

# **Raising consciousness of Judaism in your church**

**... and why it matters**

**A workshop outline and resource guide devised for  
Christian congregation and groups**

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## Welcome and Introduction...

Welcome to this study/reflection activity. The link between Judaism and Christianity is both historic and unique. This study will introduce you to material and readings that point to the significance of this relationship. I hope you are helped and encouraged by your conversation together.

1. There is much to celebrate in the richness of both the connection and the diversity to be found in the two traditions. One of the goals of the study is that it will strengthen the understanding and friendship between the Jewish and Christian communities.

2. In South Australia the Jewish community is small by comparison with the Eastern States with only two Synagogue congregations. However, they have a strong interest in inter-faith dialogue with the Christian community. The South Australian Council of Christians and Jews was formed as an inter-faith dialogue group in 1995.

3. We hope you will be able to gather with other friends and members from your congregation, with one of you accepting responsibility to act as leader. Perhaps your minister, priest or pastor will be able to help you form the group. However, the activity plan will work well with just two or three working as a small group.

4. The Workshop is designed as a single introductory study. Each group will need at least one copy of each of the listed resources. It is suggested that each member of a group bring a Bible, and a notebook to record questions, comments, and ideas for any future study.

Planning a follow up session is encouraged. The resources provided, offer both material and ideas for further meetings.

5. The Workshop format could be -

An opening informal activity - give time to sharing personal stories of contacts with Jewish friends or visits to synagogue or family events. (10 min.)

- Step 1 - read through the CCJ(SA) brochure to introduce the CCJ as the inter-faith dialogue group through whom this study is offered. (5 -10 min.)
- Step 2 - a 'show and tell' moment to describe the Resources used or referred to in the study. (10 min.)
- Step 3 - Share the reading and discussion on the 'Six Important Issues'. (45 min.)
- Step 4 - Discuss interest to plan 'follow up' activity. (15 min.)
- Step 5 - Briefly share with each other what you have gained through the study, then Read Psalm 19 as a closing reflection and prayer. (10 min.)

## Opening Activity

- Share personal stories of contacts with Jewish acquaintances and/or visits to a Synagogue or special family occasions. Your stories may be local or from experiences in other places.

### Step 1 Describe the brief history of the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) in South Australia.

- Invite members to share in reading the the Vision, Mission and Objectives statements on the CCJ Brochure. Note that the CCJ Website is listed for access to more information.
- An historical note: In South Australia the CCJ was formed in 1995. It currently comprises representatives of seven Christian denominations (Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Churches of Christ, Lutheran, Russian Orthodox and Uniting) and the two Jewish Synagogues, The Adelaide Hebrew Congregation at Glenside, and Beit Shalom Synagogue at Hackney. A Christian and Jewish representative is elected annually to act as Co-Chairs of the Council.

### Step 2 Describe and show the resources provided.

- ***PATHWAYS TO UNDERSTANDING - A Handbook on Christian-Jewish Relations*** Ed. by Marianne Dacy, published in 1994 by the Victorian Council of Churches.
- ***RIGHTLY EXPLAINING THE WORD OF TRUTH -Jews and Judaism in the New Testament.*** Published 1994 (revised in 2007) by The Council of Christian and Jews (Victoria)

[This important resource provides guidelines that can help preachers, teachers and congregations avoid misinterpreting some key passages in the Gospels and Letters within the New Testament.]

- ***RE-READING PAUL - A fresh look at his attitude to Torah and Judaism*** Published in 1999 by The Council of Christians and Jews (Vic) - Revised 2001
- ***UNDERSTANDING JUDAISM*** - A booklet prepared by the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies, published in 2008 provides brief but helpful detail of the history, faith and practices of the Jewish people.

