

Understanding triunity for accepting identity

By SYLVIA HART
Press Register Reporter

National workshops on Christian-Jewish relations have evolved from "clergy get-togethers" to "deep dialogue on world issues" involving clergy and laity, according to a Mobile couple.

Paul and Mary Filben, lay persons of Holy Family Catholic Church, made the assessment after returning from this year's national workshop in Dallas. The Filbens have attended most of the Christian-Jewish workshops, which began in this decade.

Among numerous major issues which Jews and Christians felt free to discuss together in Dallas, according to Mrs. Filben, was the land of Israel.

National news reports have been circulating for several months that a rift has developed between U.S. Jewish leaders and the National Council of Churches in their views toward Israel. The National Council of Churches includes most major U.S. Protestant and Eastern Orthodox denominations.

The Filbens said that in their own personal attempt to understand "the Jewish mind and heart," they have become supportive of the position which Jews take on Israel.

The source of disagreement is the development of a new policy statement on the Middle East by the National Council of Churches to replace one that was adopted in 1969. The rough draft of the statement calls for the recognition of Israel by the Palestinian and Arab nations and the recognition by Israel of the rights of the Palestinians for national self-determination.

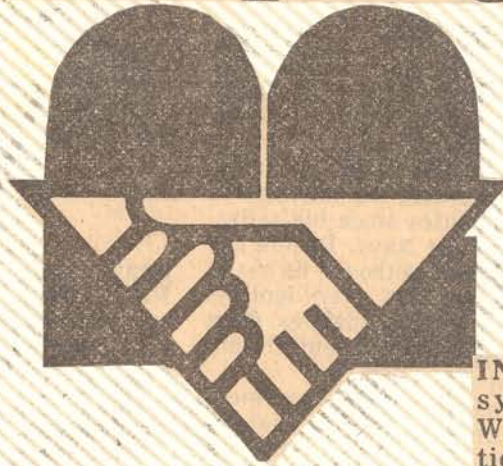
The proposed statement also calls for the cessation of violence and "constructive solutions to the problems of (Palestinian) refugees and persons displaced as a result of the Israel-Palestine and related conflicts dating from 1948, including questions of compensation and return."

The policy statement of the National Council of Churches is under review by the council's board of governors, and the final draft will be considered for adoption by the board of governors next November.

Said Filben, "The biggest complaint many of the participants (in the Dallas workshop) had was that the statement seems to set a double standard for the state of Israel and any other political entity. More is expected from Israel in terms of behavior and making no mistakes."

Filben expressed the view that perhaps "latent anti-Semitism" is involved in the statement of the National Council of Churches.

INTERFAITH SYMBOL — The symbol used at the National Workshop on Christian-Jewish Relations in Dallas this year is shown above. The clasping hands of Jew and Christian are against a background of a triangle representing the Christian Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit and stone tablets representing the Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments as given by God to the Hebrew prophet Moses.



Mrs. Filben said that Rabbi Marc Tannenbaum of New York, who is director for interreligious affairs of the American Jewish Council, "made an emotional plea," reminding Christians that the Palestine Liberation Organization is committed to "total destruction of Israel."

The Filbens said that the Rev. Robert L. Turnipseed, who represented the National Council of Churches, based in New York, maintained that no disagreement exists "over fundamental concerns for the survival of Israel," but the statement of the National Council of Churches "tries to address issues of justice and peace for all groups in the Middle East."

However, according to Filben, a Jewish viewpoint presented in Dallas was that what many Christians "are not coming to terms with is the triunity of Judaism. The people, the land, the religion define their Jewishness."

According to Filben, the Rev. Edward H. Flannery, who is director for continuing education of the clergy of the Providence (R.I.) Catholic Diocese, said that if Christians are to accept "the Jewish identity in all its totality," that identity includes the land of Israel.