



March-April 2009 [www.iffp.net](http://www.iffp.net) P.O. Box 5413, Takoma Park, MD 20913 (301) 270-6337

## REVEREND JULIA'S SPRING REFLECTION

Dear all,

This poem describes for me Lent, Easter...all of it. Enjoy.

"Here"

by Danna Faulds

It's always here, the silent  
underpinning, the foundation  
beneath the foundation. When  
I reach deep enough into darkness,

inside fear, self-doubt, aversion or  
despair, there is something so intact  
I almost miss it in my focus on  
brokenness. It's always here, this

ground of being. Like the water in  
which fish swim, it's easy to overlook  
the eloquence of truth. It's here, this  
guiding presence, this calm, abiding

stillness. It's here when I don't try  
to make life any more or less than  
what it is, when I stop trying to be  
right. It's here when I unclench my

fists and breathe, when I let go of the  
demand to make life smooth or easy.  
It's here, the oneness underlying  
multiplicity, the exquisite "is-ness"

of everything. I could shout it from  
the rooftops, but it's true no matter  
what I say, and I know you'll find  
it in your own time, your own way,

that precious moment when you  
choose to meet life exactly as it is.



## FROM THE RABBI

### Mardi Gras and Purim

The similarities between these celebrations are fascinating. Mardi Gras is celebrated with festivities, which include costume balls and playlets depicting a heroine, a hero, and a villain. The consumption of alcohol is not necessarily encouraged, but my one experience of Mardi Gras in New Orleans brought back memories of Ray Milland in the movie "The Lost Weekend." Mardi Gras also rivals New Year's Eve in the production of a cacophony of discordant sounds from a broad variety of noisemakers. Purim demonstrates parallels in almost every respect. The festival concludes with costume balls. The Purim "shpiel" is a play that involves Queen Esther as heroine, her cousin Mordecai as hero, and Haman as villain. Celebrants are encouraged to consume sufficient amounts of alcohol to the point that they do not know the difference between Haman and Mordecai. During the reading of the Scroll of Esther, known as the "Megillah," the name of Haman is drowned out by noisemakers referred to as "groggers." I have always been fascinated by the similarity between "grogger" and "grog," which may not be coincidental at all.



Both Mardi Gras and Purim precede the spring equinox by approximately thirty days. Both festivities prepare participants for seasonal change. Mardi Gras is followed by Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent. There are exactly thirty days between Purim and Passover. Lent is a prelude to the beginning of spring. The first day of Passover initiates a fifty-day period of time known as Sefirah. This is a time of refraining from numerous pleasures, including entertainment. Sefirah is, in this respect, a postlude to the inauguration of the spring equinox.

Another striking parallel between symbols are the ashes of Ash Wednesday and those of the Havdalah candle, which is used at the conclusion of Shabbat. Before the discovery of wax, the Havdalah candle consisted of date palm leaves that were intertwined to form a type of torch. Havdalah commemorates the hope for the coming of the Messianic age and the ceremony begins with a song of welcome to the Prophet Elijah who is the announcer for the coming of the Messiah. Havdalah celebrates the third aspect of the divine milieu, which is redemption. This theme was symbolized by the ashes that the original Havdalah candles produced. The ashes of Ash Wednesday are produced by the palms of Palm Sunday in a process that is not dissimilar to Havdalah.

A number of years ago I noticed what I thought was an antique wooden grogger on the desk of a Jesuit colleague at Georgetown. I contemplated asking him if I could borrow it for the Megillah reading on Purim. He did not refuse my request but informed me of the reality that the instrument had nothing to do with Purim or Judaism. The look-alike grogger was part of a Jesuit tradition used during the Lenten season as a call to daily prayer.

The word Purim is derived from a Hebrew root meaning "lot." It is attributed to a legend which describes the villain Haman carrying lots in his pockets, which he would shuffle to determine which member of the Jewish community he would annihilate first. The theme of Purim is consequently that of chance. As I reflect upon the parallels that exist between Mardi Gras and Purim I wonder whether this is a matter of chance and coincidence or what Carl Jung described as synchronicity. I am more inclined to follow the Kabbalistic assertion that there is nothing accidental about the parallels that exist in every human endeavor and in creation.

