
Interfaith Families Project

Oct.–Nov. 2005 www.iffp.net P.O. Box 5413, Takoma Park, MD 20913 iffp@verizon.net 301-270-6337

FROM THE BOARD

The Board held its monthly meeting earlier this month and we covered some important issues that you might find of interest. In particular, we discussed progress on the Search Committee and a community profile questionnaire.

The Search Committee has before it applications from five individuals who have expressed interest in the Spiritual Director/Community Leader position. They will interview candidates from those applications whom they consider appropriate for IFFP and make a recommendation to the Board of their top candidates for our consideration. The application period remains open, however, and additional candidates are still welcome.

The Board is finalizing a web-hosted and paper version of an important **IFFP Member Survey** that will provide useful guidance to IFFP as we enter our second decade as an organization. The information will be useful for the work of the Board, the Search Committee, the Sunday School and others involved in our community. I strongly encourage you to fill out the survey when you get it. The results will be shared with the whole community.

Susan Ryder and I and several non-Board members are working on **upgrading IFFP's website and P.R. opportunities**. We are contacting web design firms for their ideas. But if you have any expertise in web design and public relations or have clever thoughts for our site and would like to be involved in this project, please contact Susan or me.

In addition, the Board and Susan are preparing our invaluable **annual directory**. To ensure that you are included in it, please make sure that you have submitted your membership registration form.

I would like to highlight the work of our **Community Service Committee** this month. They organized a highly successful and rewarding gleaning day, to pick cucumbers for local food banks. They have planned a food drive in November and a gift drive in December for families in need of our help. And this Sunday, they will lead a discussion in Adult Group on the roots of community service in Judaism and Christianity. They are doing great work.

I look forward to seeing you all on Sunday. Let the Board know how you think things are going at IFFP by sending me an e-mail, or if you would rather send an anonymous note just drop me a letter in the regular mail. We want to know your thoughts and concerns.

Sincerely,

Danny Weiss, Board Chair

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2005

Oct. 30	Sligo Middle School <i>Tzedakah and Simchat Torah</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contemplative Service with Rabbi Harold, 9:30 am • Gathering with Rabbi Harold, 10 am • Refreshments, 10:30 am • Sunday School/Adult Group, 10:45 am • COA Evening Meeting 	Nov. 6	Sligo Middle School <i>All Saints' Day</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathering with Reflection by Ellen Jennings, 10 am • Refreshments, 10:30 am • Sunday School/Adult Group, 10:45 am • Pizza Party for Grade 5 • COA Evening Meeting
Nov. 20	Sligo Middle School <i>Thanksgiving and Baby Welcoming</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanksgiving Food Drive • Contemplative Service with Rabbi Harold, 9:30 am • Gathering with Rabbi Harold, 10 am • Refreshments, 10:30 am • Sunday School/Adult Group, 10:45 am • Advent Wreath Making, noon • COA Evening Meeting 	Dec. 4	Sligo Middle School <i>Advent</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathering, 10 am • Refreshments, 10:30 am • Sunday School/Adult Group, 10:45 am • New Member Lunch, 12:15
Dec. 10 (Sat.) at 5 pm	Holiday Party Schweinhaut Center 1000 Forest Glen Rd., Silver Spring More info on page 5	Dec. 11	Sligo Middle School <i>Hanukkah</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contemplative Service with Rabbi Harold, 9:30 am • Gathering with Rabbi Harold, 10 am • Refreshments, 10:30 am • Sunday School/Adult Group, 10:45 am • Young Couples go to Brunch

Important note: There have been a few changes to the calendar. Where this one differs from the one we sent out last month, please follow this one.

IFFP weather cancellation policy

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

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

UPCOMING EVENTS

Gatherings

On **October 30th**, following up the gleaning on October 16th, and led by **Rabbi Harold**, we will focus on the theme of *Tzedakah*, which is sometimes translated as "charity." A quick Google search turned up this on www.jewfaq.org: "In Judaism, giving to the poor is not viewed as a generous, magnanimous act; it is simply an act of justice and righteousness, the performance of a duty, giving the poor their due." We also will talk about the important Jewish holiday of *Simchat Torah*, which is celebrated this week.

On **November 6th**, **Ellen Jennings** will offer a reflection on the meaning of *All Saints' Day* (which actually falls on November 1st, the day after All Hallows' Eve) and of the Christian notion of sainthood.

