2021

ALFRED STREET BAPTIST CHURCH AND AGUDAS ACHIM CONGREGATION

## SOCIAL JUSTICE SEDER

SPONSORED BY The AAC HENRY AND JUNE KREVOR Social Action Fund



#### [start with "Stand Up" by Cynthia Erivo as an audio lead-in to the event (5 min)]

#### SEDER SERVICE

**Rabbi Rein**: Welcome to our Seder! We are here to observe a most ancient, colorful, and significant festival. For more than three thousand years, Jews have gathered to retell the tale of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

**Rev. Hayes:** This afternoon, we participate as members of many communities: Black, Jewish, Latinx, Native American, Muslim, Asian, and LGBTQIA—communities that have historically struggled for freedom side by side. We share a common history of slavery and oppression; we share common dreams of equality, justice, and peace. Many of the symbols we use and songs we sing this afternoon may be strange to some, but their message will be familiar. And so this afternoon, we join together to send out a message of freedom which we hope will ring through the hills of our land and across the seas.

**Rabbi Rein:** History tells us that many people were enslaved by tyrants. As most nations observe an Independence Day, so, too, the Israelites instituted this holiday commemorating their freedom from tyranny. The uniqueness of this observance stems from its profoundly religious character. Every Jewish home becomes a sanctuary, every table an altar where gratitude is expressed to God, the Author of Liberty.

**Rev. Hayes:** But the Passover Seder is more than just a ceremony marking an historical event. We are taught that "in every generation, all of us are obliged to regard ourselves as if we had personally gone forth from the Land of Egypt." Through prayer and song, ritual and symbol, custom and ceremony, we look upon ourselves as though we were among those enslaved and then brought forth unto freedom. Thus, the Seder is a re-creation and a re-living of that historical Exodus, of God's redemptive power, and the wonder of freedom. This self-identification with the past stirs in us an appreciation of the freedom that is ours, and an empathy with the plight of those of our brothers and sisters who still dwell under the shadow of modern-day Pharaohs. The Seder calls upon us to do everything in our power to assist in their emancipation from tyranny.

**ArDonna**: As we gather this afternoon to remember liberation journeys of Jewish, Black, and other historically enslaved peoples, it is important we acknowledge the Indigenous land on which we stand. Many of us reside in or around Alexandria, Va, which is land traditionally nurtured and occupied by the Manahoac, Massawomeck, Nacotchtank (Anacostan), Patawomeck, and Piscataway Tribal Nations. We acknowledge that they, too, are siblings in our collective liberation struggle and take this moment to honor their land which was lost.

**Bekka:** "In the 15th century, in North America, when they came for Native Americans, I didn't speak up, because I wasn't Native American.

Karen: They came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up, because I wasn't a Jew.

Katherine: They came for Asian Americans, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't Asian.

Danielle: They came for the poor, and I didn't speak up because I was wealthy.

Barbara: Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak up."

#### THE FIRST CUP: KOS KIDDUSH

**Rev. Hayes:** During the Seder we will drink four cups of wine or grape juice. The use of four cups is based on a biblical verse, Exodus 6:6-7. These four cups were each imbued with their own distinct significance. The first cup is called Kos Kiddush, the cup of sanctification.

### Rabbi Rein: ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam borei p'ri ha-gafen.

### We praise Thee, O Lord our God, Sovereign of Existence, Who creates the fruit of the vine.

**Rev. Hayes:** The Sheh-heh-khi-anu blessing is a prayer of thanks offered to God for the opportunity to celebrate new beginnings and joyous occasions. It is traditionally said at the beginning of festivals, as well as on certain auspicious occasions, such as eating the fruits of a new harvest, or reaching the milestones of life. This afternoon we will recite this blessing in gratitude for this opportunity to come together:

Rabbi Rein: ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם שהחינו וקימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam sheh-heh-khi-yanu v'ki-yimanu v'higi-anu lazman hazeh.

We praise Thee, O Lord our God, Sovereign of Existence, Who has kept us in life, sustained us, and brought us to this festive season.

(All drink the first cup of juice.)

