
Interfaith Families Project

March 2006 www.iffp.net P.O. Box 5413, Takoma Park, MD 20913 iff@verizon.net 301-270-6337

FROM THE BOARD

Sunday marked Rev. Julia Jarvis' first day as IFFP's new Spiritual Director. It is a pleasure to have her at IFFP and I am looking forward to not only her contributions to our community but to having our three staff -- Rev. Julia, Ellen and Susan -- working together on all of IFFP's projects and services.

I want to call everyone's attention to the upcoming annual membership meeting on Sunday, April 2. Every year, the membership meets to discuss how things are going at IFFP. It is an important opportunity for each member to learn more about how IFFP works and to voice your concerns, suggestions, pleasures, or other thoughts.

Your children will be well cared for at a peace camp while we grown-ups socialize and talk about IFFP. Please remember to sign them up for the camp in advance.

In particular, the membership will be presented with the budget for next year and a slate of candidates for next year's Board and will be asked to approve them. In addition, we will have the opportunity to discuss IFFP's programming and events this year, and your thoughts about what should remain the same and what should be different next year.

Prior to the annual meeting we will email to all members the proposed budget for next year, the proposed slate of Board candidates for next year, and the response to the IFFP Survey that we conducted last year. We will have copies of all of this information at the meeting itself, but it will be helpful if you can take a moment to look through it before you arrive.

Regarding the Board, earlier this month a note was emailed to each member regarding Board service. As you might know, IFFP has a board of nine members who each typically serve for three years. Therefore, IFFP will need on average three new members each year. This coming year, for particular reasons, we will only need two new members. We have one volunteer so far and could use additional potential names for the positions. The following year we will have four positions open, including the position of treasurer.

Please consider whether you would enjoy serving on the Board and think you would be well suited to it and contact me to discuss it. IFFP is a member-driven organization and we need everyone who is able and willing to contribute to its strength and direction.

On one personal note, I want to thank everyone who attended adult group on Sunday where my father talked about his life and work over the last eight decades. It meant a lot to me and to Anne to have him with us and I appreciated the attendance of so many IFFP members and friends. I hope those of you who heard him speak enjoyed it.

- Danny Weiss, Board Chair

MARCH – APRIL 2006

Mar. 10 (Fri.)	Men's Night Out Takoma Park	Mar. 12	Sligo Middle School <i>Purim Celebration</i>
Mar. 18 (Sat.)	Young Couples Activity Dinner and Hockey Game	Mar. 19	Sligo Middle School <i>Tikkun ha'Olam (Healing the World)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathering, 10 am, with Rev. Julia Jarvis and Rabbi Harold White • Refreshments, 10:30 am • Sunday School/Adult Group, 10:45 am • COA Evening Meeting
Mar. 26	Sligo Middle School <i>Religion in Everyday Life</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathering, 10 am, led by 6th grade class • Refreshments, 10:30 am • Sunday School/Adult Group, 10:45 am • COA Evening Meeting 	Apr. 2	Sligo Middle School <i>Membership Meeting</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult Gathering and membership meeting, 10 am in the cafeteria • Kids' Peace Camp, 10 am in the gym <p>Upcoming holidays: Passover is April 13-20 (starting at sundown on April 12) Good Friday is April 14 Easter is April 16</p>

UPCOMING IFFP ACTIVITIES

Adult Group

March 19 – Choose between two exciting discussions:

Track 1 - Jewish Mysticism (The Kabbalah) Part 1 led by **Rabbi Harold White**. This is an area of Jewish thought that Rabbi Harold has studied for many years and the discussion should be most interesting.

Track 2 - Interfaith 101 Part 2 led by **Ian Spatz** and the **Rev. Julia Jarvis**. This is a continuation of the discussion started last month on issues faced by interfaith couples.

March 26 - Jewish Mysticism Part 2. **Rabbi Harold** will continue his discussion of the Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism.

- Sam Lawson, Adult Group Coordinator

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.

Purim Festival, March 12th, 10-12

Esther, Haman, Mordechai, Ahasuerus - Who will you be at Purim? Come join the festivities at 10 when **Jill Weiler** and the 3rd grade class act out the Story of Esther.

After that, fun breaks loose with our game and craft booths, Israeli Folk Dancing, holiday food, music, and the always-popular parachute! Please, everyone, bring lots of hamantaschen (**Fredie** shares some great recipes on page 7, or you can buy them), juice, and noisemakers to boo Haman (whistles, clappers, bells, horns)! We ask everyone to pitch in and help clean up the cafeteria after our festival. Please invite friends and family to this festive celebration.

