



Joan Pearson, left, and Father Daniel Tormey, sit in prayer at the Garden of Gethsemane, Mount of Olives, in Jerusalem, Israel.

members who drafted the historic 1996 Rochester Agreement — a formal covenant between Rochester's Catholic and Jewish communities inspired by the 1993 Basic Accord between the Vatican and State of Israel, in which the Vatican and Israel vowed to combat all forms of anti-Semitism, racism and religious intolerance.

The Rochester Agreement was so significant, in fact, the Rev. J. Paul Womack, president of the Greater Rochester Community of Churches, recently said, "I think it is a very important statement and I wonder if GRCC ought to have something similar in place."

The agreement set up a process to assure continuing interaction, particularly between interfaith groups with similar interests — social workers, clergy and teachers. They regularly meet and share ideas, and have begun co-sponsoring programs.

"Part of the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue is to understand others so that we can live together peacefully," Deacon McNulty stated. "This does not mean giving up what we believe so that we agree with anything for the sake of no argument. It does mean being able to listen to others who believe differently and giving them respect as a believing person. We should know them as a son or daughter of a loving God."

Common agreements have emerged in the church since Vatican II and the various documents, statements, guidelines. As noted by Father John Pawlikowski, OSM, of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago they are:

- Christ did not invalidate the Jewish faith perspective. "God does not repent of the gifts he makes nor of the calls he issues," the council stated.
- Christianity is neither superior to nor the fulfillment of Judaism.
- The Sinai covenant is as crucial to Christian faith expression as the covenant in Christ.
- Christianity needs to reincorporate dimensions from its original Jewish context.

Eugene Fisher, director of Catholic-Jewish relations for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops explained in the introduction of the 1993 book *Interwoven Destinies* that two Jewish sects that would profoundly affect history emerged out of a "maelstrom of events, religious and civil movements, uprisings and tragedies" in the backwaters of the Roman Empire in the first century. One was rabbinic Judaism, the other, Christianity.

Neither one, he wrote, emerged as they are known today. The Nicene Creed that made a precise statement of Christian faith was three centuries away. The Mishna portion of the Talmud wouldn't be set down until the end of the second century and the rest of the Talmud, Jewish civil and religious law, until much later. There was no immediate split of the two sects, he and others noted. As late as the ninth century bishops still complained Christians preferred the blessings of rabbis on their homes and fields.

Also, Father Brennan observed, the first dozen or so bishops of Jerusalem were described as Jews.

### Future talks

Rabbi Katz noted that scholars now are saying that in order to understand their Jewish and Christian evolution, participants in interfaith Bible studies would do well to look at Christian Scripture, not just Hebrew Scripture.



Tabgha, on Sea of Galilee shore, inspires various groups to worship Aug. 6. Tabgha is where Jesus multiplied the fish and the loaves.

"That would be a nice step when we are able to do it in Rochester," he said, "to look at Christian Scripture and what does it say about early Judaism ... It is going to be harder for the Jewish community to absorb that idea than it has been for the Christian community to absorb the idea that we can study the Hebrew Scripture together."

Meanwhile, the diocese's recently-regenerated Commission for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, to begin meeting this fall, will help represent the church on ecumenical and interreligious affairs around the diocese.

While it seems clear in the Gospels we are to "go forth and teach all nations," Deacon McNulty said, some people have put more emphasis on converting people than on the overall teachings of Christ.

"Nothing I do will guarantee salvation to anyone. It is only the work of God," he said.

"If the person is through my actions or through the action of the church or group of people encountering the risen Lord, if they lead faithful lives to whatever tradition they are, haven't they come to the Father through the Lord?"

"We get hung up on it. We cannot see the goodness of

what God is doing in them ... The most I can do is be the risen Lord, be the risen presence."

Bishop Clark said, "We are Roman Catholics and have within our call from the Lord to love our neighbors as ourselves."

"The Vatican Council reminded us there is truth in not just the Roman Catholic faith, but there is truth to be found in other faiths as well."

He said he hoped interfaith Catholics would see in his decision to join the interfaith mission to Israel a call to a similar commitment.

"Who knows how many conversations about these issues are taking place in our general area," he said. "I can be sure there are all kinds of conversations and that's wonderful, that's why we do things like this."

"When you do something like this, you do so with intent of stimulating discussion in the wider community, not just about Jewish-Christian relations necessarily, though that's its purpose. You have to know that people in their own ingenious ways will expand the focus into general human relations and that's all to the good. These things have a way of doing that that you can't always measure and quantify the impact."

Continued on next page

## Talks open to all

Upcoming events where Christians and Jews can share conversation and study, open to anyone interested include:

• Monday, Sept. 14, 12:10-12:50 p.m. — Jewish-Christian Dialogue at the Dugan Center, St. Mary's Church, 15 St. Mary's Place, Rochester. This will continue the first Monday of every month thereafter. Co-sponsored by the church and the Commission on Christian and Jewish Relations, the dialogue and its various participants have been meeting for 10 years.

"We have reached a very comfortable level of conversation, trust and knowledge about one another," said Neil Jaschik, one of the group's planners, explaining that members have read books and gone to plays together. "The next challenge is to keep this going, and to replicate it in another setting."

He added he hopes that perhaps a church and synagogue will sponsor such a group in the suburbs, such as Greece or Chili.

• Wednesday, Sept. 9, noon-1:10 p.m. — The Jewish Community Federation of Greater Rochester, 441 East Ave., Rochester, will begin hosting an interfaith "book review" of Hebrew Scriptures by community presenters. It will continue at noon the second Wednesday of each month September-June. The first talk, on the Psalms, will be by Father Joseph Brennan and Rabbi Shaya Killmick of Congregation Beth Shalom. Some 60-100 community residents have been attending these meetings, which already have featured the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, or Old Testament. The sponsor is the Commission on Christian Jewish Relations.