### KARPAS (PARSLEY): REBIRTH AND RENEWAL

**Rev. Hayes:** The Passover festival of freedom was grafted onto a yet more ancient holiday: one celebrating the spring harvest. The fresh greens of spring serve a special purpose at this time in our Seder. As we dip these herbs, the karpas, into salt water, a symbol of the tears of slavery, we remember all those who still suffer under the yoke of oppression. Even as we look ahead to a more hopeful future beyond the pandemic, we also mourn the tragic loss of all those who succumbed to COVID-19.

## Rabbi Rein: ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי האדמה

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam borei pi'ri ha-adamah.

## We praise Thee, O Lord our God, Sovereign of Existence, Sovereign of Existence, Who creates the fruit of the earth.

(Eat the greens.)

#### YACHATZ: A BOND FORMED BY SHARING

**Rev. Hayes:** For the sake of our redemption, we say together the ancient words that join us with our own people and with all who are in need, with the wrongly imprisoned and the beggar in the street. For our redemption is bound up with the deliverance from bondage of people everywhere.

**Rabbi Rein** (holds up matzah): Ha lakhma anyah -- this is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry enter and eat; let all who are needy come to our Passover feast. This year, we are here; next year, may we be in Jerusalem. This year, we are slaves; next year, may we be free human beings.

**Rev. Hayes:** Avadim Hayeenu--we were slaves. We are slaves. How can we say, "This year we are slaves"? We are slaves because yesterday our people were in slavery, and memory makes yesterday real for us. We are slaves because today, even around the corner, there remain people incarcerated, in chains, and locked in cages at the border, and no one can be truly free while others are in chains.

**Rabbi Rein:** We are slaves because freedom means more than broken chains. Where there is poverty and hunger and homelessness, there is no freedom. Where there is prejudice and bigotry and discrimination, there is no freedom. Where there is violence and torture and war, there is no freedom. And where each of us is less than we might be, we are not free, not yet. If these things are so, who among us can say that they are free?

**Rev. Hayes:** Therefore, when we say that this year we are slaves, but that next year we shall be free, we make a pledge. It is the same pledge we made last year, and the year before that. And we shall make it next year, too, for the road to freedom is not an easy road and we will not soon reach its end, our goal. Yet it is the road we have chosen, and a moral responsibility we each have to bear.

#### MATZAH OF HOPE

**Rabbi Rein** (holds one matzah and says): This is the matzah of hope. Wherever people are still oppressed, wherever we are cut off from our past, forbidden our future, there are our hearts, there is our hope. For let there be no doubt: As the waters of the sea once parted for our ancestors, so will they part, speedily and in our time, in every place of terror and tyranny.

**Rev. Hayes:** These deprivations are part of a person's emotional and intellectual life. They determine whether that person is fulfilled as a human being.... When you are written out of history as a people, when you are given no choice but to accept the "majority" culture, you are denied an aspect of your own identity.... We must affirm that every human life is a reflex of divinity, and every act of injustice mars and defaces the image of God in man. (Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. )

#### THE FOUR QUESTIONS

**Rabbi Rein**: We come now to the portion of the Seder where traditionally, the youngest person at the table motivates the retelling of the Passover story by asking four questions, all revolving around the theme of why this night is different from all other nights. The Seder table was -- and is -- a time to ask, a time to search for answers. But this year in particular has been different from all other years, so this afternoon we have proposed a new set of four questions, inspired by the original four, but extending beyond them to probe our contemporary challenges. We encourage you to contemplate and discuss one or more of these new questions as we now spend 15 minutes engaging one another in breakout groups:

[inspired by the question of how unleavened bread reminds us of life interrupted in the frenzy of fleeing Egypt]
[inspired by the question of how bitter herbs remind us of the bitter injustices of slavery and oppression]
[inspired by the question of how dipping food this afternoon mingles the sweetness of hope with the bitter tears of despair]
[inspired by the question of how reclining while we eat this afternoon highlights the privilege of our freedom]

#### We Are the Drum https://youtu.be/qoAO113HoK0 Song by Sounds of Blackness VERSE 1

In the beginning was the beat And the beat was the rhythm of God And the rhythm of God Is the harmony of humanity And where there is harmony, There is peace.