## FROM THE BOARD

Dear IFFP Families,

Our annual membership meeting is coming up on Sunday, April 26, and we hope you will all join us to hear about the state of IFFP. A community service activity will be organized for the kids so our teachers can also participate.

Big news from the Board is that long time member Robin Thieme agreed to join the Board as Treasurer, completing Mike Ellner's term, which ends in June of this year. We are so grateful to Robin (and to Chris, Ashley and Drew for sharing her in this busy year!) and we will all benefit because the organization will grow from her experience and wisdom.



A preview of the membership meeting: we operate on an annual budget of about \$145,000. We have 115 member families whose membership fees, Sunday school tuition, and generous contributions comprise virtually all of the income for the budget. For the third year in a row we have received a grant from the Samuel Rubin Foundation and we are attempting to identify other outside sources of funding. The board will present our budget for next year, two new board members, and we will propose changes to several bylaws. We want to hear what's working for you at IFFP, and we want to hear your ideas about opportunities for improvement.

As the Board reported last year, we are still stretched thin in terms of staff. Rev. Beth McCracken-Harness, Interim DRE, supervises and supports our teachers and classes, while also working on our fabulous curriculum, in just 20 hours a week. Rev. Julia Jarvis is charged with gatherings, pastoral counseling, teen group and coordinating adult group, also in just 20 hours per week. And Susan Ryder – also in only 20 hours – manages administrative and communication duties, responds to inquiries and maintains relationships with prospective and new members. Rabbi White keeps busy with gatherings and adult group; member Karen Jackler is our part-time Religious Education Assistant; and member Susan Priester our bookkeeper.

The overall picture here is that we still have many very dedicated people putting in many hours because they believe in our unique community. And new folks are jumping in all the time! We even have a visiting not-yet-member who is so inspired she's already grantwriting for IFFP. And member Philip Bregstone's ideas for revamping set-up at Gatherings have transformed how our chairs and bodies face one another on Sundays. A new committee this year is composed of former IFFP Board Chairs, the Council of Chairs, and is considering overarching, strategic topics like member retention. As you know, the majority of our members volunteer for IFFP in some manner, on some committee. But there remain ample opportunities for you to get (more) involved at IFFP! A recent adult group allowed committees to meet during what we hope was a more convenient time and we plan to hold such committee meetings during adult groups more regularly.

The board will solicit your input during the upcoming membership meeting. We do hope you will plan to attend. In the meantime, if you are inspired to volunteer to join the board, or contribute time on a committee please let me, Susan, or Julia know. It's the best way to ensure that we continue to change and grow.

See you soon.

Jennifer Liebreich, Board Chair

## IFFP CALENDAR: MARCH & APRIL

### MARCH

#### **March 8 – Purim Carnival**

Story of Esther, game booths

No Sunday School

#### **March 14: COA FLOC Wilderness Retreat**

#### **March 15– Gathering : Lenten Theme, Follow the Light**

Grandparents Day

Sunday School, Session 16

Adult Group

Yoga

#### **March 22 – Gathering: Lenten Theme, Follow the Light**

Sunday School, Session 17

Adult Group—Easter/Passover Discussion

Yoga

#### **March 29 –Gathering: Tolerance, Led by Sixth Grade**

Sunday School, Session 18

Adult Group

Yoga

#### **March (TBD) – Men’s Night Out**

### APRIL

**April 4 (Sat)– Passover Seder, 5:00 pm**

**April 9 – Passover**

**April 12- Easter**

**April 19 – Gathering: Easter**

Sunday School, Session 19

Adult Group

Spring Open House

Yoga

**April 26– Annual Membership Meeting**

Kids’ Community Service & Kids’ Gathering

COA-Tech Rehearsal, Noon

## UPCOMING IFFP EVENTS

### **Shabbat Potluck Dinners with Julia & Rabbi White**

Shabbat potluck dinners are a great way to get to know other members in a small, relaxed environment. Usually three or four families gather at a house to enjoy an evening of food and conversation. This is an especially good opportunity for newer and older members to get to know each other.

Rev. Julia and Rabbi White would welcome the opportunity to join members at your homes for Shabbat dinners, and/or Saturday lunches and dinners. Rabbi White has enjoyed the opportunity to participate in several “Ask the Rabbi” sessions at IFFP. This provided an informal “getting to know each other” experience, which is not derived from his participation in the gatherings or adult education topic-oriented programs. He would welcome more opportunities to engage in the development of these interpersonal relationships that are so important to all of us and he would welcome the opportunity to become a recipient of your hospitality.