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

All Members wanted at our Annual Membership Meeting, Sunday April 2nd

This is going to be an exciting membership meeting and we would like to have full member participation. After you send your kids off to the Peace Camp in Sligo's gym, join **Rev. Julia** for an Adult Gathering on Community. Then we will talk about and vote on IFFP's budget, the Board candidates for next year, and a revised set of by-laws. We will discuss a proposal for a new IFFP youth program for kids after COA, review the IFFP survey results, and have the opportunity to offer comments, criticisms, compliments, or suggestions about IFFP in general. We will break up into smaller groups for part of the time, and have time at the end to just hang out and socialize. The really important thing about the annual meeting is to hear from you. The wonderful community of IFFP depends on the involvement of its members. Thank you.

-Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator, and Danny Weiss, Board Chair

Kids' Peace Workshop during April 2nd Membership Meeting

On Sunday, April 2, during this year's Membership Meeting, our kids will have the opportunity to participate in a workshop put on by *Little Friends for Peace*, an organization dedicated to teaching non-violence skills to children through playful skill-building activities. Since 1981, *Little Friends for Peace* has trained thousands of children and caregivers around the country. The group comes highly recommended by **Ellen Jennings** and **Rev. Julia Jarvis**, who have participated with their families in *Little Friends for Peace* workshops. You can read more about *Little Friends for Peace* at www.LFFP.org. We need to know how many children will be participating, so if you have not signed up already, please RSVP for your children to **Susan Ryder** at sury3@aol.com.

- Antoinette Eates, Community Service Co-Coordinator

Passover Seder, April 22nd, 5:00

Rabbi Harold will be joining us this year for our annual, kid-friendly Seder at the Schweinhaut Center in Silver Spring. Please be sure to reserve this date for our wonderful, and always delicious, potluck Seder. More details to follow in April.

- Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

Remembrance of Women's Retreats Past

You know those contests where the last person with her hand touching the Lexus wins it? Somehow I have managed to become the only IFFP'er to have attended all five women's retreats. I'd like to say it was grit and determination that got me this far, but really it was just showing up on the right weekend.

I was asked to write up a little something for the newsletter. I may be a journalist, but it's not like I was taking notes those weekends, and retrieving details from my middle-aged mind is as hit or miss as locating a notice in a middle-schooler's backpack. If you were there and remember things differently, take it to Oprah.

2001: I have the five-page program from that first event, which shows you how meticulously **Rev. Julia Jarvis** and **Irene Landsman** planned it. We did bonding exercises, breathing meditations, lots of yoga and something called a "Good Mother" activity. Rev. Julia told everybody in advance to bring "spiritual tools" to share and I remember being freaked out because I had no idea what that meant. Turned out, lots of others had been, too -- it was great to find out we all had this in common! I also remember we kept running out of toilet paper.

2002: This was themed *Mindful Living*. I remember a yoga class on the beach that stopped passers-by in their tracks and the infamous silent lunch as a mindful exercise. Although not popular with some retreaters, it proved we could shut up if we had to.

2003: This weekend was dedicated to the *Power of Flow* and our facilitator led us through discussions of synchronicity. What I remember is when I arrived I put down my duffel bag too hard on the asphalt driveway and the bottle of wine inside had the Power of Flow all over my bed linens, forcing me to do a load of laundry before I even took my coat off.

2004: This was the only retreat not at Bethany or Rehoboth Beach—we rented rustic cabins in the Shenandoahs. The theme was *Transitions* and one group discussion was devoted to "Mommy Fog." The yoga teacher (a self-taught local) was well-meaning but a little flaky.

2004 bonus: We had a one-day fall retreat at **Jessica Vistnes'** lovely Rockville home on the theme of *Harvest*. We dished, we danced in the backyard—there was a point to it that's lost to me now—but my most striking memory was an after-lunch walk through the neighborhood and seeing all the Bush-Cheney signs in the yards and thinking man, this ain't Takoma Park.

2005: Theme: *Coming Together as an Interfaith Community*. This was the first retreat that found room to incorporate a few hours' shopping into the spiritual activities, and the cooperative meals—always a highlight of these weekends—achieved *Iron Chef* complexity.

Retreat #6 is April 28-30. Come join us for a wonderful, relaxing, revivifying weekend. I don't know what's on the agenda, but I sure hope to continue my perfect attendance streak.

