

# Yom HaShoah 2007 features student authors and Stanlee J. Stahl

By Perilla A. Wilson

MOBILE—The annual commemoration of the Holocaust, Yom HaShoah, was held at the Ahavas Chesed Synagogue this year and featured the young student winners of the poetry contest, all from St. Dominic's School and the essay contest winners from UMS-Wright School. The principle speaker was Ms. Stanlee J. Stahl, Executive Vice-President of the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous. This foundation has the goal of repaying a debt of gratitude on behalf of the Jewish community to non-Jews who risked their lives

to save the lives of Jews during the Holocaust. At present, they provide financial assistance to nearly 1500 Righteous Gentiles in 27 countries.

Rabbi Steven Silberman of the host synagogue opened the services by reminding all that the Holocaust which means utter desolation was history's greatest failure. He said that this is a time of renewal, resolve, commitment and a pledge to go forward. In Israel today it is a day of memorial and moving on into strength and he urges all present to light a candle and "say a prayer for someone you will never meet."

The program, written and prepared each year by Mary and Paul Filben of Holy Family Parish and founders of the 32 year old Jewish-Christian Dialogue, allowed participants to join in the responses, light candles and place flowers in memory of all who perished in the Holocaust as well as honor survivors, the rescuers and the liberators.

Dr. Don Berry, state of Alabama Director of Holocaust Education, introduced the poetry winners, all students of Sr. Anne Brady, who read their poems. First place was Nicole Walker, 2nd Powell Reed, and 3rd Ellen



**POETRY CONTEST WINNERS**—Sr. Anne Brady, second left, is seen with St. Dominic School student winners of the annual poetry contest held by the Jewish-Christian Dialogue in conjunction with Yom HaShoah, Day of Holocaust Remembrance. Left to right are: 1st place, Nicole Walker; Brady; 3rd place, Ellen Claire Ankerson and 2nd place, Powell Reed.



**DAY OF REMEMBRANCE**—Participants in the annual Holocaust Day of Remembrance Services held this year at the Ahavas Chesed Synagogue included Sr. Anne Brady from St. Dominic School; Ms. Irene Lieberman, Holocaust survivor who speaks to many area students; Ms. Stanlee J. Stahl, Executive Vice President of the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, and Paul Filben of Holy Family Parish who is co-founder of the Mobile Area Jewish-Christian Dialogue.

Claire Ankerson. They were followed by the essay winners, students of Rhonda Samuels; winner Emily Morrow whose essay was titled, "A Lesson to the World;" 2nd place Luke Lewis and 3rd Wilson Newell.

Stahl paid tribute to the rescuers known as Righteous Gentiles, saying that "in every darkness there are particles of light. There were those who had the courage to care." She asked those present to consider what they would have done had they heard that knock on the door like the four Christians did who helped Ann Frank in hiding. She stated that in each country where there were Jews, there was a violation of their human rights. First there was the requirement to wear a mark of identification (in all except Denmark), next there was expropriation of property including removal from work and closing of schools to Jewish children, then isolation in the ghettos and finally annihilation. And in every country there were rescuers.

Poland, according to Stahl, was the key to the Holocaust and the rescuers. "It was not easy for a non-Jewish person to save a Jew," she contended. In September of 1939, Poland was 10% Jewish but they were the least assimilated. Most non-Jews were Catholic and interaction was mainly economic, not social. Jews were put in ghettos by 1940 but there were no

pogroms and most went on hoping but" escape to the Christian world was not lightly undertaken by a Jew."

The final action began on the eve of Passover 1943 in the Warsaw Ghetto "Maybe someone young, with no accent, who spoke Polish (which most Jews did not — they spoke Yiddish) and had no family would try to escape to the Aryan world." To survive, they needed help — provision of shelter, buying food, digging hideouts, disposal of the dead, medicine for the sick, etc. The majority of the rescuers would say they did nothing that any other Christian wouldn't do, but Stahl said that "the care, compassion and concern transcended an environment of prejudice and contempt." Today there are over 22,000 recognized Righteous Gentiles.

Stahl said that there is something tragically wrong that students know the names of Hitler and Eichmann but the names of Christian rescuers are unknown. "Without Christian rescuers, the light of the world diminishes and so do we." The saving of even one life is tantamount to saving the world. "We must teach our children that indifference can kill. Rescuers can serve as roll models for our children."

Rabbi Donald Kunstadt of the Spring Hill Avenue Temple led the recitation of the Mourner's Kaddish.