Julia, of course, always enjoys and appreciates opportunities to meet with members in small, intimate settings

If you would like to host a Shabbat potluck on one of the following dates, please email Susan and indicate the date, whether with the rabbi or Julia, the number of people that you can host (including the children in the families) and whether you prefer a certain age of children.

Rabbi’s available dates: March 6 & 13, April 3, 17 & 24, May 1

Julia’s available dates: March 6, 13, 20, April 24

If you would like to attend one of the dinners, please email Susan and indicate which date, whether with the rabbi or with Julia (only one please) and if you have a preference for a certain geographic area or age of children. We’ll do our best to match you up.

Families with young children have found this a lovely way to get together, as would couples with teenagers, to compare notes and get some support!

— Susan Ryder, Program Coordinator

### **New Member Potluck March 7**

We have an amazing group of New Member families this year! We hope that all of you will join us for a potluck at our home, Tova & Gideon Sanders, Saturday, March 7, 5-7 pm.. (Yes, we really do have the space). This one will be with children! Carly Flanigan suggested that she might plan an adult evening later in the spring! We'll be in touch to coordinate food to be brought. If you have any questions, please contact Tova.

--Tova Sanders

### **Purim Carnival March 8**

Our festive, fun Purim Carnival is almost here! If you haven't gotten your costumes ready, time is running out! Also, now is the time to invite friends and relatives to enjoy the morning with you. It's one of the best ways to introduce other families to our community. Just please be sure to bring some extra hamentashen!

We have some great new additions to our carnival this year-a **Children's Used Book Sale** organized by Lisa Henderson. This is a wonderful opportunity to purchase age appropriate books for your children (friends' and relatives' kids) and also benefit IFFP. If you didn't get a chance to drop off your kids' outgrown books February 22, you may still bring them the morning of the carnival by 9:45. We'll be accepting baby board books through teen romance novels! Donation forms will be available.

This year, as kids have requested, we will "**sell**" tickets for the children to use at the game & crafts booths, 40 tickets for \$5.00 (suggested donation). At 1 to 2 tickets per game, they'll be busy a long time! We'll have tables set up in the hall and cafeteria to buy tickets.

Most importantly, please bring hamentashen and groggers (noisemakers)!

### **Purim Carnival Craft Show & Silent Auction**

It's not too late to offer your crafts/baked goods at the carnival! If you have jewelry, sewn, knitted or crocheted items, pottery, breads, cakes or other items you've made, please contact Jose Dominquez, about having a table at the carnival. Crafters donate a percentage of their profits to IFFP. Also, if you have a beach rental, give massages or do astrology charts, take family portraits, babysit, cook great meals, walk dogs, etc. you might offer one of these services or others for our Silent Auction.

--Susan Ryder

### **Grandparents Day March 15**

We are planning a very special day to welcome our grandparents! Please feel free to invite your parents even if we don't yet have their names on our list. Just contact Susan, and she can still send them an invitation by email or snail mail. We have a wonderful program with Fr. Dennis McManus, Rabbi White and Julia focused on cross generational relationships. Your children will be thrilled to show their grandparents their classes and introduce them to their friends. Please give your parents a chance to feel welcomed by our great community!

--Susan Ryder

## **Volunteer Appreciation Day March 22-All Hands & Feet on Deck**

During the Gathering on March 22, we will take a few moments to acknowledge all the work done by the many IFFP volunteers who make coffee and set up our refreshments, bring food, host the welcoming table, teach Sunday school, set up the chairs/tables, co-op and coordinate in the nursery, fundraise, lead our Adult Groups, plan our Gatherings, serenade us with wonderful music, plan celebrations, provide comfort, welcome new members and encourage new and old members, work as hall helpers for Sunday school, publicize our great community, inspire us with community service opportunities, plan our fantastic women's retreats, organize a men's night, sit on our board of directors and council of chairs, create our newsletters, searched for our wonderful DRE, try to find us a permanent building, on & on!!!!!! Here's to all of the many hands that make us a community and keep our work light and fun!!

