

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

Let's explore with others as we broaden our faith

Note: This column is part of an ongoing effort to build interfaith understanding in Michigan. It is coordinated by Douglas Kindschi, director of the Kaufman Interfaith Institute at Grand Valley State University.

By Douglas Kindschi

Last week, we heard a Jewish perspective on interfaith understanding in a column by Sheldon J. Kopperl. It reminded me of my first serious encounter with another faith tradition



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many years ago while in graduate school. My professor of Old Testament introduced us to a Jewish family who invited us to their home to celebrate the Seder with them.

As we proceeded through the Seder meal, which marks the beginning of the Jewish holiday of Passover, it became clear to me for the first time that this was the basis of my

own Christian experience of Communion or Eucharist. In the Seder ritual, the breaking of the matzo bread and the drinking of the wine are what Christians do when celebrating the Eucharist. What we call the "Last Supper" was instituted by Jesus at the Passover meal he celebrated with his disciples in Jerusalem. What for me had been a Christian practice now was clearly put into perspective as having its roots in the Seder.

All four Gospel writers make it clear it was this

Passover meal that was the occasion of the Christian bread and wine ritual. It should have been clear to me as well, but my own limited understanding kept me from this broader perspective.

During our Year of Interfaith Understanding in 2012, there were at least three occasions in which the Seder meal was celebrated in a setting that invited persons from other faith traditions to participate.

As I became more knowledgeable in my own understanding, I began to see more

clearly why the Apostle Paul refers to Christians as the adopted children, not the original children of God. Furthermore, he used the image of being grafted into the vine to understand the role of the early gentile community's relationship to the Jewish people.

In Romans, Paul refers to himself as an apostle to the gentiles but warns that those grafted on should not boast, since "it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you." (Romans 11: 18) He sees a larger picture than

what my limited understanding was in those early years and he marvels at the mystery and mercy of God. Toward the end of that chapter, he exclaims about the wisdom and knowledge of God and quotes Isaiah, "For who has known the mind of the Lord?"

Paul's exhortation is a call for humility as we seek a broader understanding. The more I interact in with others in our interfaith understanding project, the more my own faith is deepened. We all have much to learn together.

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