



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Committee for Catholic Jewish Relations

Passover (Seder) Guidelines for Parishes

In recent years the custom has grown in many parishes to hold a Passover Seder event as part of the preparation for Easter. The Committee for Catholic- Jewish Relations has become concerned about this trend as the Seder is essentially a Jewish ritual. The word 'seder' means 'order' and refers to the service at home which includes both ritual and a meal. The following guidelines are therefore offered to help those organising such an event so that it will be sensitive to our relations with the Jewish community, respectful to Jewish observance and consistent with the teaching of the Church.

It is recognised that there is great value in experiencing a demonstration Seder. Priests, teachers and catechists also hope that such an event will help people understand the Jewish context of the Eucharistic Liturgy. There is a danger, however, that both the Jewish Seder and the Christian Eucharist will be misunderstood unless great care is taken with the preparation of the event.

1. The Jewish Passover (Seder) is not just something that belongs to the distant past which has been replaced by the Eucharist, but is a major feature of Jewish observance today. In fact the Seder and the Eucharist are two entirely distinct and independent developments since the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE (AD). Although the Eucharist partly developed from the context of a Passover according to the synoptic gospels, the present day Seder is not a replica of the Last Supper.

2. The rite of the Seder should not be altered by adding Christian prayers or New Testament readings. Neither should it be turned into a Eucharist. Such mergings show a lack of respect for both Christian and Jewish traditions.

3. If a Seder is being planned, parishes should, if possible, ask a rabbi or an observant Jew to conduct it. A preparatory talk from someone conversant with the Jewish tradition can be very helpful.

4. On the other hand, if an authentic Jewish ritual is not being used, or if a parish meal is being held to mark the ending of the season of Lent or the beginning of the Easter Triduum on Holy Thursday, the meal should be called by another name e.g. an Agape, which means 'love feast'. It is inadvisable to hold a Seder during Holy Week, particularly on Holy Thursday.

The Committee for Catholic-Jewish Relations draws attention to the Committee's pamphlet Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations (CTS, 1994) where there is a fuller treatment of the topic, and to the leaflet Christians and the Passover Meal. That, together with an outline of the Seder, available in 'The Passover. Last Supper and the Eucharist' are published by the Christian-Jewish Resources and Library at the Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter 34 Chepstow Villas. London W11 2QZ, tel. 020 77273597

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