

Interfaith Families Project

April 2004 www.iffp.net

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FROM THE BOARD

Name Game. Two years ago, I was beginning to believe that IFFP's name should be changed. The word "project" seemed to understate the extent to which IFFP constituted a vibrant, robust, and persistent community. While I am more convinced than ever that we are a vibrant, robust, and persistent community, I have changed my mind about renaming IFFP. More than ever, we are an evolving entity with a solid core and a solid mission. However, figuring out how to best serve our core and advance our mission requires precisely the spirit of innovation, experimentation, and tolerant deliberation that the word "project" suggests.

New Members. Eighteen new families have joined IFFP thus far this year. We welcome them and thank Sandy Moore, Lucinda Leach, Heather Kirk-Davidoff, and Susan Ryder for their continuing attention to the needs of prospective and new members. We also recognize in this large number of new members the continuing need to re-assess what we are doing and how we are doing it. Members join based on what we are already doing. But as an organic community—as a "project"—we are constantly evolving to meet the changing needs of our membership—whether the changes occur because existing members develop or recognize new needs, or because new members with new needs join us.

Social Studies. Earlier this year the Board decided that, in large part as a result of our recent growth, we need to encourage more opportunities for friendly socializing, where members can get to know one another in ways that do not occur during the normal structured programming of our Sunday schedule. We need to encourage members to organize activities for small groups of other IFFP members, whether it involves a book club, a movie, a museum trip, or getting together for dinner. We also want to build more opportunities for friendly socializing into our Sundays. Hence, we will be experimenting with our Sunday schedule one final time, on Sunday, April 18, by replacing Adult Group with an Adult Brunch. Please come and enjoy.

Spiritual Advisor. We are growing, we are experimenting, and we are innovating. At its March meeting, the Board agreed to appoint Rabbi Harold White as IFFP's first spiritual advisor. Rabbi White is the senior Jewish chaplain at Georgetown University and the Hymen Goldman Lecturer in Jewish Studies in the Department of Theology. As spiritual advisor, he will advise Heather and our director of Religious Education on the Jewish content of our programs and participate in some Gatherings and Adult Groups. He will also be available for family life-cycle events (for a fee to be arranged between Rabbi White and member families). We are very excited by this opportunity and by Rabbi White's desire to work with us in this way.

These are exciting times at IFFP, times when our "project" continues to unfold, develop, evolve, and mature. Please join us in shaping this ongoing process.

—Steve Jackson, IFFP Board Chair

APRIL 2004

18	Easter • Bagels, 10 a.m. • Gathering, 10:15 • Sunday School/ Adult Brunch , 10:45 Ends at 1:30 p.m.	23-25 (Fri.- Sun.)	Women's Retreat	30 (Fri.)	Young Couples Potluck
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MAY 2004

2	Community Service Day (see page 2)	16	IFFP Open House • Bagels, 10 a.m. • Gathering/Teen Graduation, 10:15 • Sunday School/ Adult Group, 10:45	23	* Coming Of Age Celebration, 10 a.m. * Thank-You Picnic, noon-2 p.m.
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SUNDAY SCHOOL

From the DRE: Teaching for IFFP

As the days get longer, we all begin to set our sights on summer and the (at least perceived) break that this time gives us. At IFFP we also look ahead to next year: reviewing where we are and making plans accordingly. As interim director of religious education (DRE), I have begun to map out the teaching needs for our Sunday School. We have had a very successful year, and we want to both appreciate the lessons learned as well as continue the progress we've made.

I am extremely pleased to note that the great majority of our fabulous teaching staff is returning to continue to offer its insight and experience to the children of IFFP. We will, however, have a few openings for interested members. Some of our teachers take on a lead role, while others serve as aides for these teachers. Some classrooms are staffed by co-equal teaching teams. The needs of each classroom are judged based on class size, group dynamics, and the volunteers available. A preliminary look shows that we will have opportunities across the range of our Sunday School:

- Preschool: Co-teacher
- Sixth grade: Aide
- Seventh grade COA Prep: New Teaching Team

In return for your service, you receive not only the pleasure of spending time with your community's kids and the undying appreciation of IFFP staff and member families but also tuition waivers (or equivalent) for your own family. The number of waivers varies depending upon the role each teacher takes in the classroom. By next month's Newsletter, I will be able to be specific about any remaining needs. In the meantime, if you are interested in teaching for the IFFP Sunday School or simply learning more about it, please contact me. I can sign you up, answer your questions, or simply put you in touch with one of our outstanding teachers so that you can learn more about all the benefits of teaching for IFFP. Many thanks, and I look forward to talking to everyone about it.