#### CHORUS

We are the drum We are the drum From Africa to America We are the drum (Repeat) Teach!

#### CHORUS

We are the drum We are the drum From Africa to America We are the drum (Repeat) Teach!

#### HOOK

The rhythm is my heart and my freedom Lead: Will you give up your rhythm? No! The rhythm is my heart and my freedom. Lead: Will you let go of the beat? No! The rhythm is my heart and my freedom? Lead: Come on, selling your soul?! No! The rhythm is my heart and my freedom. Lead: Can ya stop playing your drum?

#### No! ...

No!

Lead: We are the drum. In the beginning was the beat of the drum Which began in the beginning to beat freedom. Oh freedom! REFRAIN

Oh freedom Oh freedom Oh freedom Oh freedom (Repeat 2x)

#### THE TELLING OF THE STORY OF THE EXODUS

**Rabbi Rein:** This is the section of the Seder where we fulfill the mitzvah (commandment) of telling the story of the Exodus—a beautifully woven compilation of song, rabbinic discourse, hymns, and praise.

**Reverend Hayes:** According to Jewish tradition, every person in every generation is obligated to see him or herself as though he or she personally has gone forth from slavery to freedom. By telling the same story, year after year, we attempt to step into the shoes of our ancestors and take a journey into liberation. Reenacting the Exodus is also a vivid reminder of the fact that there are many people in the world who are still enslaved, and who continue to yearn for freedom.

#### MAKOT MITZRAYIM THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT

**Rabbi Rein:** Now we recite the plagues that God visited upon the Egyptians. As each is named, we pour a drop of wine from our cup of joy. The tradition explains this custom by reminding us that our own joy is diminished in the face of the pain of others; even though the plagues are an essential element in the saga we celebrate, we derive no pleasure from them, we do not gloat at the suffering they caused.

**Reverend Hayes:** And we pray that for all those in our own time whose hearts have hardened towards the poor and the oppressed, towards the downtrodden and the enslaved, love and reason will bring light to their eyes, wisdom and kindness to their hearts, and justice to their conduct. This we pray lest the plagues that come on the heels of injustice consume us all.

#### Group (Dip your finger in your juice and take out one drop for each plague)

Dam, Blood Tzfardeyah, Frogs Kinim, Lice Arov, Wild Beasts Dever, Blight Sh'khin, Boils Barad, Hail Arbeh, Locusts Khoshekh, Darkness דַם

**Rabbi Rein:** On Passover, we remember the ten plagues that were put upon the Egyptian people. Thousands of years later, we keep in mind the weight of modern-day plagues of **inequality**, **police brutality**, **mass incarceration**, **xenophobia**, **racism**, **anti-semitism**, **and more**.

**Samara**: This year we acknowledge in particular that the pandemic has had a devastating economic impact: One in four American households has experienced job loss or diminished income during the pandemic. To make matters even worse, data from a recent Brookings survey indicates that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on housing insecurity.

- Housing hardships increased significantly among Hispanic and Black households;
- Young adults are more likely to face eviction/foreclosure and housing hardship than older adults.

**V.O.I.C.E.** (Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement) conducted a local listening campaign and the number one issue that emerged was the fear of eviction. At today's Seder we are focusing on Housing Injustice. We invite you to dip your finger in juice, while reciting the **Ten Plagues of Housing Injustice**. We place a drop on our plates for each one to acknowledge that the joy of liberation cannot be completed while many continue to be oppressed.

