

Interfaith Families Project

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

FROM THE BOARD

During a marathon session at the May meeting, the Board accomplished several important objectives, moving to shape the future of IFFP:

1. We elected three new Board members to begin serving as of July 1st, but whose participation in Board deliberations began at the May meeting. We welcome **Mark Cohen**, **Phil Jakobsberg**, and **Rebecca Weiss** to the Board.
2. We elected three of the four officers for next year's Board. We congratulate and thank **Danny Weiss** (Chair), **Betsy Keeler** (Vice-Chair), and **Richard Harris** (Treasurer) for their commitments to serving IFFP. A Secretary will be elected at the June meeting.
3. We approved a budget for the coming year which allows us to: increase the Spiritual Director's hours; increase the number of occasions on which the Spiritual Advisor joins us; and hire **Ellen Jennings** as our new Director of Religious Education, once again. That budget calls for a 5% increase in the membership fees and, for the fifth or sixth year in a row, holds the line on any increase in tuition. For the average family, this will amount to a 3% increase in payments to IFFP.
4. In addition to the budgetary allocation for next year, which allows for an increase in the Spiritual Director's hours, the Board also voted unanimously to approve the following resolution: "The Board expresses its desire and intention to make the Spiritual Director's position full-time during the academic year within the next three years." It is the Board's intention to make this financially possible by modest continued growth in membership and expanded fundraising, both internal and external.

Finally, the Board continued discussion on a motion, which it will vote on at the June meeting, which would begin to democratize the functioning of IFFP. That resolution would commit the Board to having the membership vote on new members of the Board and on adoption of the Budget, starting at the annual membership meeting in 2006. To accommodate this change, we would move the meeting to late in the spring from its traditional mid-winter date.

These actions, approved and contemplated, are important steps in defining a path for IFFP's future in which we can improve what we are already doing, and offer even more to the IFFP community as we continue to develop this on-going project.

- Steve Jackson, IFFP Board Chair

MAY – JUNE 2005 CALENDAR

May 15 (Sun.)	Sligo Middle School <i>Pentecost and Spring Open House</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contemplative Service, 9:30 a.m., led by Rev. Heather • Choir Music, 10:00 a.m. • Gathering, 10:05 a.m., led by Rev. Heather • Refreshments, 10:30 a.m. • Sunday School/Adult Group led by Steve Jackson, 10:45 a.m. • PK and K Class Picnics, noon 	May 18 (Wed.)	Book Club <i>Barb Gottlieb's home</i> <i>Note: Please RSVP to Barb by this Sunday, May 15th so that the Book Club can ensure there is space for all who want to participate.</i>
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(May-June Calendar Continued)

May 22 (Sun.)	Sligo Middle School <i>Coming of Age Gathering</i> COA Ceremony, 10:00 a.m. , followed by reception Details follow on page 3. <i>If you plan to attend, please let the office know by May 18th</i>	June 5 (Sun.)	Sligo Middle School <i>Shavuot and End of Year Celebration</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Choir Music, 10:00 a.m.• Gathering, 10:05 a.m., led by Rev. Heather A potluck picnic will follow the Gathering. Details follow on page 4.
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GATHERINGS

May 15th: Pentecost. This Sunday in the Christian calendar marks fifty days after Easter Sunday, the time when the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus’ disciples, and they were able to preach to a crowd of speakers of many different languages and be understood by each. It’s a great holiday for our interfaith community because it celebrates our ability to communicate across lines that usually divide us. **Rev. Heather** will give a reflection on the story of Pentecost, Acts 2:1-13.

Wear Red! According to the Book of Acts, the Holy Spirit appeared to the disciples as fire that rested on each of their heads. For this reason, red is the “signature color” of the day. In many churches, there are red cloths and banners in the sanctuary, and red stoles for the clergy. Extending the tradition, many congregations encourage everyone to wear something red on this day. Let’s do the same at IFFP on May 15th!

May 22nd: COA Ceremony in the Gymnasium of the Sligo Middle School, with a reception to follow in the Sligo cafeteria. All are welcome to attend. You can find out more about this event on page 3.

June 5th: Our Gathering will focus on the Jewish holiday **Shavuot**, which celebrates the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai. We’ll read the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) together and talk about their meaning, then and now. We’ll also take some time to recognize and **thank our Sunday School teachers and our out-going Board Members.**

- Heather Kirk-Davidoff, Spiritual Director

ADULT GROUP

Our last Adult Group of the year on **May 15th** will feature **Steve Jackson**, the outgoing Chair of the Board of IFFP. Steve has chaired the IFFP Board for the past two years, and he served on the Board for a year prior to that. He also has been a Sunday School teacher for IFFP and has led our Adult Group. Steve will share some of his thoughts about the future of our organization, and then we’ll open up the conversation to the group as a whole.

