

Christians, Jews made religious news in 1982

By SYLVIA HART
Press Register Reporter

Last year was a period of increasing activities focusing on world-peace issues on the part of Christians and Jews in Mobile.

Several other major stories in the field of religion in Mobile last year were the following: the reaction of local Christians and Jews to Israel's incursion into Lebanon, Christians' reaction to a local law suit on religious activities in public schools, the appointment by Mobile's interfaith clergy organizations of an advisory committee to the Mobile Police Department, and the announcement by a married former Episcopal priest in Mobile that he is applying for admission to the Roman Catholic priesthood.

Last November Mobile Catholic Archbishop Oscar H. Lipscomb attended a highly publicized meeting of the nation's Roman Catholic bishops focusing on peace issues, including the use of nuclear weapons.

The Mobile archbishop is scheduled to meet again with the nation's bishops in Chicago in May, when a pastoral letter on peace is expected to be finalized.

While the bishops disagree on many details they generally support a proposal for a bilateral freeze of nuclear weapons on the part of the United States and the Soviet Union.

Last April about 50 to 75 Mobilians, including Christian and Jewish religious leaders, participated in an interfaith service which launched a program known as Ground Zero Week in Mobile.

Ground Zero was sponsored nationwide by the Union of Concerned Scientists, an organization involved in educating the public about nuclear issues.

In June a total of 215 persons signed a pledge in opposition to nuclear weapons in a two-part ceremony at Government Street United Methodist Church and Spanish Plaza.

In October a group of 15 to 20 Christians and Jews began meeting, with the idea of perhaps forming Mobilians for Peace. The group plans a meeting that is open to the public Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. at Government Street United Methodist Church.

On the matter of Israel's moving troops into Lebanon last June, comments were sparked in Mobile as well as throughout the world.

The Israeli government, which said its move was an attempt to push Palestinian guerrillas away from Lebanon's border with Israel, received verbal support from Mobilians Paul and Mary Filben, who visited Israel and Lebanon in August.

The Filbens, who are Catholic laypersons, are among leaders of the Mobile Area Jewish-Christian Dialogue, which focused on Israel, Lebanon and the Middle East generally in a meeting in September.

In the September meeting of the dialogue group, Edward J. Kahalley Sr., president of the Mobile Area Chapter of the American Lebanese League, spoke favorably about Israel's incursion into Lebanon because Kahalley saw that as a step toward removing all foreign military forces — Palestinians, Syrians and Israelis — from Lebanon, which has been torn by fighting particularly since the mid-1970s.

Israeli, Lebanese and American negotiators opened talks last week on the withdrawal of foreign troops from Lebanon.

During the past year Mobile Christians became involved in a law suit filed in May by local attorney Ishmael Jaffree, who charged that his children's constitutional rights were violated by public school teachers who led their classes in religious songs and grace before lunch.

The Rev. Paul McHenry, pastor of Ridgewood Presbyterian Church in Mobile, led about 600 Christians in intervening in the case in U.S. District Court in Mobile in November.

The intervenors presented the view that a ban against religious activities in the classroom violates

an individual's free exercise of religion.

U.S. District Judge W. Brevard Hand has not yet issued a ruling in the case.

In a meeting in Mobile in November, Alabama Baptists reaffirmed their traditional support of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution as "the basic and sufficient law relating to the principles of separation of church and state and religious freedom."

The state Baptists' view of the First Amendment is that it guarantees rights including "the right to practice voluntary prayer" in public schools.

Last year's activities in the field of religion included the naming of an advisory committee to the Mobile Police Department by the Mobile Ministerial Association and the Mobile Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance.

The committee, which has the endorsement of Mobile Police Chief Winston Orr, has the goal of helping build "trust between the Mobile Police Department and all

citizens, especially those who feel powerless."

W. Bry Shields Jr., a native Mobilian, was among former Episcopal priests in various parts of the United States who last year announced their intention of seeking priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church.

Shields, who now is employed as a faculty member at McGill-Toolen High School in Mobile, has applied for admission to the Roman Catholic priesthood under a special process authorized by the Vatican for the acceptance of former Episcopal priests, including those who are married. Shields is married.

Among other activities in the field of religion last year were the selection in January of Archbishop Lipscomb by about 35 Mobile organizations as Mobilian of the Year for 1981 and the announcement by Dr. George E. Bagley in a meeting in Mobile in November that he will retire as executive secretary of the Alabama Baptist Convention at the end of this year.