We'll celebrate *Thanksgiving* on **November 20th** and also *welcome a host of babies* into our IFFP community. **Marci Shegogue** is working with several families to design this celebration. You won't want to miss it!

On **December 4th**, we'll mark the Christian holiday season called *Advent*, the four Sundays preceding Christmas. The Christian liturgical year actually begins with Advent, which brings Ordinary Time, the months following Pentecost (celebrated at the same time as Shavuot), to a close.

On **December 11th**, our Gathering will focus on *Hanukkah*. More details about the particulars of this year's celebration will follow in the next newsletter and in weekly bulletins.

December 18th will be our *Christmas* Gathering. We'll reprise last year's program of Lessons and Carols, with some variations.

Our Advent, Hanukkah, and Christmas Gatherings will feature our IFFP holiday band and chorus. If you're interested in participating, read Marci's article on page 7.

- Larry Bostian, Worship Committee Coordinator

Adult Group on Community Service, October 30th

Community Service will be the topic of the next Adult Group, on October 30th. **Rabbi Harold** will lead off the discussion with a brief overview of the religious roots of community service in Judaism and Christianity. Then **Barb Gottlieb** and **Antoinette Eates** will lead a discussion of: (1) member traditions and growing-up experiences with community service/charity/tzedakah/tikkun olam; (2) what community service can mean for our children and for us; (3) what IFFP can contribute to this for members (through activities, Sunday School curriculum, adult group and other activities); and briefly (4) specific community service activities in which members are interested. Please come prepared for a thoughtful and productive discussion that we hope will inform the community service workgroup as it defines a long-range plan for community service at IFFP.

- Antoinette Eates and Barbara Gottlieb, Community Service Coordinators

Thanksgiving Food Drive, November 20th

In honor of Thanksgiving and given that food banks are experiencing real shortages with so many competing needs right now, IFFP will be holding a food drive at our November 20th gathering. Members will be asked to donate non-perishable food items to be delivered to a local food bank. Please watch your weekly bulletin for more information, and start putting aside those non-perishables for donation.

- Antoinette Eates and Barbara Gottlieb, Community Service Coordinators

Advent Wreath-Making Party, November 20th

Let's have an Advent Wreath-Making Party in the cafeteria after our Thanksgiving Gathering and Sunday School, on Sunday, November 20th. Bring a blanket to put on the floor, cider and cookies to snack on, and we'll provide the materials for your family to make a festive wreath. We're doing this in November so that your family can have a wreath for the beginning of Advent.

Advent wreath making often has been a special event at IFFP. Advent wreaths are very lovely holiday decorations that provide a wonderful family project. The wreaths are made of styrofoam, with 4 green plastic candle holders for 4 candles (3 of one color, one of a different color) representing the 4 Sundays in Advent. Greens, little bells, pine cones, stars on wire wreaths, and ribbons are used to decorate the wreath (so you don't see the styrofoam).

We need to know how many people want to purchase a kit to make a wreath at our party or at home, so that we can have sufficient supplies. Each kit is \$10. **Please RSVP to Susan, Sury3@aol.com by November 7th.**

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

December Holiday Community Service Gift Collection starts December 4th

IFFP will once again be conducting a holiday gift drive to benefit MOMS (Mothers Offering Maternal Support) of the Mental Health Association of Montgomery County. Last year IFFP collected over 100 gifts at the holidays for young teenage mothers and their children who are clients of the MOMS program. The MOMS group greatly appreciated IFFP's gifts and this year asked if we would again collect gifts for their clients. The Community Service workgroup and the IFFP Board approved the idea, so watch your weekly bulletin for details on this very fun collection. MOMS clients get to let us know what they are interested in – which is especially fun for the MOMS kids. IFFP kids last year enjoyed being able to pick out who they were helping, *e.g.*, a 14-year-old girl who was really into perfume and music, or a four-year old boy who loved trucks. Beginning on December 4th, the Community Service workgroup will have the MOMS clients' gift tags ready for picking by IFFP members.

As with all of our community service events, please watch your list serve and weekly bulletins for more details. And thanks so much for your participation!

- Antoinette Eates and Barbara Gottlieb, Community Service Coordinators

New Member Lunch, Sunday, December 4th

IFFP invites its new members to a lunch in their honor on December 4th in the Sligo Middle School cafeteria at 12:15 (after Sunday School). This will be an opportunity to chat informally with others new to our community, as well as some families with a longer history at IFFP and members of the IFFP Board. We will provide child care.