[From **Repair the World** – a national organization that mobilizes Jews and their communities to take action to pursue a just world: <u>https://werepair.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Ten-Plagues-of-Housing-Injustice.pdf</u>]

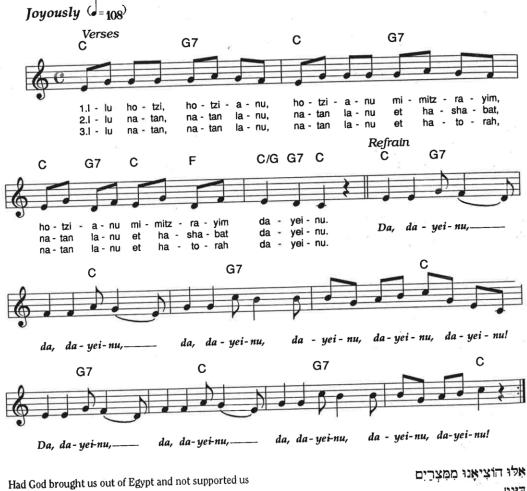
**Rev. Hayes:** None of us is free unless all of us are free. Liberation is gained through action. AT the end of this Seder, we will share resources to help you join in the work of organizations committed to addressing housing injustice here in our city.

**Hazzan Elisheva Dienstfrey:** Shalom! My name is Elisheva Dienstfrey - I am the Hazzan of Agudas Achim Congregation and I am honored to be with all of you this afternoon. The Passover Seder is an opportunity for us to remember where we came from, to dissect and discuss that history, and to find connections between the past and the present. We use a variety of methods to communicate - questions, prayer, and song! So much of the seder is sung - so that we can grasp the meanings, remember the words, and most of all, so that we can enjoy ourselves. One of the standard Passover songs that we sing is called Dayeinu - a text that reminds us of how much God did for us when we were in need. I'll now turn it over to songleader extraordinaire, Jason Mesches, who will teach us this Passover favorite.

Bim Bam Dayenu



**Folk Song** 



Had God brought us out of Egypt and not supported us in the wilderness-It would have been enough! Had God given us the Sabbath and not the Torah-It would have been enough! Had God given us the Torah and not brought us to the land of Israel-It would have been enough! אַשּׁרּוּ זּיּבְּיאָנוּ טְּמָצְרַיָם דָּיַנוּו אַלּוּ נָתַן לְנוּ אֶת-הַשֵּׁבָּת דְיַנוּו אַלּוּ נָתַן לְנוּ אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה ז הִכְנִיסְנוּ לְאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל-דְּיֵנוּו

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**Rev. Hayes:** What does this mean, "It would have been enough?" Surely no single one of these would indeed have been enough. It means to celebrate each step toward freedom as if it were enough, then to start out on the next step. It means that if we reject each step because it is not the whole liberation, we will never be able to achieve the whole liberation. It means to sing each verse as if it were the whole song -- and then sing the next verse.

**Rabbi Rein:** In the words of South-African Archbishop Desmond Tutu: "We must remember that liberation is costly. It needs unity. We must hold hands and refuse to be divided. The ruler always wants to divide and rule. We must know that before we reach our promised land there will be imprisonments, there will be bannings, there will be detentions without trial, there will be deaths in detention, there will be exile, there will be division and there will be treachery and disloyalty. We must be ready. Some of us will not see the day of our liberation physically. But these people will have contributed to the struggle. Let us be united, let us be filled with hope, let us be those who respect one another."

**Rev. Hayes:** God has given humankind a unique gift: freedom of choice, freedom to create a better World. We cannot merely cry out or pray to the Eternal to end wars, starvation, prejudice, despair, and disease. For the world has been made in such a way that we must find our own path to peace within ourselves and with our neighbors.

**Rabbi Rein:** The midrash tells us that when the Children of Israel came to the edge of the sea with the armies of Pharaoh in pursuit, the water first refused to part. It was not until the first Jews had stepped into the sea and the waters reached their necks that the sea parted and the Children of Israel passed safely through on dry land. Now as then, redemption cannot come unless we take the first step.

#### PESACH, MATZAH, MAROR

**Rabbi Rein:** Rabban Gamliel used to say, "Whoever does not consider well the meaning of these three, pesach, matzah, and maror, has not fulfilled the purpose of the Seder. "

**Rev. Hayes** (holds up shankbone): The pesach, or shankbone, is a reminder of God's instruction to the Jews to sacrifice a lamb and mark their doorposts with its blood -- an indication to the Angel of Death not to kill their first-born sons.

