

DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

Clergy

SEDER'S IN THIS PRIEST'S FUTURE

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"Look with favor on these offerings and accept them as once you accepted the gifts of your servant Abel, the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith, and the bread and wine offered by your priest Melchisedech."

I've known this ancient text of the Catholic Mass since I was a boy. I knew that Abraham was our "father in faith" because he believed and obeyed God. I knew he was the first Jew. I knew that Jesus was descended from Abraham.

As a young Catholic, my education from the book was good. But it was missing experience. It wasn't until I was 12 years old, having moved to South Florida, that I met a Jew for the first time with my public schoolmates.

My first Jewish friend was **Danny Levitch**. I used to go to temple with him, and he would come to church with me. My contact with Jews after junior high got very sporadic again until I met a wonderful chiropractor, Dr. **Sanford Cohen**, a very pious Jew. As he adjusted me, we would talk about our relationship with God, our prayer and how we experienced spiritual growth.

Reassigned from south Dade, my Jewish connections once again became sporadic. Dr. Cohen's was the first and last home where I celebrated Passover until this year.

I was reassigned to Weston 2 ½ years ago and soon was at the first "Clergy Lunch Bunch" sponsored by the city. The first smiling face and extended hand was that of Rabbi **Norman Lipson**. With Rabbi



Edwards

experience thus far has been Seder with the Lipsons.

Last year, I happened to call Norm while he was cooking for the Seder and I got an impromptu invitation that I could not accept. But, not being one to miss any meals, I took the rain check for this year.

Rabbi Lipson and his lovely wife, **Soshi**, are gracious hosts, and their home was filled with guests, including some of their daughters' Catholic schoolmates. The company and conversation were engaging, the Haggadah both moving and fun and the food was to die for!

Being with the Lipsons and their family and friends on Passover gave me the opportunity to experience with the older children of Abraham that which is foundational to my faith and worship. On Holy Thursday, as we commemorate the gift of the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, our first scripture is the Exodus passage that commands the Passover supper.

On Holy Saturday during the night vigil of the Lord's Resurrection, we read three passages from the Torah — the creation of the world, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, and the passage through the Red Sea — as well as

Lipson, I have begun a friendship that is a blessing to me here in Weston. We have begun to connect our congregations in some educational and conversational efforts. But for me, the best

four passages from the Hebrew prophets. After each reading, we sing one of King David's Psalms.

In Greek and Latin we call this Easter feast *Pascha*, the Greek translation of *Pesach* or Passover. In the Slavic languages of my grandparents, the name is *Vel'ka Noc*, or "The Great Night." This is a reference to both the night when the angel of death passed over the Hebrew homes and the night when the Hebrews passed over the Red Sea, escaping death and coming into freedom and nationhood.

There was only one difficult moment at this Seder, the same difficulty I had experienced years ago at Dr. Cohen's. It was the explanation of the open door for Elijah, which has its origins as a caution against the Passover persecutions inflicted upon the Jews by European Catholics.

It was a very painful moment for me and also a puzzling one. These Passover roots of our own experience . . . were in place in our liturgy at the time of the pogroms. I do not understand how my fellow Catholics could know these texts and act as they did.

I cannot change the past. But I can shape my future and that of the people entrusted to me. I intend to get myself invited to Seder every year. (I don't think that's a problem as long as Rabbi Lipson is my neighbor!) And I will make certain that our parishioners will find the ways and means to know and associate with the older children of Abraham, our father in faith.

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