- Heather Kirk-Davidoff, Spiritual Director

NOTES FROM YOUR RETURNING DRE

I'm very excited to be rejoining the IFFP staff as Director of Religious Education ("DRE"), beginning in July. Between now and then, I'll be spending several hours a week recruiting teachers, collecting curricula, and working with **Rev. Heather** to honor our teachers and begin revising the COA Prep curriculum. This past year has been a good one for me as I took some time away from the DRE position to focus on my family and to create IFFP's Mixed Grade Sunday School class for students with special learning needs. I really enjoyed teaching this class with **Mary Wichansky**, and doing so has helped me to gain a better understanding of both the rewards and challenges of teaching in our community. With this experience, I hope to be an even better resource, support, and supervisor to IFFP's wonderful Sunday School teaching team.

For those of you who don't know me, please allow me to introduce myself. I've been a member of IFFP since 2001 and was IFFP's DRE from September 2001 to January 2004. My husband, **Mark Corrales**, often plays drums for IFFP Gatherings, and we have three boys, **Nick** (10), **Teddy** (8) and **Tate** (5). **Nicholas** has high-functioning autism and is one of the students in IFFP's Mixed Grade class this year. My educational background is in religious studies, and I have a Master of Divinity degree from Harvard Divinity School. I'm also a member of the UCC (United Church of Christ-- a liberal Protestant denomination) and am currently in the process of becoming an ordained minister.

As I look toward the coming year as Director of Religious Education, there are a number of goals I hope to achieve. I look forward to creating a better teacher recruitment, mentoring, training, and support process. I'm excited to be part of a team that will be reviewing, revising, and refining our entire Sunday School curriculum. I plan to create a model for more Sunday School/Home learning and interaction. And I'd like to continue developing our unique program for children with special needs. I also welcome your input and suggestions.

Right now my focus is on retaining and recruiting teachers for next year. If you are interested in the possibility of teaching Sunday School, I urge you to call or e-mail me as soon as possible. I can promise you (from the perspective of both teacher and DRE) that it is a wonderful experience and an excellent way to contribute to IFFP. It also will give you a chance to learn more about our two religious traditions than you ever knew before!

I look forward to talking with you,
Ellen Jennings

COA AND SUNDAY SCHOOL

Coming of Age Ceremony

With the guidance of **Rev. Heather**, **Rabbi Harold**, and a special mentor, the eight students in this year's coming of age class are each diligently preparing for the ceremony recognizing the culmination of their Sunday school class experience and their individual projects. They look forward to sharing their presentations with their families and the IFFP community. The ceremony will take place in the Sligo gym at 10 a.m. on Sunday, May 22, 2005. A lunch reception will immediately follow. Please **RSVP by May 18th** to the IFFP office, iffp@verizon.net, so that we know how many members will be attending the ceremony and joining us for lunch.

- Karen Gregoire, Parent of COA Student

We Need YOU to Teach Sunday School!

It's time once again to recruit teachers for IFFP's fabulous Sunday School teaching team! We have many experienced teachers returning, but we also need NEW TEACHERS to replace those who are taking a much-deserved break. We need teachers for all grade levels, and we especially encourage IFFP's YOUNGER ADULTS to consider teaching our Middle School aged kids (since we definitely don't want their parents teaching them!). I can promise you great training, plentiful resources, enthusiastic support, and fabulous teaching colleagues. Call me!

- Ellen Jennings, Director of Religious Education

MAY AND JUNE IFFP ACTIVITIES

Spring Open House, May 15th

Our Spring Open House is the Sunday. It's not too late to send out a few e-mail announcements to interfaith friends and acquaintances, or to call the couple you met who might be interested. Help spread the word about our wonderful community to lots of families who would like to learn about IFFP.

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

Closing picnic

On June 5th, we will have our fabulous finale picnic at Sligo Creek Park after the Gathering. This casual potluck event is the last official function of the school year and the last opportunity to gather as a large group before the summer. IFFP will provide paper goods, beverages, and popsicles. Each family should bring enough picnic fare to feed 12-15 people. Kid-friendly fare and finger food work well. There are no kitchen facilities, so please bring food that is ready to eat and stored in coolers in your cars until we adjourn to the park to eat. If last name of the female head of household begins with:

* **A-J:** Side dish

* **K-Z:** Main Dish

* **Board members:** Dessert (other than popsicles)

Let's hope for good weather and a big turnout for our last bash of the season. Questions? Call **Jessica Vistnes**.

