

What's happening at ... Columbia Jewish Congregation

Columbia communal seder to honor multicultural traditions

By Jesse Berman

With less than a month before the beginning of Passover, Columbia Jewish Congregation is hard at work preparing for their community seder on the second night of the holiday.

"It's actually been one of the cornerstones of our year cycle," CJC Rabbi Sonya Starr said of the event. "It's been an amazing intergenerational service that is really true to the Haggadah but also contemporary and involves new things every year that reflects what's going on in our own life."

CJC has been holding these communal seders almost every year for the past 10 to 15 years, Starr estimated. The synagogue did not hold the communal seder last year due to the onset of the pandemic.

For this year's seder, CJC started planning around the end of January and beginning of February, Starr said.

Most years, the seder has a theme. This year that theme is the multicultural experience of Passover around the world.

"The Jewish community has created different customs, different minhagim, all around the world in China, in India, in Africa, in the United States, in Europe, in Eastern Europe, in

Latin America," said Starr. "And all of these different expressions attempt to tell the story, in this case of Passover, in a most meaningful way."

These different expressions can take the form of different types of foods, music, stories and ways of acting out Passover traditions, Starr explained. One example is a ritual some cultures have that involves participants beating each other with scallions, she noted.

"We want to honor not only the Ashkenazic way, but all of the multicultural ways we have experienced Passover throughout our journey," Starr said.

One major change to this year's communal seder will be the move to a virtual format, Starr said. CJC doesn't expect the majority of people to have received the COVID-19 vaccine by that point, and it isn't practical to ask people to eat while wearing a face mask.

An additional change to CJC's communal seder will involve removing the main seder meal from the evening, Starr said that attendees will be advised to eat the main meal prior to the online seder.

While the communal seder is open to the general public, with no CJC membership required, participants will need to register beforehand. This is to help prevent the likelihood of Zoom bombing, Starr said, noting that



Rabbi Sonya Starr is the rabbi of Columbia Jewish Congregation.

CJC was the victim of a number of Zoom bombings at the beginning of the pandemic.

Starr likened the experience of the pandemic to the Jewish people's "wandering in the desert that followed immediately after they were freed. Being freed was only the beginning of their liberation. They still had to wander in the desert, get to Mount Sinai and then still wander for 40 more years after that.

"But all through that, they kept seeking that relationship

with God and their community and created the community really," Starr continued. "The community as we know it was created in the wilderness. The covenant with God was made at Mount Sinai, in the wilderness. So that's what we must do, too. We must face our fears, listen to the science, depend on our community, family and friends for support, reach out for help when we need it and wake up tomorrow to face a new day." [Jr.](mailto:jberman@midatlanticmedia.com)

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