—Sherri Brown, Interim Director of Religious Education

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Our May 2 Community Service Day will focus on homelessness. We will be serving two organizations.

(1) The [Montgomery County Animal Shelter](#) asked us to sponsor a blanket and towel drive. These critical items need constant replenishment so that shelter animals do not have to sleep on cold concrete. The shelter is open Monday-Friday to accept donations. Depending on the volume of donations from our community, I may need 1-2 volunteer drivers to take the items to the shelter during the week. Write me if you can be a volunteer driver.

(2) The Silver Spring Interfaith Housing Coalition is dedicated to setting up shelter residents in their own homes. From 10 a.m. to noon we will be clearing overgrown brush from the yard of a house that will become home to a shelter family. The specific location will be decided by the coalition in a couple of weeks.

Also, many families from the shelters have few basic items needed for a home. To help get them on their feet, we will donate a "Welcome Home Basket" for the new residents. I am asking members of our community to donate one of the following: Safeway gift card for start-up groceries (maybe \$20-\$50), dishtowels, dishwasher soap and dish soap, hand towels, hand soap, sponges, laundry detergent, toilet paper, paper towels, shower curtain and rings, small plastic trashcan(s), assorted cleaning supplies (Comet, Lysol, etc.), Set of twin sheets, pillow, pack of hangers, and a laundry basket to hold everything. Other ideas to make the house cozier include candles, potted plants, placemats, vase, doormat, and throw pillows. Please e-mail me at: scribers@erols.com and let me know which item(s) you will donate. Susan Ryder will bring construction paper and markers so youngest members can make welcome-home cards for the basket.

Please bring donations—for the shelter and the welcome-home basket—to our designated work site. If you want to donate blankets and towels to the animal shelter but cannot make the May 2 event, please drop them off during shelter hours (M-F, 10 a.m.-7 p.m.; Sat., 10 a.m.-5 p.m.) at 14645 Rothgeb Drive, Rockville, MD 20850; 240-773-5960, www.mchumane.org.

—Randi Field

Meet Jim Bethel, Lisa Strauss, and Max Mizell

Jim Bethel and I were married in 2002, second marriages for both of us. We live in D.C. with my son, Max Mizell. With our eclectic religious backgrounds, IFFP seemed like the right place for the three of us. Jim converted to Judaism from Christianity for his first marriage. Max's father is Christian. I am Jewish but went to Catholic school, attended a Christian camp, and have only one relative on my father's side who retained the Jewish religion after coming to the United States from Germany. Jim is one of seven children. He lived in various places, growing up primarily in Pittsburgh and California before moving to D.C. in the early 1980s. Jim earned his Ph.D. at the University of California at Berkeley and is a senior statistician at Westat, Inc., in Rockville. He is interested in jazz and plays the flute with the Woodley Park Trio.

I was born and raised in Asheville, N.C. My father was a German refugee. His siblings converted to Christianity when they arrived in the United States, but my father married a Jewish woman who wanted her family to practice Judaism. I am the executive vice president/executive director of the American Psychological Foundation in Washington, DC.

Max is 10 and attends Kingsbury Day School in Washington, D.C. Max is currently interested in Beyblades [Japanese fighting tops], but the interest he shares with his stepdad and with me is movies. We try to pick movies in common for all of us to see, but mostly his stepfather and I go to foreign movies, and we are waiting for the time when Max will want to go with us to those movies too. We are also waiting for the time when he will eat something besides macaroni and cheese, chicken nuggets, and fish sticks. We thought IFFP would expose Max to the various religious backgrounds of his family, and that he would feel comfortable with other children who are not grounded in one particular faith. I would like to thank people in IFFP, particularly Max's Sunday School teachers, Carol Muskin and Anne Stewart, who have been so welcoming and helpful.

