

OFFICE FOR ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS
ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA



NEWSLETTER FOR PARISH ECUMENICAL REPRESENTATIVES
March, 2008

Our celebration of Easter this year on March 23 is only one day later than the earliest possible date it can be celebrated. Easter can never occur before March 22 or later than April 25 according to the Gregorian calendar. For our Orthodox friends who still use the Julian calendar, Easter is April 27. This is a year in which the celebration of Easter between East and West are separated by more than one month. Similarly, our Jewish friends' celebration of Passover, which is based on a lunar calendar, takes place on April 20-26, much later than our Holy Week.

Our Jewish friends celebrate in Passover the passage from slavery to freedom found in the book of Exodus in the Bible. The *Haggadah*, or *telling* of the Passover story, reminds Jews that in every generation they should see themselves as if they personally had been taken out of slavery to freedom. The Passover Seder powerfully reminds Jews of their past, and the celebration of Passover with the *Haggadah* is a fulfillment of the scriptural commandment to each Jew to "tell your son" about their liberation from slavery in Egypt, as described in the book of Exodus.

As Catholics, we are aware of the recent tension between Catholics and Jews over the possibility that the Tridentine Rite for Good Friday can now be used. Our Jewish friends have expressed concern over the Good Friday petition for the Jews in the old rite. Pope Benedict has recently approved a new version of that petition for the churches that will celebrate the Triduum in the Tridentine form. The change helped a great deal, but still contains language that some Jews find objectionable. This concern is something of which we should be aware and sensitive. In addition we should be aware of Cardinal Kasper's very clear explanation of the change made by our Holy Father. (<http://www.vaticanradio.org/en1/Articolo.asp?c=185009>) The USCCB has a helpful resource on this topic, entitled: *God's Mercy Endures Forever: Guidelines on the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Preaching*. It is available in booklet form through the USCCB or free on line at: <http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/godsmercy.shtml>.

May the joy of this sacred season lead us all to work ever more fervently for interreligious understanding and Christian unity.

Fr. Gregory J. Fairbanks

Bucks County Vicariate

Chalfont-New Britain Ministerium

At noon on Good Friday, March 21st, six different Christian denominations will join together with their clergy and combined choirs as they have for decades in recognition of their common belief. This year's service will be hosted by Rev. Msgr. James P. McCoy at St. Jude Catholic Church in Chalfont.

Bristol Ministerium

Good Friday Stations of the Cross, involving all the congregations in the Borough, will begin at noon at the Church of the Nazarene on Wilson Avenue. The participants will stop for brief devotions at ten different churches in the area, including St. Ann and St. Mark Catholic churches.

Hatboro-Warminster Community Lenten Services

“Hungers of the Human Heart” – every Wednesday at 7:30 PM, reception following.
February 13 “Seeking God” at Lehman UMC Church, Hatboro, Rev. Angelo Citino
February 20 “Seeking Wholeness” at Nativity Catholic Church, Warminster
February 27 “Seeking Community” at St. John’s Lutheran Church, Hatboro
March 5 “Seeking Purpose” at United Church of Christ, Warminster
March 12 “Seeking to be Sought” at Church of the Advent, Hatboro
Community Good Friday Service – Hatboro Baptist Church, March 21, noon to 3 PM

Northampton, Southampton, Wrightstown Ministerium

Good Friday Ecumenical Stations of the Cross will be hosted this year by St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church, 654 Hatboro Road, Richboro, PA 18954 beginning at noon. There will be a combined choir consisting of four of the seven participating congregations.

Taize Ecumenical Prayer Service

Sunday, April 13, 5:30 PM at First Presbyterian Church of Morrisville, 771 N. Pennsylvania Avenue, Morrisville, PA 19067. For information call 215-295-4191.

Lower Bucks Center for Church and Community

Amazing Grace - 18th Annual Festival of Music – Sunday, April 27, 3:00 PM
A varied group of choirs and musical ensembles from twelve churches in the area, including the Children’s Choir of St. Bede Catholic Church, Praising Hands Signing Choir, the Quaker Singers and the bell choir of Northminster Presbyterian Church. The host church will be the North and Southampton Reformed Church, 1380 Bristol Road in Southampton. For information call Belinda Ash, 215-860-3330.

Chester County Vicariate

As a result of a program held last summer at SS. Simon and Jude Parish, **Encountering Other Faiths**, members of five parishes in the surrounding area have continued to meet regularly in each others' homes to explore interfaith understanding in greater depth. At their monthly meetings, the group has been viewing and discussing a DVD series, *The Heart of Islam from a Franciscan Perspective*.

Delaware County Vicariate

Marple-Newtown Clergy Association

An interfaith service was held at St. Pius X Church in Broomall, an annual event in support of the Life Center of Eastern Delaware County, a shelter in Upper Darby. The speaker for the event was Rabbi Meryl Crean of Martins Run.

A service marking the **World Day of Prayer** was held on March 7 at 7:30 PM at St. Michael Episcopal Church in Yeadon for Churches in the Yeadon area.

Montgomery County Vicariate

Plymouth/Whitemarsh Ministerium – World Day of Prayer Service

March 7 at noon, Epiphany of Our Lord Church.

One hundred seventy countries celebrate the World Day of Prayer each year, and a different country writes the prayer service. This year the women of Guyana in South America developed the theme, "God's Wisdom Provides New Understanding" to express the awesomeness of God's creation and our responsibility to care for it. Sister Andre Dembowski, RSM, a former missionary to Guyana, will speak at this event, and a good-will offering will be sent to a mission in Guyana that serves the needs of women and children. Refreshments will follow in the Parish Center.

