

## Differing traditions but shared passions

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**HERALD NEWS EDITORIAL**

Spring is a time of religious rebirth and redemption. It is an appropriate time to seek common ground and understanding.

That is why we applaud the efforts of a group of Jews, Muslims and Christians who joined together to celebrate an interfaith seder. For a time, this group of individuals affirmed a common religious ancestry and condemned escalating violence in the Middle East.

The first night of the Jewish observance of Passover was at sundown on Monday during the Christian holy week, which started with Palm Sunday and ends with Easter. In addition to religious significance, the two holidays follow the March 21 beginning of spring, a time when nature is reborn.

The name Passover comes from the night of the 10th plague when, by tradition, the angel of death saw the blood of the slaughtered lamb on the doorposts of the homes of Jews. Those homes were passed over and the first born child was allowed to live.

Passover marks the ancient Hebrews' flight from slavery in Egypt. Jews plan a symbolic meal, called a seder, to tell the story of the prophet Moses who led the Hebrews out of bondage. Moses declared, "Let my people go" to the Egyptian pharaoh.

It is an eight-day observance that coincides this year with the Christian holy week.

In some languages, with the exception of English, German and some Slavic languages, the name Easter is derived from Pesach, the Hebrew name of Passover. Easter depends on Passover for much of its symbolic meaning. The Last Supper shared by Jesus and his 12 disciples before his Crucifixion on Good Friday is generally thought of as a Passover seder.

The week starts with Palm Sunday and the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. It ends the following Sunday with the Resurrection of the crucified Jesus.

Starting in 2005 a new and encouraging tradition started in North Jersey. On Palm Sunday of that year, area Jews, Muslims and Christians joined together for an interfaith seder.

More than a hundred people attended the event at the Congregation Beth Shalom in Pompton Lakes. Joining members of the conservative Jewish congregation were members of the Islamic Center of Passaic County in Paterson, Christ Episcopal Church in Pompton Lakes and St. Luke's Episcopal Church in the Warren County town of Hope.

The event, in its third year, is organized by Imam Mohammad Qatanani, a native of Palestine, who heads the Paterson mosque; Rabbi David Senter, Beth Shalom's leader; and the Rev. William Potter of St. Luke's. After the attacks of Sept. 11, Potter contacted a Muslim organization seeking a quote from the Quran. That led to a dialogue that evolved into the interfaith seder.

This exercise in understanding will not resolve long-standing differences in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, it can foster good will among religious leaders of different faiths in North Jersey. This is a positive step, and a hopeful sign that perhaps this sort of religious empathy can be spread beyond New Jersey to other parts of the world.