- Geneva Collins, Celebrations Co-Coordinator

Save the Date! COA Ceremony May 6th

Please join the COA students and their families at the COA Class Graduation Ceremony on Saturday, May 6, at The National 4-H Youth Conference Center's Aiton Auditorium in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Student presentations will start at 9:00 a.m. and the culminating ceremony will take place from 11:00 a.m. through noon. They'll be lots of great music, too! The 4-H campus is located at 7100 Connecticut Avenue. See you there!

- Lauren Groff, COA Parent

Cape May Trip for the Teens May 19-21! Mark Your Calendars!

Join us for a fun weekend with Julia and teens some parents at the Chalfonte Hotel in Cape, New Jersey, May 19-21. We will work every day for part of the time doing various jobs (like painting, cleaning, etc.) assisting Chalfonte's summer opening and the rest of the time we will be free to play, eat, go to the beach, eat, and have fun! This is for teens who have already been through the COA program. Space is limited so call or email me ASAP to register! FUN! FUN! FUN!

- Julia Jarvis, Spiritual Director

NOTES FROM THE DRE

Greetings,

March winds of change are blowing through IFFP, and I find myself energized and refreshed! There's a reason why both of our traditions encourage spring cleaning. Sweeping out the dirt of our physical lives provides us with an outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual renewal we're meant to experience in preparation for the great feasts of Passover and Easter.

Here's a fun way for your family to combine spring cleaning with both the Lenten emphasis on simple living and the Passover/Easter celebrations of release, rebirth, and renewal. This activity also reminds us of the importance of charity/tzedakah in both traditions.

Materials needed: several large garbage bags, incense, flowers, and vases.

On the first available day following the spring equinox (March 22nd), start the morning with a spring cleaning that focuses on getting rid of things you don't need. Give each family member a garbage bag to fill with outgrown clothes, unused toys, already-read books, etc. Emphasize that many of us have more than we need, and that we can both simplify our own lives and improve the lives of others by donating things we no longer use.

After clearing out your home, have each person straighten up their bedroom. Tell them you want everyone in the house to have a beautiful space in which to welcome spring. When everyone's room is clean, walk through the house with a stick of incense (lilac is a good "refresher"). Open the windows and say goodbye to winter. Depending on the ages of your children, you might want to sing, dance, march—celebrate! Then return to the kitchen and have each person arrange their own vase full of flowers for their bedroom.

You have now simplified, renewed, and rejoiced!

There are numerous other activities you can do with your children during the Lenten season. Look at www.simpleliving.org for more ideas. Or, see **Sherry Leikin's** article in this newsletter (page 8) to find out how you can participate in the IFFP Lenten Collection for the Heifer Project.

I wish you all a happy and blessed Spring,
Ellen

HOLIDAYS

What Is Lent?

Lent is the Christian Season that begins on Ash Wednesday and ends right before Easter Sunday. In 2006, Ash Wednesday falls on March 1. Because Jesus' Last Supper was celebrated during the Feast of Passover, Easter is calculated according to the lunar calendar. It always falls on the first Sunday after the full moon of the spring equinox, and Lent begins forty days (not including Sundays) prior to that date. The word, Lent, is derived from the Anglo-Saxon term, *lencten*, meaning "spring."

Lent is the penitential season of preparation for Easter—the greatest feast of the Christian year. It is a time for reflection, humility, simplification, and inner transformation. On Ash Wednesday, many Christians have their foreheads marked with ashes to remind them that "from dust you came, and to dust you shall return." Traditional practices of penance included: contrition for sin and a return to God, increased almsgiving, and additional time devoted to spiritual discipline. Historically, Lent has also been a time for fasting. Since Easter was associated very early on with the baptism of new Christians, Lent became the season of preparation for baptismal candidates. Thus, the custom of fasting may have originated in their prescribed fast.

The origins of *Mardi Gras* (French for "fat Tuesday") or *Carnival* (Latin, *carnem levare*, "to put away flesh meat") have to do with the tradition of fasting. In the days prior to Lent, people would use up all the foods from which they planned to abstain. It was a symbolic time of feast to prepare for the ritual forty days of famine. These forty days of Lent are often associated with Jesus' forty day fast in the desert and the forty years of deprivation suffered by the Hebrew people as Moses led them to the Promised Land. They are days of spiritual retreat, always concluded by the joyful celebration of renewal and rebirth at Easter.

What is Purim?

Purim celebrates the victory of Mordechai and Esther over the wicked Haman, as told in the Book of Esther, or *Megillat Esther*. Purim takes place in the month of Adar on the Jewish calendar and usually falls in early spring. The word Purim means "lots," for, in the story, Haman used a lot, *pur*, to decide when to kill the Jews.

