

# Ithaca parish, temple celebrate common heritage at Seder

## More than 200 people welcomed at ritual meal

By Teresa A. Parsons

In Jewish tradition, the Seder is a family celebration of Passover's ritual and history.

Recognizing that Catholic tradition is rooted in Jewish tradition, parishioners at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Ithaca anticipated Passover by a few days, celebrating the Seder meal on Thursday evening, April 9.

The "family" they gathered, however, stretched beyond even parish boundaries to include more than 200 people from neighboring churches and the Ithaca community.

Last Thursday was not the first time parishioners at St. Catherine's had celebrated the ritual Passover meal, but it was the first such occasion to include a local Jewish rabbi and members of his congregation.

Thursday was likewise a first for Rabbi Scott Glass of Ithaca's Temple Beth El, who led the group through the Seder songs, readings and blessings in both Hebrew and English.

"This is the first time I've done this with the Catholic community," he said. "I think it's a good idea, because it fosters understanding and gives people a better idea of what their neighbors practice as part of their

faith."

Passover and the Seder are also a part of Catholics' heritage, noted Michael Stanley, who organized the event along with members of St. Catherine's religious-education committee.

"Jesus celebrated Passover with a Seder meal," he said. "Our heritage is Jewish, and I think it is important for us to be in touch with our own history and traditions."

Jewish families marked the beginning of Passover on April 14 this year. The eight-day celebration commemorates the Israelites' exodus from slavery in Egypt to freedom. As part of the celebration, families gather for the Seder, a ritual meal that combines special symbolic foods with prayers, blessings, songs and narrative readings from the Haggadah.

In particular, the Haggadah related the Old Testament story of how God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, and how God broke down the Egyptian Pharaoh's intransigence by sending a series of 10 plagues, culminating with the death of Egypt's first-born sons.

Traditionally at Passover, Jews sacrificed an unblemished male lamb at the temple. The lamb was then roasted and served along with bitter herbs and unleavened bread, to recall the hardships of slavery and the haste with which their ancestors fled from Egypt.

At contemporary Jewish Seders, lamb is



not always served as the main course, but is often represented by a bone. The bone is usually placed on a special Seder plate, along with other symbolic foods.

In addition to unleavened bread and bitter herbs (usually horseradish), such green vegetables as parsley or celery are served as a reminder of spring and the rebirth of hope. Before they are eaten, these vegetables are dipped in salt water — a reminder of the

tears shed by the Israelites while they were slaves.

Haroset, a mixture of chopped apples, nuts, cinnamon and red wine, represents the mortar the Israelites were forced to make for Egyptian building projects. A roasted egg recalls the sacrifices offered at the temple in earlier times.

Four cups of wine, a symbol of joy, are poured throughout the meal. They represent God's four promises of salvation. A fifth cup of wine is placed on the Seder table for the prophet Elijah, whom the Jews believe to be the forerunner of the Messiah.

Most Jewish people today celebrate the Seder at home with small, intimate family gatherings that last long into the night, according to Jaime and Sue Hecht, two of nearly one dozen Temple Beth El worshippers who participated in St. Catherine's Seder.

"Passover is probably the most widely celebrated of all the rituals," Jaime Hecht said. "Kids come home, and friends come over. If you can't come home, you go to someone else's house."

Sharing a table with the Hechts were Dick and Betty Oliver, parishioners at St. Catherine's. Although the Olivers struggled over Hebrew pronunciations, hospitality is a language they well understand.

Last week, Betty Oliver noted, their granddaughter celebrated the Seder at a friend's house. On Easter Sunday, her friend will celebrate with the Olivers.

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And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they were saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?' And

looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back; for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, 'Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here'...

Mark 16: 1-6

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