

THE CATHOLIC WEEK

Serving the Gospel of Christ for Sixty-six Years

Cover Story

Teacher gives Holocaust lecture



A PROMISE TO NEVER FORGET—Mobile's Christian Jewish Dialogue begins its 26th year with Mr. Jerry Darring, a teacher at McGill-Toolen Catholic High School, telling about his month-long study of the Holocaust in Israel this past summer. Held at the Ahavas Chesed Synagogue in Mobile, Mr. Darring brought many people to tears with his powerful reflections and personal promise to do his part to change the legacy of anti-Semitism.

by Perilla A. Wilson

A powerful message was delivered to the Jewish community by Jerry Darring, scripture, Latin and social justice teacher at McGill Toolen Catholic High School, in a lecture last week at the Ahvas Chesed Synagogue. Darring, who spent a month in Jerusalem at Yad Vaseem last summer, studying the Holocaust, opened the Mobile Area Christian/Jewish Dialogue's 26th year speaking on, "A Christian Encounter

with Judaism, Israel and the Holocaust." He was the recipient of a fellowship to the Seton Hill College program on Holocaust Studies and also was sponsored by the Dialogue, the Catholic and Episcopal Dioceses and McGill-Toolen Catholic High School.

Darring related the thrill it was to have the "first-hand experience of living Judaism in

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Israel." He described his experiences of witnessing a bar/bat mitzvah of a brother and sister at a Conservative synagogue, a Shabbat service at an Orthodox synagogue, and the reverence with which the people treated the Torah. He was most impressed by the way the whole city of Jerusalem begins closing down on Friday afternoons in preparation for the Shabbat observance.

Side trips were at the minimum but he did relate a moving experience in seeing the devoutness of a youth group at Masada who donned prayer shawls after sunrise over the Dead Sea to sing and recite morning prayers. He was in awe of the ancientness of so many sites such as Rachel's Tomb, Qumran, the Western Wall and Mount Zion and by contrast, the newness of modern construction and "a living, vibrant city." Darring related fascinating tidbits such as the Knesset whose numbers and name are based on the Great

Knesset or Great Assembly, and discovering that the Hebrew language is not only used for scripture and religious ceremony but also "to discuss football and to advertise Coca-Cola."

The most impressive part of the presentation, though, dealt with Holocaust studies. There was a very diverse group both geographically and religiously. The lectures were by foremost authorities and the range of topics covered the history of anti-semitism, Nazi racial ideology, European Jewry before World War II, Nazi policies and practices during the 1930s, World War II and the Final Solution, the Righteous among the Nations, the response of the Allies, the Vatican and the Shoah, liberation and the prosecution of Nazi war criminals, and Holocaust denial. They also met with eleven survivors between lectures.

Darring spent a great deal of time in the Yad Vashem library researching "Israeli-produced material on the [Christian] church's involvement in the history of anti-semitism and the Holocaust." Since

returning to Mobile he has put online "A Catholic Timeline of Events Relating to Jews, Anti-Judaism, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust" and "A Catholic English-Language Bibliography of the Holocaust."

After much reflection on Judaism and Christianity during many encounters in Israel he concluded: 1) "it is somewhat misleading to speak of dialogue between equal partners unless we have in mind not equality in size or equality in importance but equality in dignity"; 2) Judaism will undergo some unpredictable changes due to the rise of the state of Israel, dialogue with the Christian community being "one of the major contributions of the diaspora community"; and 3) Christians cannot continue to worship and read scripture "as though the Holocaust didn't happen." (On Nov. 16th, Darring will address this 3rd point in a lecture for the Christus Theological Institute at Spring Hill College, open to the public)

In his final statement Darring affirmed the Jewish people and the covenant of God with the people of Israel, the State of Israel and the right of Jews to live on their land. He condemned the history of anti-semitic teaching and actions of Christians, the Shoah and whatever contribution he may have made to the "ongoing story of Christian contempt for Jews." He rejected Holocaust denial and attempts to cover up Christian complicity, and challenged other Christians to join him.

Darring ended with a prayer anonymously written in France by a Jew in a concentration camp begging God to enlighten the enemy and asking Him, "May peace come once more upon this earth, peace to men of good will, and may it descend upon the others also. Amen." Understandably, Darring received a sustained and enthusiastic standing ovation.

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Church on Friday, Nov. 10 with 6:00 p.m. Entrance Procession & Sacrament followed by all-night Vigil; and 9:00 p.m. Rosary; on; 8:15 a.m. Mass; and 10:00 a.m. Traditional Fatima Farewell.