- Jessica Vistnes, Celebrations Coordinator

STAY CONNECTED

Summer events

The time between our end-of-the-year picnic in June and our welcome-back picnic in September allows a lot of time for personal "disconnects" with the community, especially for the children. Last year, we organized three summer events, one for each month. A group, including children, adults, and at least one member's dog, lucked out with a sunny day for a hike and picnic at Sugarloaf Mountain. Our mid-summer date got rained out, but later in the summer, thanks to **Richard Harris**, we had a wonderful swim party at the Daleview Pool.

We would like to offer summer events again this year and already have circulated a survey to get member input and feedback. Some members want a repeat of last year's events, as well as an IFFP "Olympics." Others

expressed an interest in having at least one adults' only event such as a trip to a museum or a "dinner & movie" night when folks could see a movie and then discuss it over dinner.

We are in the planning stage and will be re-sending the survey to give more of you a chance to respond, especially with suggestions for non-weather-dependent activities for families. Because many members go away during August, we also would like feedback about which times in the summer would be best for you.

We are looking for members to "host" summer events --- people who could help organize an event, or would commit to participating on a particular day. **Susan Priester** has agreed to help with a possible Summer IFFP Olympics. If you want to be involved in the planning and organizing of a summer event, please contact the office, iffp@verizon.net.

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

Satellite groups

Last year we started grouping members into geographic areas for the purposes of having more neighborhood get-togethers and expanding our feeling of community. We have sent out many of the satellite group lists already, and we will send the remaining lists out by the end of May.

IFFP provides these lists as a service to help members get to know other members living near them. You can use them to organize picnics or other family get-togethers, to plan a parents' nights out, or simply to invite a family or two to join you at the pool or in some fun activity. Satellite groups can be a great way to reinforce IFFP with your kids by giving them the chance to do something fun with other local IFFP kids.

While members can use the satellite group lists as a "matchmaker" for such small, informal activities, organized events which are open to everyone in the satellite area also can be fun and can help people become more connected to their IFFP community. **Susan Kaplan** and **Paul Colarulli** planned a get-together in Virginia last spring, and **Susan Priester** organized a picnic with her satellite group in the summer. We would love to have each satellite group do two of these events a year, to give more people a chance to participate. If you might want to plan such a get-together for your satellite group, please contact the office, iffp@verizon.net.

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

RECENT IFFP ACTIVITIES

IFFP Book Club

On April 20, 2005, a group of six IFFP members met at the home of **Adria Zeldin** to discuss *The Color of Water* by James McBride. This book, a true story about a Black man's tribute to his Jewish mother, provoked much discussion about McBride's family, the choices his mother made in rejecting her religion and marrying a Black preacher, and the way her Jewish family disowned her completely when she married a Black man. She became a very devout Baptist, raised 12 children who are all successful and accomplished today, but never talked about her past when McBride and his siblings were growing up. The book juxtaposes his story with that of his mother in a very striking memoir.

- Adria Zeldin, IFFP Member

Seder

Thanks to **Brent Mitchell**, our unsurpassable “MC,” and **Jessica Vistnes**, our extraordinary organizer, we had a memorable, enjoyable Passover Seder. Members and guests brought delicious food in large quantity, the kids ran free and happy on the stage, families introduced themselves, visitors were hospitably received, many afikomen were hidden and successfully found, oranges were on the Seder plates, and everyone helped to clean up.

Brent surprised us all by replacing a regular reading of the Haggadah with a reenactment of the Passover story, brilliantly performed by our members and guests. There were Egyptians beating the Hebrew slaves under the orders of Pharaoh Amye, Moses leading the Hebrews through the cardboard sea, and lots of folks having great fun! It was a Seder we won't soon forget.

In response to members' request, we are including two favorite Passover recipes below. Enjoy!

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

VEGETARIAN CASSEROLE FOR PASSOVER RECIPE

From **Rebecca Weiss**

1 box of whole wheat matzah farfel
onion
zucchini
mushrooms
red pepper
4 eggs
1 container of cottage cheese
salt & pepper to taste

Pour boiling water over matzah farfel. Sauté veggies. Mix everything together and bake (at 375°?) in a greased pan for about an hour, uncovered.

Coconut Macaroons (*Joy of Cooking*)

From **Sue Katz Miller**

2/3 cup sweetened condensed milk
1 large egg white
1 1/2 tsp vanilla
1/8 tsp salt
3 1/2 cups flaked or shredded sweetened coconut
(optional chocolate chips)

Position rack in UPPER THIRD of oven and preheat to 325°. Cover cookie sheets with parchment paper or WELL-greased aluminum foil. Stir together all ingredients except coconut, then stir in coconut. Drop by tablespoons on sheets. Bake and monitor closely after about ten minutes--they will be done way before 20 minutes. The bottoms need to be well-browned but just shy of burning (they burn easily)--if they're too pale, they won't come off. You must cool completely before carefully peeling off the foil.

