp@verizon.net by the end of November.

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Interfaith Concert

On Tuesday, November 9th, at 7:30 p.m., the InterFaith Conference will host its 25th Anniversary InterFaith Concert: A Celebration of the Sacred in Song, Dance and Chant. The concert, which will feature the music of youth and young adults representing a wide variety of faith communities, will be at the [Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception](#) (4th Street and Michigan Avenue NE, Washington). You can order tickets (ranging from \$12.50 to \$30 per person), by contacting Mike Goggin at 202-234-6300 X208 or mikeg@ifcmw.org. For more details, look at the Interfaith Conference's website, www.ifcmw.org/events/upcoming.html.

JOYS AND CONCERNS

We are happy to welcome two new families to our IFFP community. Jodi Cohen and Scott Bolden have expanded our Virginia group of families. Stephanie Flores-Koulisch, Robert Koulisch, and beautiful Olivia, who's 11 months old, have bravely joined us from Baltimore!

We also welcome several members' new babies, including Ethan, born to Melissa and Gabe Helicke on August 11th; Cynthia Elizabeth, born to Lora and Rich Dunne (and welcomed by big brother Zachery) on August 6th; and Hannah, born to Angela and David Quigley on August 20th.

Earlier this fall, Cindy Allen's mother was hospitalized unexpectedly. She recently has left the hospital. Please continue to keep Cindy's mother, and the entire Allen-Bostian family, in your thoughts and prayers.

REFLECTION

"It took me a long time to understand that God is not the enemy of my enemies. God is not even the enemy of God's enemies."
-Rev. Martin Niemoeller (1892-1984), during W.W.II, imprisoned in Sachsenhausen concentration camp

I spent the weekend of October 22 - 24 in Boston, and, from the moment I stepped off the plane, I was struck by that city's mania over the Red Sox. There were homemade signs hanging from high parts of the Zakim Bridge, and professionally printed signs hanging from most office buildings. At night, the office lights of the Prudential Tower read "Go Sox." The electric

message boards over the highways, which usually announce traffic accidents and delays, simply announced the score of Game 7 against the Yankees.

As a Sox fan, I can't deny that all of this made my heart sing. But I was quite surprised when, on Sunday morning, the minister of the church where I was preaching spent his Children's Sermon celebrating God's clear preference for the Red Sox. He passed around a picture he had gotten off the internet which portrayed Johnny Damon as Jesus, with the rest of the team dressed as disciples kneeling at his feet. He read a scripture passage from Joel about how God blesses those who dream, and another from Proverbs about how an unwarranted curse can do no harm. It was all very tongue-in-cheek, but he got me a bit worried. "What if the Red Sox don't win?" I asked him. "You're going to destroy all these kids faith in God!" "Don't worry," my friend said with confidence, "They'll win." Turns out they did. And I'm sure churches across the Commonwealth were thanking God for their victory the following Sunday!

All of this has me thinking about how we talk about winning and losing, and what God's role is in all of this. We're often quite careless about what we say in this regard -- an exclamation of "Thank you, God!" or "Praise Jesus" after a success doesn't necessarily represent a thought-out theological position. And when we say that a politician we disagree with is "evil" we probably aren't being any more precise.

But when we constantly engage in rhetoric which describes our team, or our candidate, as the one whom God is rooting for, and anyone who opposes them as being not just mistaken or less preferable, but allied with the Powers of Darkness, do we give ourselves permission to see the world that way? What are we telling our kids?

This issue starts to get sticky when it comes to prayer. Is it okay to pray to win -- a game or an election? Is it okay to pray that someone else lose? If not, what should we pray? I believe that prayer is an important part of discernment of right choices, so I often pray that God will help me make a good choice, even when it comes to voting. But I'm less clear about how to pray that other people might make good choices. I plan to spend a good part of Election Day at a Prayer Vigil at Seeker's Church in Takoma Park, and I imagine that I will end up simply opening my heart to God's power and goodness. One of the things prayer helps me to do is to let go of my desire to determine the outcome of my actions, and to simply let God be God.

Who is God? If we are to read the Bible, it's not at all clear that God prefers winners. There are countless stories of God's special interest in the one others cast away, be he Joseph or Jesus. And throughout the Bible, God shows a special attachment to the "losers" of our social order -- the poor, the widows and orphans, the sick, and the unclean.

My family, like many of yours, is one where there is a strong identification with one political party. We are, however, divided when it comes to baseball. My Brooklyn-bred husband remains a Yankees fan, even after God's clear vindication of the Red Sox. I'm glad for this -- and I hope I have the spiritual strength to assure my children that, like Daddy, people who root for the wrong side or make bad decisions are not any more evil than the rest of us. I hope even to be able to tell them that God loves and cares for winners and losers, red states and blue states, Red Sox fans and Yankees fans. And so can we.

- Heather Kirk-Davidoff, Spiritual Director