Look for an invitation and more information in your mail. If you have questions, please call or e-mail one of our New Member Coordinators, **Lisa Wilcox**, lisa.wilcox@nasd.com, **Cheryl Leanza**, cherylleanza@earthlink.net, or **Tova Sanders**, Tova@gwu.edu.

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

*Returning members: Do you wish **you** could enjoy the delicious food and good company? Then become a mentor.*

Holiday Party, Sat., December 10th

The IFFP winter extravaganza Holiday Party will take place on December 10th at 5 p.m. at the Margaret Schweinhaut Center (1000 Forest Glen Road, Silver Spring, Maryland). 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 main dish to feed 10-15

* H-O: Bring dessert to feed 10-15

* P-Z: Bring side 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 to Jessica Vistnes by December 4th** by phone (please don't send e-mail - it's a work e-mail address). 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 Talent Show, Sat., December 10th

Last year we had our first IFFP Holiday Talent Show. We saw how talented our members are, or at least how brave! The talent show provided a festive, fun atmosphere for the party, and kept the kids occupied. We would like to have a second annual talent show this year. Dress up, sing, dance, practice your holiday jokes, bring your band members and perform (we do have some terrific musicians at IFFP), or just bring your instrument and do a solo. Kids or families can do skits-especially those based on a December Dilemma theme. **Please contact Susan, Sury3@aol.com.**

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

Young Couples Brunch, December 11th

Please join us for brunch on Sunday December 11th after Adult Group and Sunday School. The restaurant is to-be-determined, so if you have any suggestions, please let **Kerri Mullins-Levine** know. More information will be emailed closer to the date.

- Kerri Mullins-Levine, Young Couples Coordinator

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Notes from the DRE

This month I'd like to suggest some ways in which you can both support and reinforce your children's Sunday School experience. Not only will this make Sunday School much more interesting and relevant to their lives, but it also will provide your family with the opportunity to share, discuss and act upon different meaningful topics throughout the year. I plan to create some special home/school IFFP materials for family use as the year progresses. Meanwhile, see how many of the following ideas you can implement on your own! And, as always, feel free to call or e-mail me with any questions or suggestions.

1. Attend Gatherings with your child. This will let him/her know that you think coming to IFFP is a valuable use of your time. The worship committee works hard to make the Gatherings family friendly, and if you and your child attend, you'll have a shared experience to talk about later in the day. In addition, Sunday School teachers often coordinate their lesson plans with the Gathering theme. Thus, Gatherings not only provide children with a chance to practice the prayers and songs they learn in class, but they also often give children an opportunity to experience the ritual aspect of the lesson for that day.

2. Be prepared for the Gathering. Although the worship committee tries hard to accommodate all ages, it can be difficult for some children to sit through a ½ hour service. Bring along silent activities for younger and/or more fidgety children. Paper, pens and stickers will keep most kids happy and quiet—and they’ll still absorb what’s going on in the Gathering. Once they’re old enough to read, encourage them to follow along in the program -- and definitely get them standing and singing whenever there’s a song!
3. Volunteer in your child’s Sunday School class. Participating in the class once or twice a year can really help you get a good grasp of its structure, method and purpose. It also lets your child know that you’re interested in what s/he’s doing.
4. Check in with your child’s teacher. Find out how things are going for your child. Ask if the teacher has any insights about your child’s participation in class and perspective on the topics they’ve discussed (you may want to do this by e-mail, since teachers have a very short period of time to clean up and get out of the building after class).
5. Read and respond to the e-mails sent out by your child’s Sunday School teacher. Most teachers send out regular and very informative e-mails about class content and logistics. If you know what’s been happening in the class, then you’re better equipped to talk about it with your child.
6. Choose a regular time to talk about what’s going on in Sunday School. Sunday evening dinner can be good, because the lesson is still fresh. Avoid general questions such as “What did you do in Sunday School?” Instead, use the information you’ve been given by the teachers and/or the experience you had in the Gathering to ask some specific, leading questions. For a six-year-old, you might ask “Is Sukkot a Jewish or a Christian holiday? What American holiday does it remind you of? What’s a special ritual done by many Jewish people as part of Sukkot?” For a ten-year-old, you might ask, “Why does Sukkot come at a different time every year? Do you think Jesus celebrated Sukkot? Why do some people sleep outside in their Sukkahs?” Then see if your kids have any questions for you. Be prepared to look up the answers!
7. Use some of the prayers, songs and rituals that the kids learn in class and/or the Gatherings as part of your routine at home. For example, let your child say a prayer that s/he says in class before dinner each night. This gives him/her a chance to teach you something. Or, even if you don’t have a special Shabbat dinner every Friday, plan several during the year and do the accompanying rituals. Do this for all the Christian and Jewish holidays. Learn as you celebrate together.