Since the Book of Esther isn't part of the Torah, Purim is less religious than the holidays mentioned therein. Purim is a holiday that turns convention on its tail. Instead of being celebrated in the synagogue or home, Purim is often celebrated "in the street." When the *megillah* is read, people scream and shake noisemakers at the mention of Haman's name. Both children and adults dress up in colorful costumes that reflect the story's characters. The story itself is both simple and fanciful. Once upon a time there was a wicked man named Haman, the advisor of the King of Persia. When the king met Esther, a beautiful Jewess, he fell in love and made her his queen. When Esther's uncle, Mordechai, refused to bow before Haman (Jews bow only to God), Haman became so furious that he asked the king to have all Jews killed. The king agreed, not knowing Esther was Jewish. Fortunately, Esther figured out a way to tell her husband the truth, and, thus, the king ordered all Jews spared and Haman hanged.

Purim is a time for both taking and giving pleasure. Tradition says that on this day, Jews should perform *tzedakah* by donating food or money to at least two poor people. They should also practice *mishloach manot*

(gift giving) by bringing a plateful of sweet treats to at least one friend. While Purim is a fun holiday, it is also a holiday that acknowledges the terrible plight of a people who are consistently and unjustly despised by others. On Purim, we celebrate the survival of the Jewish people, in many times and in many places, against all odds.

- Ellen Jennings, Director of Religious Education

Hamantaschen recipes

Traditional hamantaschen

1/4 cup shortening
1/2 cup unsalted butter
1-1/4 cups sugar
2 eggs
1/4 cup milk or orange juice
1-1/2 tsps vanilla
1/4 tsp salt
2-1/2 tsps baking powder
4-1/2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
Egg wash (see below)
Fillings (see below)

Cream shortening, butter, and sugar. Add eggs and blend until smooth (add a little flour if the mixture starts to curdle). Stir in milk or orange juice and vanilla. Fold in salt, baking powder, and flour and mix to make a soft dough. Divide into 3 flattened disks and refrigerate for 10 minutes to an hour.

Make egg wash. Preheat oven to 350 degrees and place rack in upper third of oven. Line a cookie sheet with parchment paper.

On a lightly floured board, roll out dough to 1/8" thickness. Cut into 3" rounds and brush with egg wash. Put 1 generous teaspoon of filling in center and form cookies. Brush exposed dough with egg wash. Dough scraps may be re-rolled once to make more cookies.

Bake 18 - 25 minutes.

Egg Wash

1 egg
1 egg yolk
1 - 2 tbsps milk
pinch of sugar

Whisk ingredients together to make glaze.

Poppy-seed filling

1 can prepared poppy-seed filling (Solo brand is easiest to find)
grated rind of one orange
1 tsp vanilla
1 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp lemon juice

Mix together and add additional flavorings to taste.

Apricot filling

3/4 cup orange juice or water
1/4 cup lemon juice
2 cups (about 1 lb.) dried apricots
1/3 to 1/2 cup sugar
1 cup yellow raisins

Put all ingredients into a small pan and simmer 10 - 15 minutes or until soft, adding more liquid if necessary. Let cool about 5 minutes & purée. Taste and adjust sugar/lemon balance.

Chocolate hamantaschen

1/2 c shortening
1/2 c unsalted butter
1 c white sugar
1/4 c firmly packed brown sugar
2 eggs
1/2 c milk
2 tsps vanilla
2/3 c cocoa powder
4 1/2 c flour
1/4 tsp salt
2 1/2 tsps baking powder
Same egg wash as regular hamantaschen (see page 7)
Nutella filling and chocolate sprinkles

Cream together shortening, butter & sugars. Add eggs and blend (if the mixture gets lumpy, don't worry, just add a little flour). In a small bowl, stir together milk, vanilla, and cocoa and then add the paste to the sugar mixture. Sift together flour, salt, and baking powder, and fold dry into wet ingredients. Divide dough into 3 disks, wrap each in plastic and let stand a few minutes; refrigerate at least 15 minutes.

Preheat oven to 350 and follow same directions as for plain (page 7)

- Freddie Adelman, Sunday School teacher (4th grade)

Family holiday traditions

Lenten Offering Project: The **Leikin** Family is giving up ice cream for Lent this year. I plan to donate the money we save over the next several weeks to the Heifer Project. I would like to invite other families to join us during this Lenten season -- or if your family keeps a tzedakah box, this could be an opportunity to put it to good use. For those of you not familiar with the Heifer Project's work helping people obtain a sustainable source of food and income, check out their website, www.heifer.org.