**Rabbi Rein**: As we look at this shankbone, or pesach, we are reminded of how our ancestors were spared the tragic fate of their Egyptian neighbors whose first born were slain. For Pesach means "pass Over" and as the Torah tells us, God passed over the homes of the Israelites in Egypt when the Holy One smote the Egyptians and spared our houses (Ex. 12:26-27). This is why the festival is called Pesach.

**Rev. Hayes**: O God, as we recall how you spared our first-born from death, we pray the time will not be distant when all your children may be spared the fear of injustice, persecution, and death.

**Rabbi Rein** (holds up matzah): The matzah was meant to recall that the dough prepared in haste by our people had not time to rise before the final act of deliverance. And they baked unleavened cakes of dough since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves (Ex. 12:39).

**Rev. Hayes:** To the driven of the Earth we link ourselves today as we fulfill the commandment: For seven days shall you eat matzah, that you may remember your departure from Egypt as long as you live (Deut. 16:3).

**Rabbi Rein** (holds up maror): We eat maror, or bitter herbs to remind us of how the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors.

**Rev. Hayes:** As the Torah says, They made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and brick and in all manner of work in the field; all the labor which the Egyptians forced upon them was harsh (Ex. L:13-14).

**Rabbi Rein:** Today, as well, wherever slavery or oppression of any sort remains, we taste its bitterness.

**Rev. Hayes:** In every generation, each of us should feel as though we ourselves had gone forth from Egypt. And you shall explain to your child on that day, it is because of what the Eternal did for me when I went forth from Egypt (Ex. 23:9).

**Rabbi Rein:** We remember, it was we who were slaves...we who were strangers (Ex. 23:9). And therefore we recall the teachings of the Torah, among them: You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt (Ex. 23:9). When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong that person...you shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Lev. 19:33-34).

[show Michael Twitty's alternative seder plate here: screen https://afroculinaria.com/2019/04/16/african-american-seder-plate/]

**Rev. Hayes:** The contemporary scholar and culinary historian, Michael Twitty, has proposed a modern African American seder plate, shown now on our screen.

The **Chicken Bone**, in place of the zer'oa or lamb shankbone, represents traditional sacrifices and migration from oppression to opportunity during the Great Migration.

**Charoset**, traditionally fruit, nuts and wine, is here molasses and pecans to represent the sugarcane that fueled the beginnings of slavery and the duality of our culture in exile. Though we were in bondage, we found things here to help us cope and overcome.

**The Sweet Potato,** in place of the karpas or parsley, is symbolic of using the American environment to perpetuate West and Central African tradition.

The **Egg** or beitzah, is a symbol of overcoming oppression, the Supreme Being, spring and cycles of nature.

**Collards** represent Maror, or bitter herbs, to symbolize both the bitterness of enslavement but also how we survived it. **Hot pepper**, in place of horseradish, a sharper variety of maror, gives a sense of the sting of the lash. Also, it is a spice central to West and Central African foodways, proverbially associated with speaking the truth.

**Rabbi Rein: Hoecake or Ashcake**, made of corn, is the closest analogue to matzah, the flatbread of slavery and yet the first food in freedom. This corn cake simply prepared was the hardtack of enslavement in colonial and Antebellum America. Finally, the **Orange** is a modern symbol for including those who are often excluded from the forefront of religious communities or spiritual practice, from women in leadership to sexual minorities to the poor or differently abled. The orange symbolizes the flavor and sweetness inclusion brings us all.

#### THE SECOND CUP: KOS GULAH -- THE CUP OF REDEMPTION

**Rabbi Rein:** With the second cup of wine we recall the second promise of liberation: As it is written: I will deliver you from their bondage (Ex. 6:6).

**Rev. Hayes**: Remembering with gratitude the redemption of our ancestors from Egypt, rejoicing in the fruits of our struggle for freedom, we look now with hope to the celebration of a future redemption, the building of the City of Peace in which all will rejoice in the service of God, singing together a new song.

Rabbi Rein: ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam borei p'ri ha-gafen.