As I wrote earlier, I plan to create some materials for home use as the year goes on. However, there are some wonderful resources that you can begin using immediately on your own. I’ll have a short but highly recommended list of these books available at the next few Gatherings. You can look for the hand-out at the Welcome Table.

Until then, many blessings and Shalom,
Ellen Jennings, Director of Religious Education

GET INVOLVED

The Community Service activities and the Holiday Talent Show described on pages 3-5 are great ways for members to participate actively in IFFP's activities. If you want to do more than drop the kids off at Sunday School but don't quite know how your interests and abilities fit in with IFFP's needs, here are yet more wonderful opportunities to get involved.

IFFP Needs Mentors for New Families

We are very pleased that we have had a steady stream of new members joining IFFP this fall. That means that we are in need of Mentor Families to help welcome our new members into the IFFP community. This involves joining your assigned new family at a New Members' Lunch at on Sunday, December 4th, and being available to answer their questions throughout the year. Making an effort to greet them at our Gatherings is another helpful way to make new members feel welcomed. If you would be willing to provide this little bit of hospitality to one of our new families, please contact Susan, Sury3@aol.com, or one of the New Member Coordinators, Lisa Wilcox, Cheryl Leanza, and Tova Sanders.

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

Join and Use our Yahoo List Serve

For new members, or those who have forgotten, you can join IFFP's free list serve by sending a blank e-mail to iffplistserve-subscribe@yahoo.com. Please send a copy of your e-mail to Jeff Kenton, our list serve coordinator, at Jkenton@verizon.net.

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

Calling Singers and Instrumentalists of All Ages!

It's the time of year to put together our 3rd annual IFFP holiday chorus and band! We welcome all levels of talent to join in the fun as we assemble our Advent, Hanukkah, and Christmas programs. There will potentially be two or three rehearsals in November and possibly a December one if needed. You do not have to come to all rehearsals, but try to make as many as you can. I should have a schedule once I have a place to hold the rehearsals -- hint, hint.....(all offers will be considered!). Please contact me by e-mail if you are interested (mshego@comcast.net). Thanks!

- Marci Shegogue, Worship Committee member and music leader

Musicians – Don't forget to sign up for the talent show, too.

National Interfaith Conference in January - Join Us!

IFFP is excited about the huge opportunity presented by the first Dovetail National Interfaith Families Conference ever to be held in the Washington, DC, area. Mark your calendar for MLK Jr. weekend, January 13-16, 2006, at the Bethesda Jewish Congregation/Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church (a beautiful space in the woods). The theme is "How Interfaith Families Can Thrive and Contribute in a Polarized World." IFFP staff and former staff including Rabbi Harold White, Rev. Heather Kirk-Davidoff, Rev. Julia Jarvis, and Ellen Jennings will be among the Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim clergy and other experts from throughout the country leading workshops at the conference.

Workshop topics that may interest IFFP members include Interfaith Marriage in the Bible, Children of Abraham: Connecting Through Sacred Texts, Developing Your Own Spirituality Within Interfaith Marriage, The Interfaith Couple as Model in the Modern World, and Intercultural, Interethnic and Interracial Interfaith Families. On Saturday night, there will be a showing of the new PBS documentary "Three Faiths, One God:

Judaism, Christianity, Islam” followed by a discussion with the film’s producer. On Monday, there will be a morning of networking with the other independent interfaith groups from other cities—this is when we can talk shop and compare notes.

Conference workshops on lifecycle issues are designed to appeal to young couples, among others. **We need IFFP members to serve as panelists for some of these workshops. Please e-mail Sue Katz Miller (former IFFP Board Chair) at susankatzmiller@cs.com or Ellen Jennings** if you (or your spouse, or your teenager) are interested in being on any of these panels: Planning Inclusive Wedding Ceremonies, Welcoming Your Interfaith Baby, Planning a Coming of Age Ceremony, Grandparenting Interfaith Children, Dealing with End-of-Life Issues, Choosing Your Child’s Religious Identity, Dealing with Extended Family, Adult Children of Interfaith Marriage, or Interfaith Teens. This is your chance to share your knowledge with interfaith families from across the country, and let the world know what groups like IFFP can do for interfaith families.

