

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

When and how do we celebrate events of Holy Week?

By Douglas Kindschi
Director of the Kaufman Interfaith Institute

For Christians, this period between Palm Sunday and Easter is called Holy Week. Between these two special Sundays, we find Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. In most years, Easter is not celebrated in the West on the same date as it is by the Eastern Orthodox Church, which uses the Julian calendar rather than the Gregorian.

According to the Christian Scriptures, and as recorded by all four Gospels, this was the



Kindschi

week Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples. But here again, we have a calendar issue, since the Jewish community uses a lunar calendar that doesn't always agree with the Gregorian calendar. This, however, is one of those years when all three calendars agree. Passover began Monday at sundown, and the Eastern and the Western churches will celebrate Easter

this Sunday.

Unfortunately, it is not only calendars that often are in conflict at this time of year. There is a history in Christian communities of blaming the Jews for the death of Jesus. A friend of mine tells how, as a young girl in school, her classmates would call her "Christ killer," a term which has a long history traceable to the Roman emperor Constantine in the fourth century. The concept even found its way into the Catholic liturgy of Good Friday where, until the Second Vatican Council in 1962-65, the Mass included

prayer for the "perfidious Jews," a term often defined as treacherous or faithless. A major turning point in church doctrine was proclaimed by Pope Paul VI in 1965 in the "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," known as "Nostra Aetate."

As next year, we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of this most significant declaration, it is good to be reminded of the impact of this document on how Christians should relate to a world of religious diversity. "Nostra Aetate" addresses the whole

human race and its various religions, specifically discussing Hinduism and Buddhism in a call for "dialogue and collaboration ... with prudence and love." Islam is noted for its recognition of Jesus as an honored prophet, and the declaration calls for all to "work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve, as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind, social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom."

The declaration states the death of Christ "cannot be charged against all the Jews,

without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today." It notes the shared heritage of the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets, as well as the shared revelation of the Old Testament and the people "with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant."

As we Christians observe our Holy Week, let it not be a time of superiority, but a time of repentance, thankfulness and humility. In its conclusion, "Nostra Aetate" quotes, "He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8).
Email: interfaith@gvsu.edu