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THE MOBILE AREA CHRISTIAN-JEWISH DIALOGUE

# The Mobile Dialogue

## A CELEBRATION OF DIALOGUE TWENTY-FIVE YEARS!

Paul Filben, Editor

During the past 24 years the Mobile Christian-Jewish Dialogue has evolved from a nucleus of ten to twelve Jews and Catholics who met in a downtown room, to as many as 200 in some gatherings. It began as a Catholic-Jewish Dialogue and within the first two years it became clear that the dialogue must include all Christian denominations who were interested, and all Jews who were interested. These now include Reform and Conservative Congregations, Roman Catholics, and Protestants from many denominations in and around metropolitan Mobile. Over the years, the members have met in living room dialogue settings, visited one another's place of worship, and discovered the wonder of sameness and the splendor of difference. The history of The Mobile Dialogue is replete with memories of the earliest days when announcements were mailed on mimeographed sheets and people who were struggling to discover, not only who the "other" was and what he/she believed, but wrestling with their own religious identities and defining those beliefs to the "other." Beginning in the third year, theologians and speakers with various areas of expertise were invited to speak to the Dialogue group. The Lecture Series was well received and offered perspectives that were otherwise unavailable to many in both the Jewish and

Christian communities. Over the past twenty four years, Mary and I have had the good fortune to have visited Israel on several different occasions. In 1982 we were able to travel in Israel and Lebanon accompanied part of the time by Israeli troops throughout northern Israel and into Tyre, Sidon, Dammour and Beirut. We talked to Jews, Palestinian Arabs and Christians on the streets and had lunch in Beit Jalla on the West Bank in the home of the Mayor and his family. In 1982, we were privileged to be invited to the Knesset to listen to deliberations with regard to the shelling in Beirut. It was during that trip that we were able to meet with the then Prime Minister, Menachem Begin. Some of the memories that we talk about often include meeting with Major Saad Haddad, the Lebanese officer who helped Israel defend its northern border; our subsequent separate trips to Israel and the wonderful and fascinating people we met and with whom we have maintained contact over the years. In November, 1984, our dear son, David died in an automobile accident. We remember, with gratitude, the outpouring of love and support we received from the Roman Catholic, the Protestant and the Jewish communities of Mobile during that emotional time. In 1985, Mary was able to go to Israel with Seton Hall University and Sr. Rose Thering. While she was in Israel, Project Interchange called from

Washington, D. C. and asked if I could go back to Israel. As it happened, I arrived in Israel the evening before my wife was due to return to the states. There are many times we reflect on the faces of those who have been part of our life these past 24 years. Kela Zarembo, a Holocaust survivor, who, at one of the earliest Yom haShoah services, read with her memorable Lithuanian accent, "I Never Saw Another Butterfly." One of the early pioneers of Christian-Jewish Relations was Rabbi Marc Tannenbaum, of blessed memory. We recall seeing him entering the bus which was to take us to the Synagogue in Southfield, Michigan during a Christian-Jewish Relations Workshop. He was a genuinely impressive man and we were reluctant to do more than simply nod. We whispered, so as not to be noticed: "Isn't that Rabbi Tannenbaum?" He sat directly behind us and much to our surprise tapped me on the shoulder and said: "Aren't you the Filbens from Mobile?" What a wonderful and charming person he was! Fr. Ed Flannery, who authored the book, "The Anguish of the Jews," a book which set the course for the years of dialogue that followed. He was truly one of the key persons in the international Christian - Jewish Dialogue. Fr. Flannery's "The Anguish of the Jews" remains one of the most significant contributions to the ongoing C/J Dialogue.