We can always use more volunteers to make the work even lighter. If you aren't part of a committee, please consider joining all the efforts in making our community!

-Julia Jarvis

## **Passover Seder April 4**

Celebrate Passover with IFFP on Saturday, April 4, at 5:00 p.m. at the Schweinhaut Center, 1000 Forest Glen Road, Silver Spring. Rabbi White will lead our wonderful, child-friendly, family Seder. We'll use our own family oriented Haggadah, written by Freddie Adelman and past member Brent Mitchell. Several afikomen will be hidden for the kids to find and there's always great food!

After dinner we'll have lots of fun and work off the calories with some Israeli folk dancing, led by Mona, the professional DJ who led our dancing at last year's Seder. It's a lovely way to welcome Passover. This is also a great event for you to share with your family and friends, especially other interfaith families/couples. (Just please let them know that it's a potluck and everyone needs to bring food!).

We will also include a community service component to the seder. We will make cards for the residents of Springvale Terrace and also collect pennies for Shepherds Table. More details will follow in the bulletins.

Since this is a potluck event, and there will be good kitchen facilities, bring your favorite Passover dish. IFFP provides paper goods, wine, and other beverages. We also need about 5 volunteers to bring matzo ball soup and 2 volunteers to bring charoset in addition to bringing the food assignment below. If you'd like to help, contact **Jessica Vistnes**.

### **FOOD ASSIGNMENTS FOR THE SEDER**

- \* A-G – Main dish. If last name of female head of household begins with A-G, bring a main dish to feed 15 people.
- \* H-P – Dessert. If last name of female head of household begins with H-P, bring a dessert dish to feed 15 people.
- \* Q-Z – Side dish. If last name of female head of your household begins with Q-Z, bring a side dish to feed 15 people.

Please RSVP to Jessica by March 30. We must know the headcount for this event, as this celebration involves much more specific organization than the Holiday Party. We will need help setting up, cleaning up and in the kitchen. Please contact Jessica if you will be able to help in any of those areas.

--Jessica Vistnes

**Spring Sunday School & Community Open House, April 19**  
**SPRING SUNDAY SCHOOL & COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE, APRIL 19**

In past years we began having a Fall & Spring Our Open House. These orientations are one of the best ways for prospective members to get a sense of our community and to learn about our programs and activities. This year it will be the same day as our Easter Gathering with Fr. Dennis McManus, so visitors will have the added pleasure of being with him as well as Julia and the Rabbi.

Prospective members attend the Gathering and refreshments time. At 11:00 they are invited to attend an orientation session with Julia, Jen, and other members of the board and staff, to have an opportunity to ask questions about our programs and activities. Please invite interfaith or other friends and family to attend. We need help getting the word out about our wonderful Sunday school & community.

--Susan Ryder

**Easter Services**

Looking for a church to celebrate Easter on April 12?  
IFFP members in the past have gone to Christ Congregational Church (9525 Colesville Rd by the YMCA). They will have identical services at 9 and 11 a.m. Come early to get a parking spot! Both the music and sermon promise to be good.  
Pastor Mark Griner will also lead Easter Services at Takoma Park Presbyterian Church.  
If you have a church you like to attend during non-IFFP weeks, please let us know and we will let others know.

**COA Ceremony May 3 at Einstein HS Cafe from 10-noon!**

Please mark your calendars to attend IFFP's Coming of Age Ceremony on May 3.  
This year the 14 COAers have been focused on four questions: Who is the God I believe in (or don't believe in)? Is there life after death? How can I live a meaningful life? Why do bad things happen to people? Each COAer at the ceremony will present a "This I Believe" speech featuring one, some, or all of their responses to these questions. Rob Liebrich, Julia Jarvis, Pam Bachorz and Taghi Ryder have been the teachers for this program.

The COAers have been exploring these important questions through skits, role plays, small group interactions, rituals and a wilderness journey. On March 14, the COAers will head to the Shenendoah Mts to attend an all day Wilderness Journey which will include a three hour solo time ending with their going before a Council of Elders. Please stay tuned to hear more about how the wilderness journey goes and please join us all for the culminating celebration of what these COAers have learned, how they have grown and developed their own beliefs.