We will start collecting in April. Children can give the money to their Sunday School teachers or you can put it in the big collection can I will have by the name tag table. I do ask everyone not to bring more than a dollar's worth of change per person; if you could convert as much change to paper (a check or bills) I would appreciate it. Otherwise, I'll need an armored car to get it to the bank! I think this will be an excellent chance for us to reach out and help others around the globe.

- Sherry Leikin, Sunday School teacher (pre-K)

Celebrating Easter and Passover: We both "give up" or add something extra during Lent. The Easter Bunny visits our house on "Easter Eve" and hides baskets/gifts for everyone in the house that night. We attend mass on Easter. I grew up with these traditions.

On Passover we either fly to Oregon to be with Rob's family or host a Seder. For several years, we have hosted an interfaith Seder; we use a Haggadah modified from various versions on the net by Ian Spatz. Our varied faith friends love it. We both follow dietary restrictions during Passover. Rob grew up with these traditions.

- Jen Liebreich, Worship Committee Member

More Passover and Easter celebrations: We usually have a very meaningful Passover Seder with friends we've been celebrating with for more than 10 years. We revise or piece together Haggadah's each year and try hard to engage our children in conversations that link the exodus story with what is going on in the world today. Years ago, we wrote a script of the Exodus on a long car ride to a family gathering for the holidays and we often dust that off and read it dramatically at the Seder.

For Easter we go to church and again, try to engage our kids in making links between the Resurrection and their lives today.

- Jill Weiler, Sunday School teacher (3rd grade)

Yahoo List Serve

To get your weekly bulletin and other IFFP news, join IFFP's free list serve by sending a blank e-mail to iffplistserve-subscribe@yahoogroups.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.

AMAZING QUOTES FROM THE DOVETAIL CONFERENCE 2006

Sue Katz-Miller, long-time IFFP member, shares some memorable quotes from the recent Dovetail conference.

From Ned Rosenbaum, Judaic Studies Professor and co-author of *Celebrating Our Differences*:

- "Judaism doesn't remember the intermarriage in the Bible—if they remembered it, they'd repress it."
- "All Biblical marriages were intermarriages because women had their own religion—fertility. Their chief goddess was the moon."
- "Early Israel was like America—totally diverse. Israel was a trading crossroads of Africans, Asians and Middle Easterners. So there wasn't much call to avoid mixing."

From Sunny Schnitzer, Bethesda Jewish Congregation's Hazzan (Cantor) and Spiritual Leader:

- “Without pressure from missionaries, Jews can come to see Jesus as a tzadik, a righteous one...Jesus can be seen as a Rebbe with his Chasidim, a mystic Pharisee, a mensch.”
- “Jews and Christians were one people, until the destruction of the Temple...We need to embrace, rather than reject each other...You interfaith families are some of the most important people in the world...you are modeling something different, new and important.”

From Eugene Fisher, Associate Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops:

- “The interfaith couples among us are extremely precious.”
- “We cannot be fully ourselves without the other.”
- “Interfaith couples are pioneers...increasing the understanding between the two religious communities.”
- “Neither priests nor rabbis are adequately trained to give interfaith families what they need.”
- “Jews need to understand and take more seriously their role in the creation of Christianity.”
- “Christianity and Judaism are intertwined like a double helix” and interfaith families are like the bonds connecting the two strands of the helix.

From Hannah Fegley, U of Maryland student and IFFP graduate/product, speaking on the “teen” panel:

- “I can’t imagine raising children with one religion...It’s important to raise children with open minds...I will probably live in a metropolitan area where I’ll have the option of raising my children interfaith.”

From Diane Dean, conference attendee:

- “My husband and I and our ten-year-old daughter just returned from our first Dovetail Conference and have decided it will be a bi-annual event for our family. The most comforting panel was the teenagers’ forum on what it has been like to be children of interfaith marriages (hearing ‘We really are OK’ was a lifeboat in many ways). We are having local friends over this Saturday (we are in Albany, N.Y.) to share what we learned this weekend...It was just so calming to be in a space all weekend with families who love each other and are working, in a very conscious and conscientious way, on making this pioneering path positive for ourselves and the world. Thank you, engaged couples who came looking for hope (I hope you found it), founding couples who inspired us (I am humbled by your stamina), working families who are creating groups and finding answers (I learned from you all) and God bless the spiritual leaders whose life work has taken them to a place where they can teach us at precisely this moment in our lives in a manner that keeps us connected to God and each other.”