—Lisa Straus

Meet Kerri Mullens and Andrew Levine

Kerri and I were married in November 2003. We met three years ago at a Maryland basketball game (Go Terps!) and currently live in Rockville. We actually found IFFP before we were married and are now part of the growing "young couples" group.

Kerri was born and raised near Rochester, N.Y. She received her special education degree from Mercyhurst College in Erie, Pa. and her Master's from the University of Maryland. She currently works as a special education teacher at Wheaton High School. I was born and raised in Columbia, Md. I received my chemical engineering degree from the University of Maryland and currently work as a chemical engineer for the Naval Surface Warfare Center at Carderock.

Kerri was raised Catholic and I was raised Jewish. Both of our families gave us a good basis in our faiths, and we are glad to have found a place like IFFP early in our marriage to help us share them together.

—Andrew Levine

Gatherings

Adult Brunch—April 18

After our Easter Reflection, a lovely Adult Brunch will replace the Adult Group discussion. We hope that all adults will come and enjoy this opportunity to visit leisurely with one another and meet members they don't know. We will have the cafeteria until 1:30, so we can continue with social time after the kids join us. They will have an Easter Egg hunt, hopefully outside, after Sunday School. You'll probably see members of the Teen Group busily filling eggs that morning. This is a potluck brunch so please bring lots of goodies to eat. Suggestions (to balance coffee cake) include egg salad, tuna salad, rolls, veggie platters, pasta salad, fruit, fruit salad, and anything else (store-bought or home-made) that folks would enjoy.

Spring Open House—May 16

In addition to our annual Fall Open House and Back to School Day, we now have an Annual Spring Open House, this year on May 16. We have been very fortunate to have added many new families to our community this year, and we would like to reach many more who are looking for a group like IFFP. Flyers will be available at the April 18 Gathering. Please pick up a stack to distribute to interfaith friends and folks at work, libraries, health food stores, schools, coffee shops, etc. An invitation will be sent via the IFFP Listserv that you can forward to other listservs you belong to.

Conference on Interfaith Shifts and Risks in America

I was very fortunate to attend the Mutable Mosaic of Belief conference at the Washington National Cathedral on April 3. It was an extraordinary gathering of faith-centered leaders in the fields of religious pluralism, civil liberties, the media and academia: Diana Eck, head of the Pluralism Project at Harvard University; Azizah al-Hibri, professor of law at the University of Richmond and executive director of Karamah: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, professor of Islamic studies at GWU, world-renowned author and president of the Foundation for Traditional Studies; Mark Talisman, founding vice chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum; Bob Abernathy and Ray Suarez, journalists; Tom Chappell, co founder & president of Tom's of Maine, and others.

During six inspiring hours, speakers told of the enormous efforts being made on national and neighborhood levels to understand and befriend those grounded in faiths other than their own. At the same time, the government has instituted the Patriot Act and the Office of Homeland Security, ordinary Muslim citizens feel at risk simply going about their daily lives and anti-Semitism is on the rise (especially since Mel Gibson's film was released). Religions that were treated, in the academic world, as ancient paths to God are now seen as dynamic forces that can motivate adherents to violence.

To me, the most pertinent message of the day was that the United States must define itself. We are a pluralistic society with 10 percent of our population foreign-born. We can continue along the path of the self-righteous superpower or come to terms with our very disturbing past, Carl Jung's shadow. If we, as a macrocosm of the world, acknowledge this past (our treatment of Native Americans, black Americans, putting Japanese in internment camps, etc.) and apologize, we could become a beacon of light for the rest of the world.

It's a very crucial time. This country will likely face a very difficult period for the next 10 to 15 years. People need to be very involved. It was pointed out that members of Congress received very little constituent mail regarding the Patriot Act, when we all should be drowning them with letters.

Much was discussed regarding religious communities and their leaders. Many people have operated on the premise that interfaith work should be centered on finding common ground. There is a need to recognize, discuss, and respect our differences, discussing and respecting them, so that we may begin to understand each other's religions. It was determined that most of the outreach being done is by private groups or members of religious organizations. Religious leaders are often afraid to take positions; those who have sometimes suffered the consequences. It was also mentioned that many people who don't share the views expressed here were invited but did not come to listen to those ideas.

Wish you all could have benefited from the entire session. This is just a taste of the day.

—Susan Ryder