**ADULT GROUPS**

March 15 (Grandparents Day): "Exploring What the Bible & Our Faith Traditions Say About Honoring Our Parents & Grandparents and How We Live out that Commandment Today". Please join Rabbi White and Fr. Dennis McManus who teaches with him at Georgetown (also of the Pope Paul Center) as they lead this group dedicated to our visiting grandparents.

March 22: Passover/Easter Discussion  
Ian Spatz (Interfaith 101 master facilitator), Rabbi White and Larry Bostian will lead an interfaith consideration of Easter and Passover. We'll take a big, deep breath and talk about whether and how the idea embodied in the hymn "Christ the Lord is risen today" can be one we can sit with, ponder, chew over. From there, Ian, Larry (?) and the Rabbi will lead a discussion and hear the concerns/interests of the community regarding celebrating and honoring these two holy days.

## Quiet Lenten Reflection Days

On March 15 and 22 we will have a second adult group track to share the silence and reflective mood of the Lenten Season. We will be doing some guided meditations, slow walking meditation, deep relaxation, and some reflection. Please bring a blanket (or something to lie down on) and a journal. This time will be facilitated by Rev. Julia.

March 29: “Pebbles in Our Shoes” – The Greek word translated as “sin” in the Christian scriptures is “hamartia,” which literally means “missing the mark.” Religious leaders have used Scripture and tradition to justify or excuse homophobia, sexism, racism, imperialism, and anti-Semitism. What do we make of the wide gap between the best teachings of our faith traditions and all-too-common attitudes and behaviors within them of prejudice and discrimination?

April 19: “Ten Commandments of Inter-religious Dialogue” with Fr. Dennis McManus & Rabbi White

## COMMUNITY SERVICE

### Spring Community Service Activities

Saturday, April 4- Please join us at the IFFP Seder when we'll make cards for our senior friends who reside at Springvale Terrace.

Sunday, April 26- Plan to be at Einstein for the Annual IFFP Membership Meeting and Kids Community Service Day! The 7th Grade COA Prep Class and their teacher, Jessica Stevens, are busy organizing a variety of community service activities for the IFFP children and tweens to engage in while adults take part in the membership meeting. All of the children, tweens, and teens will take part in a Gathering in the cafeteria led by Beth McCracken-Harness. Then the preschoolers will go with Susan Ryder for their special projects and the older children/tweens will join the 7th graders in the cafeteria.

We will be recruiting teens and adults to help out with the service events, so please watch for upcoming announcements. Susan will need at least 3 adult or teen helpers for the Pre-K activities. Please contact her if you would like to specifically help with the little ones.

Sunday, June 7- For the first time we will engage in a spring gleaning activity! This ever popular community service activity has always been a fall tradition (2008- kale and collard greens, 2007- apples), and our friends at MAGNET (Mid-Atlantic Gleaning Network) will arrange a spring activity for us.

Please contact Paul Miller or me if you would like to help plan our community service activities. One goal set by our Community Service Work Group at our 2/22 Adult Group Meeting is to work this spring/early summer to arrange a calendar showing all of our community service events for 2009-2010. We hope to have an evening planning meeting sometime in March/April.

Carol Muskin, Community Service and Social Justice Workgroup

## NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

We have wonderful, talented and dedicated teachers at IFFP and they are connecting with your kids. They are making learning Judaism and Christianity fun! I know because I see excited kids in the hallway going to Sunday school. And I go into classrooms where teachers are prepared to teach and kids are engaged.

During these last few months, I have been meeting with your children's teachers and getting their input and ideas. I am also available to speak to any parents or members who have ideas, observations, concerns or joys to share about the Sunday school or its curriculum. Stop me in the hallway. Give me a call. Or e-mail me. I'd love to hear from you.

The Purim carnival is coming up on March 8th. Each class is going to have a booth. We'll be doing fun things like catching ducks in a duck pond (plastic ones!) and throwing whipped cream "pies" at willing kids and adults. This year we are going to sell tickets (25 cents each), so it will feel like a carnival without costing as much as one. The money goes to pay for prizes and expenses. We are also going to have a used book sale fundraiser.

The Purim carnival is a great opportunity for potential members to see what we are doing--and have fun. I've already invited two families I know. Please come, and invite your friends too!