## We praise Thee, O Lord our God, Sovereign of Existence, Who creates the fruit of the vine.

(All drink the second cup of juice.)

#### SHULCHAN ORECH

**Rabbi Rein:** It is customary here to eat the matzah, maror, and festive meal: we'd like instead to share in the Chat what sustenance we have all derived from this collective experience. Please also share what has kept you going throughout the pandemic, or what has inspired you today?

#### BAREKH: THANKS FOR DIVINE SUSTENANCE

Michael: On this Festival of Matzot, inspire us to goodness.

Stephanie: On this Day of Liberation, make us a blessing.

Deborah: On this Festival of Pesach, preserve us in life.

Sharita: All Merciful, rule over us forever.

**Danielle**: Sustain us with honorable work. Make us worthy of the promise of a world that is yet to be.

Andi: May God Who blessed Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, bless all assembled here; and so may all our loved ones share our blessing.

**ArDonna**: May the One Who brings harmony into the spheres on high bring peace to Earth for all humanity.

#### THE THIRD CUP: KOS BRACHA -- THE CUP OF BLESSING

**Rabbi Rein:** Together we take up the third cup of wine, now recalling the third divine promise: As it is written: I will redeem you with an Outstretched arm (Ex. 6:6).

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam borei p'ri ha-gafen.

# We praise Thee, O Lord our God, Sovereign of Existence, Who creates the fruit of the vine.

(All drink the third cup of juice.)

### KOS ELIYAHU: THE CUP OF ELIJAH

**Rabbi Rein:** Elijah, the prophet from the village of Tishbi in Gilead, challenged the injustice of the king and overthrew the Worship of Baal. He healed the sick and helped the widowed. The prophet Malachi promised that Elijah would return to announce that time when all humanity would celebrate freedom.

**Rev. Hayes:** Hence, he has a place in every Seder. We open the door that he may enter, and set a cup of wine to represent the triumph of justice and freedom for all God's children. Each year on Passover, Jews and their communities gather around Seder tables and open the door for Elijah, a messenger of hope, as we retell the story of Exodus. This Passover, join us to open the door to housing justice. As we confront the injustice of this world, may we be like Elijah, who in defense of justice, challenged power.

[Show video of Glory by John Legend https://youtu.be/HUZOKvYcx\_0]

#### NIRTZAH: CONCLUSION THE FOURTH CUP: KOS HARTZA-AH --THE CUP OF ACCEPTANCE

**Rabbi Rein**: As our Seder draws to an end, we take up our cups of wine one last time. The redemption is not yet complete. The fourth cup recalls us to our covenant with the Eternal One, to the tasks that still await us as a people called to the service of God, to a great purpose for which the people of Israel lives: the preservation and affirmation of hope.

**Reverend Hayes**: With this cup, we accept our responsibility to take concrete steps to address housing justice in our community.

Stephanie: [call to action on housing justice]

Please support:

- The Heritage at Old Town Redevelopment Project;
- Amazon's Affordable Housing Initiative in Arlington;
- The Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (<u>https://apah.org/</u>);
- The Gilliam Place, proposed structure to be built on the site currently occupied by the Arlington Presbyterian Church (<u>https://projects.arlingtonva.us/projects/arlington-presbyterian-church/</u>);
- Grassroots Alexandria Housing Team: <u>https://grassrootsalexandria.org/teams/housing/</u>
- VOICE Sessions: <u>https://voice-iaf.org/content/housing-evictions</u>
- Tenants and Workers United: <u>https://www.tenantsandworkers.org/</u>
- The Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance (<u>https://nvaha.org/</u>);
- Always avail ourselves of the appropriate regulatory and public commission meetings whereby we can offer positive comment/feedback regarding housing insufficiency and support for affordable/workforce housing initiatives.

### Rabbi Rein: ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam borei p'ri ha-gafen.

## We praise Thee, O Lord our God, Sovereign of Existence, Who creates the fruit of the vine.

(All drink the fourth cup of juice.)

#### [Closing remarks by Reverend Hayes and Rabbi Rein]