### Step 3. Reading the paper "Six Important Issues "

- Remind the group again of the points under 'Our Mission' section of the CCJ Vision Statement. They provide the invitation to explore and understand 'each others' faith tradition. In particular read the 5<sup>th</sup>. dot point again.
- Distribute the Issues Paper. The topics introduced here will help group members start the journey of understanding the importance of the relationship between the two faiths.
- Invite members to share the reading of the extracts, and initiate brief discussion and comment. **After each issue** has been explored, **ask the question, "What fresh insight has come to you on this issue?"**

#### **Step 4. Discuss interest in some 'follow up' activity**

- On concluding the reading and discussion of the Six Issues , plan to share the resources used in the session around the members for their individual reading and study. List issues or questions you would like to explore further.
- Discuss the question, ***"What could we do as a congregation to further raise our awareness of modern Judaism and celebrate the things we have in common?"*** - and the idea of visiting a synagogue, or inviting a Rabbi and/or members of a synagogue congregation to your local church.
- Consider inviting members of your congregation (or your congregation through a nominated member) becoming Associate Members of the CCJ so as to be informed about CCJ meetings and special events.

#### **5. Concluding Activity**

- Share briefly around the group what members have gained from the workshop, then read Psalm 19 as a closing reflection and prayer. This is an important scripture in the worship and devotional services of both traditions.

[NB. The resources listed above are available from The Council of Christians and Jews (SA) Tel: 08 8296 0395; email [dhouston@iinet.net.au](mailto:dhouston@iinet.net.au) OR the first three from the The Council of Christians and Jews (Vic) Tel: (03) 9817 3848; email: [ccjvic@bigpond.net.au](mailto:ccjvic@bigpond.net.au) ; and '*Understanding Judaism*' from NSW Jewish Board of Deputies Tel: 02 9360 1600; email: [mail@nswjbd.com](mailto:mail@nswjbd.com) ]

# SIX IMPORTANT ISSUES

## An introduction

It has been said that many Christians are inclined to either acknowledge the connection between Judaism and Christianity but not think very much about it; or, they view it as belonging to an earlier time and not very relevant today. It has also been said now is the time to renew the connection and understand afresh why it matters...

**Invite** your group members to share reading each of the 'Issues' leading into discussion ... after each, **ask the question, "What fresh insight has come to you on this issue?"**

## **1. Christians do have an historic and theologically unique relationship with Judaism.**

Christians and Jews share the rich heritage of the Hebrew Scripture and the belief in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the Law and the Prophets; and a covenantal relationship with the one God and Father of us all. From this we see how Christianity emerged out of Judaism.

A 1985 Report to the Church of Scotland Assembly described the relationship this way , *"...When we approach the Jews we are approaching the people who, under God gave us everything we value most. Gladly, we acknowledge the great debt in the Scriptures, the revelation, the promises and commandments of God, and above all in the person of Jesus himself. It was from the Jewish apostles and Jewish missionaries that the Gentiles first received the faith in which we stand. To be Christian is to be irrevocably linked with the Jewish people."* (p.50 'Pathways to Understanding')

Do we acknowledge our indebtedness sufficiently ? How could we do this? And now the question, **'What fresh insight...?'**

## **2. Jesus was and always remained a Jew.**

Professor Robert Anderson, former Old Testament lecturer at the United Faculty of Theology in Melbourne, and a founding member of CCJ(Vic) said, *"What continues to bind the Christian to the Hebrew Scriptures is the Jewishness of Jesus"*.

In a 1986 Roman Catholic *Report on guidelines for Catechetical Presentation of Jews and Judaism in the New Testament (Pathways to Understanding, p. 51)* we read,

*"Jesus was born, lived and died a Jew of his time. He, his family and all his original disciples followed the laws, traditions and customs of his people. The key concepts of Jesus' teaching, therefore, cannot be understood apart from the Jewish Heritage."*

Can you see the '*laws, traditions and customs of his people*' reflected in 2:41 and Luke 4:16? And, **'What fresh insight...'**

### **3. Jesus regarded the Law (or Torah) as central for himself and his life and teaching.**

In a 1985 Roman Catholic report we read,

*"...there is no doubt that Jesus wished to submit himself to the law (cf. Gal.4:4), that he was circumcised and presented in the Temple like any Jew of his time (cf. Luke 2:21, 22-24), that he was trained in the law's observance. He extolled respect for it (cf. Matt. 5:17-20) and invited obedience to it (cf. Matt. 8:4)*

*(Pathways to Understanding, p 52)*

*"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not the stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished." (Matt. 5 : 17-18)*

Jesus' exploration of aspects of the Law of Moses that follow this passage in verses 21-48 underlines the centrality of the Torah to his life and teaching. [Take a moment to read these verses]

Can you see that the Torah contained a living and continuing relevance for Jesus in these verses? And... **'What fresh insight...'**?

