

Tolerance is goal

Why Mercy students learn about Protestants

By CORINNE ABATT

A course in contemporary Protestantism, offered for juniors and seniors at Mercy High School, Farmington Hills, is quietly fostering tolerance and understanding.

George Wright, chairperson of religious studies at the Catholic girls' high school says, "It is not a comparative religion class. The idea is not to foster ecumenism, but rather to strive for clarification."

From the beginning five years ago, Wright has drawn upon the local community for his resources and continues over the years to find the response heartwarming.

Contemporary Protestantism is an elective in a religious curriculum that includes a survey of Catholic teaching, religions of the East and religions of the West, voices of the 20th century Christian community and other courses.

As Wright began to plan his course, he contacted Dr. J. Harold Ellens of University Hills Church. He calls the

help, suggestions and contacts he received from Ellens "invaluable."

EACH SEMESTER the class pays a visit to six or seven local Protestant churches during class time. Wright talks with the ministers ahead of time, asking them to touch on history of the denomination, major beliefs, issues and practices and the form and content of Sunday worship.

Later in class, students give oral and written reactions to each visit. Class activity also includes a study of Protestant denominations and the Reformation, papers, questionnaires, films and in-depth reports.

Rather than neutralizing their faith, Wright says, "My students learn more about their own faith as a result of the class."

"They are challenged to clarify their own thinking."

"This is not a class in ecumenism, but ecumenism is a byproduct. Some of the other byproducts are tolerance, understanding, sensitivity and awareness."

An optional assignment is to attend a Sunday service in one of the local Protestant churches.

Wright chose six major denominations for study—Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Methodist and Baptist.

This year the students visited and talked with: Rev. Victor Mendenhall, Prince of Peace Lutheran; Rev. John Hooper, Trinity Episcopal; Rev. Stanley Nicol, North Farmington Baptist; Rev. Gary Cowall, Lutheran Church of the Incarnation; Rev. Homer Nye, First Presbyterian Church; Rev. Meredith Moshauer, Nardin Park United Methodist; and Rev. Carl Schultz, Salem United Church of Christ.

As he describes the course in a

paper, Wright comments, "Stereotypes and misunderstandings were replaced through genuine sharing of beliefs and ideas. New insights were gained about the denominations... Most importantly, meeting the local clergy on a personal basis began relationships for the students, the teacher and the school which grew into friendships... and became the major benefit of the course for all its participants."

The final visit for the course, which began in September, was with Moshauer in the sanctuary of Nardin Park United Methodist, just across the street from the high school.

AFTER GIVING the background of the church the students had already seen a film on John Wesley and stud-

ied a booklet on the Methodists from the Paulist Press Ecumenical Series. Moshauer described the structure of the church, how bishops are elected and elders and deacons ordained.

In answer to a question of whether women were ordained, Moshauer said, "Yes, four or five elders in this conference are women. There is no hang-up there."

He used the late Rev. Elsie Johns of the Clarencerville United Methodist Church as an example.

To another question about infant baptism, he said, "Yes, we have infant baptism, but we allow for believer's baptism."

Speaking of infant baptism he said, "I think we have a misnomer there. It should be called dedication or christening."

Later, he showed the robes he wears for service and the variety of stoles which carry symbols for the various seasons and holidays.

Wright is certain that he has derived a great deal of benefit from the course. Many of the area's religious leaders are his friends. He has seen his students come to appreciate their own religion with a depth of understanding. And he has heard them express appreciation for the community in which they live and go to school.

He says that what originally was simply an additional elective to the religious studies curriculum "has produced unexpected ecumenical rewards in the classroom and in the community."



Pastor Stanley D. Nicol, right, of North Farmington Baptist Church and George Wright, Mercy High School teacher, discuss Wright's course in contemporary Protestantism. Pastor Nicol and many members of the Farmington clergy have cooperated with Wright to make the course a popular and relevant one. (Staff photo)



Students from Our Lady of Mercy High School in Farmington Hills watch as Rev. Meredith Moshauer of Nardin Park United Methodist Church shows the vestments he wears at services. He

is explaining the symbols on the various color stoles. The girls are studying contemporary Protestantism. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

Rabbi Silberberg honored at Labor Zionist Institute

The Jewish community of West Bloomfield, Farmington and neighboring areas will welcome Rabbi Elimelech Silberberg at a reception Dec. 20 at the Labor Zionist Institute in Farmington.

Rabbi Silberberg, a three-week resident of West Bloomfield after having been called here from Brooklyn, N.Y., will be spiritual leader for Congregation Bais Chabad of West Bloomfield, which meets in Ealy School, 5475 W. Maple. His offices are currently in the Zionist Institute in Farmington.

Rabbi Silberberg, representing the Chabad-Lubavitch organization of Michigan, has already begun offering classes in various aspects of Judaism to members of his 25-family congregation. It is his intent to "develop an education environment in the community."

"I have a two-fold purpose," he explained. "To be spiritual leader of the congregation and offer a place for all members of the Jewish faith to learn more about Judaism."

According to the rabbi, adult and

young Jews alike do not know enough about Judaic history and philosophy. He hopes to continue established lecture groups in history, liturgy and contemporary topics, and to eventually set up classes in Yiddish, Hebrew and the Bible, for children.

HE ALSO HOPES to set up a drop-in center for Jewish youth and a Hebrew afternoon school at the Labor Zionist Institute, and to someday have a new synagogue in West Bloomfield.

Preceding the rabbi's arrival in West Bloomfield, Congregation Bais Chabad was led by a "caretaker rabbi" who came from the Detroit area Lubavitch headquarters in Oak Park. Erwin Hollander of West Bloomfield is president of the congregation.

Bais Chabad was established two years ago in West Bloomfield and, according to Rabbi Silberberg, combines the "Hasidic mystic with a contemporary approach" to Judaism.

The congregation meets at 9:15 a.m. each Saturday at Ealy School for services and at 10 a.m. Sunday.

The rabbi described Bais Chabad as the first traditional, orthodox congregation in West Bloomfield and described the Lubavitch movement as the "most dynamic Jewish movement today."

He said Bais Chabad draws its membership from West Bloomfield, Birmingham and Farmington.

RABBI SILBERBERG, 28, was born in New York and educated at Bronx Lubavitch Yeshiva, Mesivta Talmudical Seminary and Central Lubavitch Academy in Brooklyn. He was ordained at age 21.

His wife, the former Chana Sara Schulkind, is a graduate of Brooklyn College and was assistant principal at Machon Chana Women's Institute.

"My goal is to educate the people and give them a panorama of Jewish information, then let them exercise their freedom of choice of synagogues," said Rabbi Silberberg.

Those interested in signing up for the rabbi's lecture groups may contact him at his office, 628-6218.



Susan Latham, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Latham, 23350 Middlebelt, Farmington Hills, has been appearing with the national company of "Irene" starring Betsy Kelly. She recently performed at the Whiting Auditorium in Flint.



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