- Susan Katz-Miller, IFFP Member

JOYS AND CONCERNS

We welcome **Daviana Olive Leanza Marcus**, born on Valentine's Day. Congratulations to parents **Cheryl Leanza** and **Jeremy Marcus**.

We were so glad to have the whole **Jarvis-Gibson** clan at the Gathering on 3/6!

We are celebrating 18 years of wedded bliss for **Marika Partridge** and **Larry Ravitz**!

We continue to celebrate the vision and hard work of the founding IFFP Mothers! --**Stacey, Mary Joel, Irene, and Laura**.

Our thoughts are with **Robin Allen's** sister Stacy, who suffers from lupus and all its effects on her.

Our deepest sympathy to the family and friends of Douglas Ely, especially his wife Sarah and his children Alexander and Julia. Douglas was **Ward Cooper's** friend and colleague who recently died in a tragic car accident.

We share our concerns for Mother Earth, who suffers from global warming

REV. JULIA'S LETTER

Dear IFFP Community,

What a wonderful Sunday we had on the 5th. It was great meeting so many families for the first time and hugging all the families I already knew. **Larry Bostian** asked me how I felt at the end of the morning and I said, "Warmly welcomed, excited, engaged, loved and...tired." My heart is so wide and expectant. It feels almost pregnant with the many possibilities of what IFFP is now and what it can become.

It has been said that unless religions can learn to live together, the world doesn't have a chance for peace. IFFP is, I believe, an important model for bringing about deep peace in our divisive world. I'm so excited to be part of this vision, this learning, this opening and drawing together.

Some of you might want to know what I have been doing the last several years and why I want to come back to IFFP. Let me try to address those questions.

For the past three years, I worked as Chaplain for Springvale Retirement/Assisted Living Community in Silver Spring, Maryland. I led weekly interfaith services, bible studies, and "Life Review" sessions, and I taught meditation. I also visited residents when they were in the hospital or nursing home/rehab centers. Working with largely 90-plus year olds (and one 102 years old) was pure delight. Undoubtedly you will be hearing stories about them and some of the lessons they taught me in upcoming Gathering reflections.

Two years ago, I began working at Christ Congregational Church (CCC) in Silver Spring as the Director of Older Adults Programming. The work entailed assisting with worship design, planning older adult events, pastoral counseling, and facilitating "Life Review" groups. After preaching one Sunday, an elderly CCC woman came up to me and said, "You are ready to be a senior pastor somewhere!" She was right. I heeded her advice and encouragement.

About six months ago, I began looking around for a part-time position as pastor of a church, about the same time that IFFP began its search for a Spiritual Director. As I began to consider this possibility, it dawned on me that the Spiritual Director's position offered the opportunities I was looking for: 1) to be a pastor in a congregation, 2) to be in an interfaith setting (which I love), 3) to help create and design joyful, playful, and sacred spaces and events, 4) to assist in making the world a better, more peaceful place, 5) to reconnect with all the wonderful families I've been missing and to have the opportunity to continue to build new relationships, and, 6) to have my family (at least **Randy** who has always enjoyed IFFP) participate in IFFP events. (We have two 13 year old twin girls, **Jeanne** and **Lauren**, whom we hope will rejoin their COA Prep class.)

As spring approaches, we see growth happening everywhere. My hope is that we will continue to see growth at IFFP. Not only growth in numbers, which is important as we share our vision and place of sanctuary with other interfaith couples and families, but also growth in our minds and hearts as we continue to learn about and support each others' faith traditions. I have some ideas about how we can do this and I look forward to sharing them with all of you in the April newsletter.

For the next month, I will begin phoning the families I do not already know so that we may become acquainted. I haven't yet set office hours at the IFFP office but I will let you know ASAP the days/hours that I will be there. But please know that I am available to you for pastoral and spiritual counseling. You can email me (julijar@erols.com) or call the IFFP office to set up an appointment. **Susan** will happily give me any message. If you have an emergency, please don't hesitate to call me at home. I am your pastor and want to stand or sit with you in a time of need or crisis! Also, If you have any thoughts about the IFFP Gatherings/Reflections, please call and let me know your concerns. I would prefer that you not email me about these concerns.

Lent is a season of reflection, renewal, returning to G_d and to one's true self. It seems like perfect timing for me to return to YOU.

Returning with great love and gratitude,
Julia

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