

- Minnesotans whose Palm Sunday celebrations include live fronds may be part of a growing movement for environmentally-friendly palms from the rain forest.



DEAN CURRENT • CINRAM — University of Minnesota

A Guatemalan woman is one of 15 in her community who are employed to sort palms sold to churches. Environmentally friendly, fair-trade palm fronds are produced by farmer-owned cooperatives in rain-forest villages in Guatemala and Mexico.

Fair-trade palms are a wave of the future

By BARBARA TUTTLE • Special to the Star Tribune

This weekend, thousands of Midwestern churchgoers will celebrate Palm Sunday with a contemporary twist on an ancient symbol. They will usher in Holy Week with “eco-palms” — environmentally friendly, fair-trade palm fronds from farmer-owned cooperatives in Guatemala and Mexico.

The flow of fronds from rain-forest villages to North American churches is coordinated by Dean Current, a research associate at the University of Minnesota School of Forestry. “It’s a unique opportunity to promote the development of these communities while protecting the rain forest,” said Current, a forest-resources economist with years of experience in Central America.

The green frond is well known to Christians who attend Palm Sunday observances, which recall Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. But the plant is also the nexus of weighty global issues: environmental, international and economic.

Typically, the chamaedorea — or jade palm — harvest threatens the rain forest, as well as the economic survival of the humans who dwell there. Because exporters pur-

chase the fronds by quantity, not quality, harvesters strip the palms bare, often leaving plants too depleted to regenerate.

To the typical American, palm leaves may seem minor on the list of foreign imports, compared with cars or computers. But to the rain-forest villager, palm is a significant source of income. Palm Sunday sales to the United States may be worth \$4.5 million a year, according to the Center for Integrated Natural Resources and Agricultural Management, which Current manages.

A social justice aspect

Begun two years ago, the eco-palm initiative — along with the sale of fair-trade timber — has yielded palm-sorting jobs for women, scholarships for young people and electricity for the villages. Eliminating intermediaries means that profits flow directly to the communities of Uaxactun and Carmelita in Guatemala, and to Sierra Morena in Mexico.

Palms continues: Churches are encouraged to buy the palms for social justice reasons. **E11 ▶**

Family enriches Passover tradition

- A Plymouth family has found innovative ways to go beyond observing Passover to actually engaging with it.

By PAMELA MILLER • pmiller@startribune.com

Tradition.

Nowhere is its power as strong, perhaps, as in Judaism. Through time, tradition has defined the Jewish people, held them together, helped them endure unimaginable assaults and sorrows.

But tradition is not a monolith. Rather, it’s the foundation of a faith that has many facets and many faces.

When Passover begins at sundown Wednesday, Jews around the world will say the time-honored words, walk through the 15 steps of the seder meal and share the story of how their forebears fled slavery in Egypt.

There’s no messing with tradition. But variations and innovations help enrich the Passover experience.

“We want to engage people around its central themes, to present it anew,” said David Orbuch of Plymouth, who with his wife, Jill, and daughters Sarah, 14; Elana, 12, and Rachel, 10, throw a welcome each year for Passover unlike any other.

“You can be formal while still being creative,” said Jill, 46. “For instance, the grandfather can lead the observance, but you can explore contemporary issues. That makes things even more interesting, and helps engage the children.”

One year, the Orbuchs “re-created the exodus downstairs in our basement,” said David, 44. “We set up tents, dressed in costumes, created a play acting out the whole story — the stress of building pyramids, the plagues.”

The Orbuchs invite family members and friends, Jewish and non-Jewish, to their creative Passover observances. On Wednesday, they’ll welcome 23 guests.

They also assign homework.

“Homework is important,” David said. “This isn’t just an experience served to us.”

Passover continues: Celebration lends itself to contemporary treatment. **E13 ▶**



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Food served during the seder and other Passover observances is often symbolic.

A CELEBRATION OF FREEDOM

What: Passover, or Pesach, is a joyful and solemn commemoration of the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt more than 3,000 years ago, after generations of slavery. It’s usually observed in the home, with family and friends.

When: This year, Passover begins at sundown Wednesday. It lasts for seven days in the Reform traditions, eight in the Conservative and Orthodox traditions, said Rabbi Adam Stock Spilker of Mount Zion Temple in St. Paul.

Rituals: There are many; the seder dinner features 15 steps symbolizing the journey toward freedom. The youngest person in the household traditionally asks, “Why is this night different from all other nights?” The seder ends with the wish, “Next year in Jerusalem!” There are many readings from the haggada, which tells the story of Passover.

Food: Food served during the seder and other Passover observances is often symbolic, such as matzo, bread made without leavening agents, symbolizing the haste of the flight into the desert. It includes bitter herbs such as horseradish to symbolize the bitterness of slavery; parsley dipped in salt water, which symbolizes the tears of the slave; asparagus and eggs to hail the coming of spring and new life, and macaroons, kugel and charoset (a mash of nuts and fruit that symbolizes the mortar used by Jewish slaves to build the pyramids).

PAMELA MILLER



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Occupation: Director of faith formation, Our Lady of Grace, Edina.

Faith: Roman Catholic.

Place of worship: St. Edward’s Catholic Church, Bloomington.

Favorite hymn: “We Come to Share Our Story.”

Favorite Bible verse: Isaiah 50:4: “The Lord has given you the tongue of a teacher that you may sustain the weary with a word.”

What do you believe and why? I believe that our relationship with God is intrinsically connected to our relationship with other people. Jesus is very clear about this in the gospels: What

we do unto each other, we do unto God. I believe in the social teachings of the Catholic Church. We are called to be like Christ in ministering to the marginalized of our society, including the sick, the poor, the outcast, the refugee. I believe that doctrine should grow out of human experience, not the other way around. And I believe that God’s love for us is greater than we can comprehend.

If you know a person of faith who would be a good candidate for “Believer,” e-mail pmiller@startribune.com.