### **4. Understanding Judaism**

*There is a special urgency for Christians to listen, through study and dialogue, to the ways in which Jews understand their history and their traditions, their faith and their obedience "in their terms"....*

*rather than interpreting them for ourselves.  
(Pathways to Understanding, p. 59)*

A 1988 Interfaith Dialogue Report (Jewish/Christian/Muslim) Report to the Lambeth Conference of Bishops suggested:

*Great care should be taken not to misrepresent Judaism...as in the long standing stereotype of Judaism as a religion of works, completely ignoring the deep Jewish sense of the grace of God. Judaism is a living and still developing religion, which has shown spiritual and intellectual vitality throughout the medieval and modern periods despite its history of being maligned and persecuted. (Pathways to Understanding, p. 52)*

The question - 'What fresh insight...'? ?

## **5. The Pharisees relationship with Jesus**

This area deserves closer consideration. From the Roman Catholic Commission on presenting the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis June, 1985 we read:

*Scholars are increasingly aware that Jesus "shares, with the majority of Palestinian Jews of that time, some Pharisaic doctrines: the resurrection of the body; forms of piety, like alms-giving, prayer, fasting (cf. Matt. 6:1-18) and the liturgical practice of addressing God as Father; the priority of the commandment to love God and neighbour". (Pathways to Understanding, p. 53)*

And a second reference on this -

*Christians should remember that some of the controversies reported in the New Testament between Jesus and the 'scribes and pharisees' find parallels within Pharisaism itself and its heir, Rabbinic Judaism. These controversies took place in a Jewish context, but when the words of Jesus came to be used by Christians who did not identify with the Jewish people as Jesus did, such sayings often became weapons in anti-Jewish polemics and thereby their original intention was tragically distorted. (World Council of Churches Report July 1982) (Pathways to Understanding, p. 54)*

Do these readings help balance in the way we should view the Pharisees who related with Jesus? And, 'What fresh insight' ?

## 6. Care needs to be taken in the interpretation of various New Testament texts to avoid the presentation of negative stereotypes about Jews and Judaism.

*"It is now widely recognized that certain New Testaments texts, when not accompanied by appropriate explanations and cautions, have created attitudes towards Jews and Judaism that have led to hostility and, at times to persecution. While it ought to be evident that any such use of Scripture stands in total opposition to the central Gospel of Christ, the danger of harmful and wounding misrepresentations of texts enjoying authoritative status in the Church remains ever-present." (Rightly Explaining the Word of Truth, p. 7)*

*Rightly Explaining the Word of Truth* begins with a section on how to interpret such texts. Context and circumstance must be considered when interpreting texts (see paragraphs. 4 and 8).

Paragraph 9 on page 12, the differences between the Gospels in some of the detail related to the trial and death of Jesus offer important observations to be noted -

*"The death of Jesus is of central importance in the Christian understanding of the divine process of redemption. It is not surprising, therefore, that the accounts of the trial and death of Jesus in the four gospels provide us with an unusual degree of common material. Nevertheless, individual traits are also clearly evident. Not the least of these is the disagreement on the identification of those who were responsible for bringing Jesus before Pontius Pilate. It is also of importance that both Luke and John fail to mention any role played by the Jewish Sanhedrin. Nor do the synoptics mention any involvement on the part of the Pharisees (compare John 18:3)."*

**'What fresh insight...'?**

The texts which present concerns and for which guidelines toward interpretation are offered follow are -

- The trial and death of Jesus
- The 'new' and the 'old'
- The depiction of the Pharisees
- 'The Jews' in the Fourth Gospel



- Jesus, Judaism and the Torah