

## LOCAL NEWS

# Christian-Jewish Dialogue holds its 25th Anniversary Dinner

by Perilla A Wilson

It was an elegant celebration for such a simple concept—let's talk! Twenty-five successful years of dialogue between Christians and Jews in the Mobile area, the longest-running such group in the United States, was celebrated at a dinner in a packed Bienville Club overlooking Mobile Bay last week.

Hosted by the Archbishop of Mobile, the Most Rev. Oscar H. Lipscomb and the Mobile-area Christian-Jewish Dialogue, co-chaired by Paul and Mary Filben, it brought together a group who rejoiced in what Filben called their "incredible journey together." The Rev. Michael Farmer, along with the Dialogue committee, made the arrangements.

From out of town came charter members to join the festivities, including Sr. Therese Brethauer, MSBT, from Quincy, Florida; Barbara Paper, from Atlanta, who gave the opening Blessing; and Isabel

Siegal, from Birmingham, who gave a brief history of how it all began.

Some 26 years ago, The Most Rev. John L. May, late Bishop of Mobile, asked the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission of the Diocese to arrange a meeting which brought together Rabbi Richard and Gilda Messing of the Springhill Avenue Temple; Claire Goldfarb, Sisterhood President; Isabel Siegel, Social Action Chairperson; Roland Fry; Lowell Friedman; Barbara Paper of the Mobile Jewish Welfare Fund; Sid Posin and Dr. Julian Lewis of the Jewish community.

Representing the Diocese were the Filbens, Cathy and Neff Weber, Fr. John Amos, Sr. Sara Butler, MSBT, Bill Greenspun, the late Fr. Michael Lux, Fr. Kenneth Klepac and Annette Quint. The evening was such a resounding success that Julian Lewis said, "Let's do this again!"

Mary, Isabel, Claire, Norma Conrad and Phyllis Feibelmanspent

the next year arranging groups, facilitators and homes in which to have dialogue and dessert. It was several years before the format changed to having well-known speakers on current dialogue topics meeting in a different place each time, usually a church, the Temple or Synagogue. However, the aim of "talking together" never changed.

While in some areas of the country the dialogue efforts have been centered on roundtables with clergy leading them and "seldom got down to the people in the pews," according to Mary Filben, the dialogue locally has stressed that one cannot look to a single person for all the answers. Whereas all clergy of whatever persuasion are continually and ardently encouraged to participate, they are never expected to have to shoulder the responsibility of answering all questions.

The surprise of the evening was the dedication to the Filbens by Rickie Voit and Eileen Susman of the Mobile Jewish Welfare Fund, of a Holocaust Curriculum Trunk which will be used to teach the Holocaust to middle and high school age youth in the Mobile/Baldwin area schools. It contains multi-media, books, posters and teacher les-

son plans which will be up-dated biannually by the Houston Holocaust Museum, which also sponsors annual teacher workshops. It will be available for use at the request of any school within the state, since Paul serves as chairman of the Alabama Holocaust Commission.

Voit paid tribute to the Filbens as a "positive force extending into the Jewish community with unconditional love and respect." She referred to their "stand as allies" and the manner in which they "lovingly create" a Yom haShoah memorial service every year for the community. Voit quoted her 14-year-old daughter as saying that "if people could be like the Filbens, there really can be peace on earth." Susman presented a plaque to them, paying tribute to their vision of building bridges. In accepting the presentation, Mary Filben said, "You trusted us—what a marvelous gift!"

Archbishop Lipscomb remarked that the Shoah is important in his life, having been to Dachau in 1952 and then returning after a short three or four years to see the changes instigated, already covering up the horror that happened there. He said that he has recently returned from a meeting in which the U.S. Bishops approved

a syllabus for teaching the Shoah to Catholic middle and high school students. He also made mention of *Lumen Gentium*, saying "we will in the end succeed with trust and integrity on our own part and a willingness to learn from each other."

Paul Filben closed the evening with a litany of future topics and areas to be explored by the group. Among these were a hope to pursue more research on the separation of the first centuries; the pressing need to preserve the Holocaust recollections of our primary sources who are dying and the necessity of "cognitively accurate answers for the naysayers;" a desire to include Muslims, Fundamentalists and Evangelicals in dialogue; a hope to discuss topics such as the death penalty, bioethics; the document *Dominus Iesus*; preaching commentary reflecting *Nostra Aetate*; and how Nazism was made possible by the attitude of Christians.

In celebrating all that has been accomplished in the past quarter century of dialogue, the hope for its future was expressed in the evening's program..."Let's move on to the 21st Century with hope for...Peace...Salaam...Shalom."

## 65th Annual ACCW Convention

October 29, 30, & 31, 2000

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