Women's Retreat

Now in its fifth year, the IFFP Women's Retreat returned to its Bethany Beach roots. Approximately 25 IFFP women shared two fabulous houses a block from the beach for a weekend of food and female bonding. We laughed, we cried, it was better than.... well, if you're an IFFP woman you'll just have to be sure to come to next year's retreat to find out. If you're a man, well, there are always those bongos.

After pitching a Red Tent, synchronizing our cycles, and giving each other chocolate facials, we discussed "passion," gazed at the stars, spent just hours and hours and hours talking about relationships and feelings and stuff, and got in touch with our inner beauty queens. Some of us went shopping. Some of us took naps. All of us took walks on the beach. We also embarked on an art project to honor our mothers, were treated to an "inspiring" demonstration of liturgical dance by **Heather** and **Ellen**, and heard some "amazing" birth and bris stories. Oh, and did I mention that we ate? And ate some more?

Then, when it was all over, we very carefully sorted the recycling, checked the bathrooms, and made sure everything was exactly the way we left it...because that's just how women are.

Many, many thanks to the Retreat organizers: **Maggi Cowlan**, **Felise Shellenberger**, and **Pamela Shewmaker**, as well as Food Czarina **Lauren Groff**, and Carpooling Goddess **Antoinette Eates**.

- Erica Burman, Retreat Participant

JOYS AND CONCERNS

Peter Gray's son **Jordan** is graduating from Lowell Whiteman School, located in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. He will be attending Georgetown University in the fall.

Jodi Cohen and **Scott Bolden** are now married and off on an adventurous honeymoon!

Wilbert Glover, building facilities manager at the Takoma Park Presbyterian Church (site of the IFFP office), has suffered major tragedies in his family this week. Please remember him in your thoughts and prayers.

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

REFLECTION

How important are Bible stories, to you? How important are they to our community at IFFP? What function do they serve in our lives, individually and together? What function do they serve in the world?

A few weeks ago, we had a lunch with teachers at which we continued an on-going discussion at IFFP about the way we teach about the Bible in our Sunday School. We noticed with some satisfaction that we do teach Bible stories from Kindergarten through 5th grade. Sometimes, we're able to introduce a key story in an early grade, and then revisit it in an older grade in the context of exploring a theme (like Justice in the fourth grade) or examining a question (like "Who is a hero?" in the third grade).

But we also noticed that Bible teaching is somewhat scattered—we bounce between stories in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, and often talk about a scene or character in a story without taking much time to place that story in its context in the Bible. We spend little time teaching basic Bible mechanics—how to find books and chapters and verses, and how to fit something we read into an overarching narrative.

So do we really teach Bible literacy, we wondered? Will our kids gain enough familiarity that they feel comfortable reading and talking about the Bible on their own? Do they have a sense that these stories are, on some level, their stories? Behind those questions lie others: Does knowing about the Bible make any difference in a person's life? Does it affect their ability to forge a religious identity for themselves? Does it affect the way they live their lives?

These questions were still on my mind later in the week when I went to hear Ched Meyers speak at the National Cathedral. He's a personal hero of mine—a smart Biblical scholar who is committed to popular education and community empowerment. As a result of his extensive community work, he is able to make connections between the world of the Bible and our world today that are incredibly provocative. He calls crucifixion, for example, “the preeminent form of state terrorism” of the Roman Empire, their version of “shock and awe.”

Meyers spoke with incredible passion, his voice echoing throughout the giant cathedral. He said first of all that those who are committed to building a more inclusive, more compassionate, more just world, must be as vocal and visible in their claim of the Bible as are those who use it to exclude or shame or dominate others. And second, he argued that, in order to really understand the power and importance of the Bible, we must read it contextually. We have to make the connection between the rulers and empires, armies and prophets, of that time and our own.

This goes way beyond citing a Bible passage to justify our decisions, or using “values language” to support a political agenda. This is about empowering more people to read the Bible in a way that enables them to see the story as their own. When we read the Bible with eyes wide open to its context and our own, it becomes more than folklore, more than a devotional guide, more than quirky tales or good advice. It becomes an instigator in the people's fight for power.

Ched Meyers left me thinking that that perhaps the single most important thing we do at IFFP is to tell Bible stories, rooted in the time and place in which they were first told. What do you think?

- Heather Kirk-Davidoff, Spiritual Director