



## **THE PASSOVER SEDER – A JEWISH CELEBRATION**

This document is prepared by the Catholic/Jewish Subcommittee of the Brisbane Archdiocesan Commission for Ecumenism and Interfaith Relations to assist teachers in schools and parish committees to reflect on the appropriateness of celebrating the Jewish Passover ritual in a Christian context.

The document is based on an article released by SIDIC (Rome, 1995) which acknowledges the practice among Christian communities of celebrating a Jewish Passover Meal as a means of better understanding the Christian Paschal celebration. Guidelines are offered to Christian communities to avoid possible ambiguity and to ensure respect for the living ritual of another religious tradition.

The release of the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate- The Declaration of the Relations of the Catholic Church to non-Christian Religions* in 1965 heralded a new era of understanding between people of the Roman Catholic faith and followers of other faith traditions. In the light of the Roman Catholic Church's efforts towards reconciliation and friendship with people of the Jewish faith, teachers and parish committees are asked to reflect on the appropriateness of celebrating a Jewish Passover Seder in a Christian context.

Christians are encouraged to acknowledge that while Christianity emerged from within Judaism, the Jewish religion is a unique and vital living religion. There are essential differences between the two traditions, which must be respected. One such difference is the celebration of the Passover Seder and the Eucharist. The Eucharist commemorates the Last Supper, which Jesus celebrated with his disciples. Even if the Last Supper was celebrated in the context of a Passover Meal it would not have followed the same format as that of the present Jewish Passover Seder.

Both the Passover and the Eucharist are celebrations of remembrance. The Jewish people remember and celebrate the liberation event of the Exodus each Passover while the Eucharist provides Christians with a time to remember the liberation they associate with the death and resurrection of Jesus. Each of these rituals has developed in its own unique way over the centuries within its particular religious tradition. As the SIDIC document states 'It is ambiguous to speak of a Christian Seder. It should be avoided as it is historically incorrect.' (1995: p2)

The following points for reflection are offered with regard to the preparation of celebrations for Holy Week.

- 1 The Passover Seder is a Jewish celebration.
- 2 The study of the Passover is best situated within the academic framework of the study of Judaism. As the SIDIC document states ‘Christians can approach the Passover Seder alone or in groups and study its structure, read the text, explain the rites with the help of a competent person sensitive to Judaism. (1995: p3)
- 3 Christians may wish to attend a Jewish Passover meal when invited by Jewish friends. As stated in the notes on *Nostra Aetate* ‘One would then truly be guest of the Jewish tradition and faith by which the Church is linked by its very identity.’ (Nostra Aetate – notes 12)

In the spirit of mutual respect and understanding for the religious traditions of other people, every care needs to be taken not to appropriate the Passover ritual which rightfully belongs to the Jewish people.

Catholic/Jewish Subcommittee  
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