

DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

Passionate points of view

Religious leaders, congregants discuss
The Passion of the Christ.

BY MARCIA FREIDENREICH
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The city of Weston is rich in cultural diversity and home to people of many different religions.

To help understand each other's points of view, religious leaders and congregants of several area houses of worship recently hosted dialogues to discuss Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of the Christ*.

Members of Temple Dor Dorim and St. Katharine Drexel Catholic Church met at the temple for a discussion, followed several weeks later by a gathering of congregants of St. Paul Lutheran Church and members of Temple B'Nai Aviv.

Rabbi **Norman Lipson** of Dor Dorim and Father **Paul Edwards** of St. Katharine Drexel led the discussion. The meeting was conducted to address growing concerns among area Jews that the movie and its similarities to passion plays of the past would cause a surge in anti-Semitism.

Lipson and Edwards agreed that the intent of the movie was not anti-Semitic. However, Lipson said the negative portrayal of Jewish characters in the movie was potentially inflammatory, and in that regard, Gibson had acted irresponsibly.

Pastor **Tim Hartner** of St. Paul Lutheran and Rabbi **Samuel Kieffer** of B'Nai Aviv led the discussion at St. Paul.

"The emphasis for us is the humanity of Jesus," Hartner said of the movie. "In his death, he becomes the ultimate victim. In his death he was alone, the forsaken one. He became sin for us so that we could become like him through his death. He becomes the ultimate sufferer for us.

"For many Jewish people, the movie is a reminder of some very dark periods of history, when their people were persecuted and killed after passion plays, especially during the Middle Ages."

"We're not here to debate or convince each other, but to share ideas," Kieffer said. "Mel Gibson had chutzpah, a lot of nerve, when he made this movie. Jews in general are deeply concerned about the effects

of this movie, not so much about what might happen here, but in other countries where outbreaks of anti-Semitism happen. The history of passion plays has often led to persecution of the Jews.

"The four different Gospels portray Jews in vastly different ways. In the movie, the Jews who were against Jesus were portrayed by actors with stereotypical and grotesque features such as hook noses. The Jews that were sympathetic to Jesus in the movie were played by handsome actors with a more 'normal' look. We ask, why was the movie cast in this way?"

The movie also generated debate among audience members. "The fact that we are all here having a dialogue is proof that God is involved in having this movie

"The fact that we are all here having a dialogue is proof that God is involved in having this movie released."

AL SOSA
PEMBROKE PINES

released," said **Al Sosa** of Pembroke Pines. "When I saw the movie, I was reminded of how much love God has for us all. Christ said, 'I take my life and give it up freely.' If there are people who come out of this movie with anti-Semitism, they were never Christians to begin with."

"The extra violence in the movie angered me," said **Pauline Yonts** of Pembroke Pines, a Presbyterian. "Jesus suffered enough; why add to it? It also angered me that the movie wasn't accurate. There were things added that never appeared in any of the Gospels."

Some people were bothered by the commercialism surrounding the movie, noting that people can go to a Web site sponsored by Gibson and buy replicas of crucifixion nails, with proceeds going to Gibson's project to build a church.

Overall, the participants in the two events were happy with the results.

"I thought it was wonderful," Hartner said after the discussion at St. Paul Lutheran. "People spoke from their hearts and convincingly from their own religious perspective and from a caring perspective."

"I think it was important for everyone to get together and discuss," said **Jon Adonilo**, 16, of Weston, a member of Temple B'Nai Aviv. "Through this we can cope with our different points of view."