- Sue Katz Miller, IFFP Member

Women’s Spring Retreat in April - Additional Organizers Needed

With the weather turning brisk, it’s nice to start thinking about our wonderful spring women’s retreat at the beach. Last year, approximately 25 women gathered at two beautiful homes at Bethany beach for 2-3 days of feasting, great walks on the beach, wonderful discussions and bonding.

Please mark your calendars for the retreat, April 28-30th. **Linda Sapin** and new member **Tova Sanders** have volunteered to be organizers for the retreat. They would like to have at least one other woman join the committee. **Please contact Susan, Sury3@aol.com, if you’d like to plan this great weekend.**

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

UPDATES

Community Comfort/Support Group

Every one of us has times of joy and sorrow when we need extra support from our IFFP community. We are fortunate to have many young couples who are providing us with tiny new members and who love delicious, home-cooked meals during the first weeks they welcome their new babies. We also have times of illness and other family challenges when meals, child care, and someone to visit are greatly appreciated.

This year we have a wonderful group of women who are available to coordinate the needs of our families. Please contact **Anne Stewart**, annecstewart@aol.com, or **Carol Muskin**, cmuskin@umd.edu, if you want special support from the community or know of a member who does. **Maggi Cowlan, Susan Kaplan, Mary Wichansky**, and **Lisa Beaudet** are the other members of the committee.

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

Successful Sukkot Gathering and Gleaning at the Cucumber Patch!

A wonderful turnout of IFFP members of all ages (even a baby or two!) gathered on October 16th under a gorgeous blue sky to celebrate Sukkot at a cucumber patch in Brandywine, Maryland, with representatives from the Mid-Atlantic Gleaning Network. IFFP members sang harvest songs (thanks, **Pete**, for the music!) and heard a reading from Leviticus on gleaning. Members were then turned loose to pick cucumbers --and pick we did! Sixty-five bags, weighting approximately 60 pounds each (that's almost 2 tons for those counting) were gathered and sent by truck to be distributed to local food shelters. And we'd be remiss if we failed to mention the slight issue of mud -- as in acres and acres of it. We lost only one shoe (that we know of), although many kids had the chance to experience the thrill of having feet sunk in IFFP’s own version of quicksand. Slop, slop, slop -- it really added to the fun. Really! Thanks to **Chuck Pierret** for organizing the event and to **Promise Ahlstrom** for the great idea. We may have started an IFFP Sukkot tradition!

- Antoinette Eates and Barbara Gottlieb, Community Service Coordinators

Welcome to Our New Members

We have been blessed with many new member families since the last newsletter: **Nina Shumofsky and Curt Meuse** with **Jack**, K and **Kate**, Pre-K; **Sarah and Alex Lennon** with **Tyler**, Pre-K; **Julie Stewart and Ron Weich** with **Sophie**, K and **Sara**, 2 ½; **Jenni and Lawrence BenBassett**, with **Nikki**, Pre-K; and **Tova and Gideon Sanders**, with **Makeda**, 7 months.

We hope that IFFP will provide you all with an accepting, supportive community. We welcome all that you can contribute to IFFP!

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Celebrate American Indian Heritage Month

The American Indian Heritage Education Association is presenting a special event called "Honoring Our Students and Veterans" at the University of Maryland, Cole Field House, on Friday, November 4th, from 11 am to 7 pm and on Saturday, November 5th, from 10 am to 7 pm. There will be a Pow Wow and Student Education Day honoring the American Indian students at the University. Greg Hamilton, who does all the scheduling for Sligo Middle School and is their representative on the Interagency Coordinating Board, is half Cherokee and is involved with the planning of this event. He recommends it highly and has offered to make arrangements for groups of our kids to have free admission. For more information, look at the website, www.aihea.us, or send them an e-mail at aihea@comcast.net. If any parent or teacher would like to organize a group to attend either day, **please contact Susan, Sury3@aol.com**.

JOYS AND CONCERNS

We are delighted to welcome the newest addition to the **Herman** family. **Andy** and **Josh** report that their daughter **Sadie Jane** was born on October 4th. She weighed 8 lbs., 2 oz., and was 20.5 inches long. "We are all doing fine. Big sister **Gloria** is adjusting relatively well."

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

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

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