The following Sunday is Grandparents' Day (March 15th). Kids are proud to bring their grandparents with them into the classroom. And grandparents want to share in the religious education their grandkids are getting. Please invite your parents to join us that day.

Since we are entering into the second semester, we need to start thinking about who will teach the children next year. Lead teachers and co-teachers are eligible to receive 1 tuition waiver for the IFFP Sunday School (or an equivalent reduction in membership fees). Assistant teachers can get half a waiver. We have one day of training before Sunday school starts in the fall, and I meet with each teaching team once during the summer and as needed during the school year. I have already started meeting with potential teachers. If you are interested in teaching at IFFP next year, please contact me. Thanks for your support.

--Beth McCracken-Harness

## IFFP AFTER KIDS?

For most IFFP members, the Sunday morning ritual is the same. Get up, make breakfast, get the kids dressed, fed and ready for IFFP and then, for some, convince them (or threaten them) to get out of the house. I recall that ritual somewhat fondly but don't relate to it directly. For me, it's been many years since I had a child in IFFP. Yet, I still come.

I came to IFFP for our children and I stayed for me. I found that IFFP was a place to learn about faith and to share that learning journey with long time friends. Our discussions over the years about Judaism and Christianity have greatly expanded my knowledge, interest and appreciation of religion and those within IFFP who struggle to understand their relationship to their own faith and those of their partners.

I have also discovered the benefits of community that are available through IFFP. Like more traditional religious settings, IFFP has brought together an extraordinary group of people whom I would not otherwise connect with and get to know so well. We've had the chance to share a lot of joys and sadness over the years.

I also experienced the satisfaction of helping make IFFP a stronger and more lasting entity. When I started with IFFP, our numbers were small and our ambitions were limited to Sunday School. Through the hard work of so many including the generosity of our founding mothers who never limited the ability of newcomers to amend their vision, we have taken IFFP to special places. Seeing the large numbers of families and hearing the stories of how IFFP has benefited them provides me with an enormous amount of satisfaction.

I am so grateful for those of our community willing to serve as Board members, teachers, organizers and coffee bringers. It reminds me quite often that, as much as I have put into IFFP over the years (including two terms on the Board), I've received -- and continue to receive -- so much more in return.

--Ian Spatz, former board chair

## NEW MEMBERS

We want to welcome new members, Sarah Gamble and Jon Erdman! Sarah became an active member of our PR committee before even joining IFFP!!

### New member Profile

#### **The Hoffman Family**

Micah was raised as a Reform Jew in Silver Spring, MD. Carol spent most of her childhood in Western Massachusetts, with a couple of short stints in Belgium and Berlin, Germany. Before attending college, Carol attended the United Church of Christ Congregational church near her home. Micah and Carol have two children, Tyler (8 years old) and Camille (6 years old), who are both enjoying the IFFP Sunday school.

During the week, Micah helps keep federal computer systems secure and Carol helps to secure the future by volunteering at their children's public school and working full-time at home. Both Carol and Micah are leaders in PEP (Parent Encouragement Program) and help others to learn the parenting techniques that its many programs offer. Micah and Carol know Elizabeth Gelfeld through their connection in PEP, and the Natchipolsky family, who are also new members.

Carol and Micah heard about IFFP over a decade before they decided to join. Recently, their family has had questions about religion, faith and other spiritual issues that they realized that they needed some outside help to address. At Elizabeth Gelfeld's suggestion, they decided to look into IFFP and found that it, well, just fit.

The four members of the Hoffman family are vegetarians, and they love to go hiking. Micah enjoys volleyball and is active in Cub Scouts with Tyler. Carol is an avid baker and cook.

**IFFP Board Chair:** Jen Liebreich

**IFFP Board Vice Chair:** Stephani Abramson

**IFFP Coordinators:** Adult Group: Larry Bostian • Celebrations: Jessica Vistnes • Membership: Mary Beth Cisneros • Website: Mark Shellenberger • Newsletter: Adam Korengold

**IFFP Staff:** Spiritual Director: Rev. Julia Jarvis, 301-270-6337 (office) • DRE Assistant: Karen Jackler • Spiritual Advisor: Rabbi Harold White • Program Coordinator: Susan Ryder, [Sury3@aol.com](mailto:Sury3@aol.com) • Bookkeeper: Susan Priester