Philadelphia North Vicariate

Bustleton Ministerium – Good Friday Ecumenical Service – March 21 at noon
Calvary Lutheran, 9610 Avenue, Philadelphia, 19115

Philadelphia South Vicariate

Walking God's Paths – a dialogue series designed to encourage the development of Jewish-Christian relations and understanding continues on Wednesday evenings:
February 27 at Old Pine Presbyterian Church – *Common Texts, Different Scriptures*
March 12 at Old St. Joseph's Catholic Church – *Season of Freedom, Season of Rebirth*
March 26 at Old Pine Presbyterian Church – *Metaphors for a New Relationship*
April 9 at Old St. Joseph's Church – *Mending Relationships, Mending the World*

Recent Ecumenical Dialogues

BAPTIST – CATHOLIC RELATIONS

The second meeting of the second phase of the International Baptist-Catholic conversations took place in Rome, December 2-8, 2007. The Baptist World Alliance, which sends the Baptist participants, represents some 40,000,000 baptized adherents (more than 100,000,000 when counting family members and children) throughout the world. Their headquarters are in Falls Church, Virginia.

These conversations have as their general theme *The Word of God in the Life of the Church: Scripture, Tradition and Koinonia*. Under this theme, the conversations are dealing with issues which have long been controversial between Baptists and Catholics. At the first meeting in 2006 the Commission studied the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, finding some elements of convergence. However, while Vatican II's Constitution *Dei Verbum* (DV) is well respected by many Baptists, a phrase in DV9 which says that "Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal feelings of devotion and reverence," seems to Baptists that not enough priority is given by Catholics to Scripture. As a result, this year's meeting continued that discussion, hearing papers analyzing that phrase. Meeting in Rome, the joint commission was received in audience by Pope Benedict XVI.

COMING EVENTS

Feast of Passover, April 20

We suggest that parishes which have a synagogue in their area send Passover greetings to them, as Cardinal Rigali will do for the Jewish Community in the Greater Philadelphia area at the time. The Cardinal's letter will be printed in the *Catholic Standard and Times*.

Yizkor

The annual Memorial Ceremony for the Six Million Jewish Martyrs of the Holocaust will take place on Sunday, May 4 at 1:00 PM at 16th Street and the Parkway. In case of rain it will be held at Rodeph Shalom, 615 North Broad Street. The theme of this year's program is "*As the Branches of This Tree, So the Branches of Our People: Remember the Children.*"

Pauline Year

The Pauline Year, called by Benedict XVI, will run from June 28, 2008 to June 29, 2009 to commemorate the second millennium of the birth of St. Paul. The year's activities aim to revitalize faith and encourage prayer and work for Christian unity through a rereading of the letters of St. Paul. A web site detailing events for the Pauline year will soon be available in English.

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Interfaith Relations

Catholic-Muslim Forum to be held in November

In light of the open letter, “*A Common Word Between Us*,” signed by 138 Muslim scholars last October, and of the Pope’s response through the Cardinal Secretary of State, a delegation of five signers of that letter met with five representatives of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in the Vatican on March 4-5, 2008.

A communiqué signed on March 5 by the heads of the two delegations states that “in order to further develop Catholic-Muslim dialogue, the participants agreed to establish the ‘Catholic- Muslim Forum’ and to organize the first seminar of the forum in Rome 4 to 6 November 2008.” That meeting will be attended by 24 religious leaders and scholars from each side. The theme will be “Love of God, Love of Neighbor” and the sub-themes, “Theological and Spiritual Foundations” and “Human Dignity and Mutual Respect.” The seminar will conclude with a public session on November 6 and the participants will be received by Pope Benedict XVI.

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Activities of Office Staff

December 1 – Father Fairbanks and Sister Josephine Kase presented a workshop on ecumenical and interreligious relations to the candidates for ordination to the permanent diaconate in 2008.

January 29-February 4 – Father Fairbanks participated in an Interfaith Mission to Israel sponsored by the Jewish Community Relations Council. See the *Catholic Standard and Times* for Fr. Fairbanks’ reflections on the trip.

February 5 – Sister Josephine addressed a class at the Jewish Community High School at Gratz College on questions of their interest.

February 19 – Sister Josephine attended an interfaith memorial service at Congregation Rodeph Shalom for the victims of the shootings at Northern Illinois University.

February 23-March 4 – Father Fairbanks visited Jordan and Egypt as part of the final regional component of a program sponsored by the local International Visitors Council in conjunction with the US State Department, entitled “Islam: Scholarship and Practice in the US.” See the *Catholic Standard and Times* for Fr. Fairbanks’ reflections on the trip.

February 27 – Sister Josephine visited a Jewish Community High School class at Ohev Shalom in Richboro to answer their questions about Christianity.

March 4, 5, 12 – Sister Josephine assisted in coordinating the annual Youth Symposium on the Holocaust at St. Joseph’s, LaSalle and West Chester Universities.

March 6 – Father Fairbanks and Sister Josephine hosted the annual Seminary Outreach Program at St. Charles Seminary. This included students from St. Charles, Lutheran, Palmer (Eastern Baptist) and Westminster Seminaries and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

Presenter: Rev. Msgr. Michael Magee, St. Charles Seminary

Topic: How We Understand Our Sacred Scriptures As God’s Revelation

April 14 to 17 – Father Fairbanks and Sister Josephine will attend the annual National Workshop on Christian Unity in Chicago, Illinois.

April 18 – Sister Josephine Kase will attend the ecumenical meeting with His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI at St. Joseph Parish Church in New York City. The theme for the meeting is “Christ, Our Hope for Unity.”

April 23-24 – Father Fairbanks will participate in the East Coast Muslim-Catholic Dialogue in Washington, DC and will present a paper on “Teaching About Islam in Seminary Curriculum.”

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