

Jews, Catholics face future

By Marie McGee
staff writer

AT FIRST, Rev. Alex Brunett, pastor of St. Aldan Catholic Church in Livonia, almost missed the significance of the flood that occurred in the church a scant two weeks before he was to host an important interfaith rally.

He regarded the incident as a nuisance that only muddled up things and caused a lot of havoc. Four inches of water throughout the church sanctuary — where the conference was to convene — can be unsettling.

But like that biblical flood that brought a new covenant between Noah and God, the St. Aldan flood was a reflection, he said in brief opening remarks to the convened audience, of the new relationship that now exists between many Catholics and Jews.

THIS WAS EVIDENCED, he continued, by the record crowd which gathered at St. Aldan's that day to mark the 20th anniversary of the second Vatican Council, which is credited with paving the way for historic changes in Catholic-Jewish relationships. The theme for the convocation was "Twenty Years After . . . Facing the Future Together."

From the Vatican Council II, which was convened by the late Pope John XXIII and met from 1962 to 1965, came the document "Nostra Aetate (In Our Age), which repudiated the notion of collective Jewish guilt for the Crucifixion, stressed the spiritual bond between Catholics and Jews, and called for mutual understanding and respect between the two faiths.

Approximately 250 people — mostly Catholics and Jews — gathered at the church to celebrate the 20 years of progress that began with "a little holy madness," first unleashed by Pope John XXIII.

The holy madness reference was a humorous reference in what was an otherwise serious and eloquent keynote address by Rabbi James Rudin of New York, national director, American Jewish Committee inter-religious Affairs Department, at a dinner that followed the conference.

IN HIS ADDRESS, Rudin said that Vatican document "recognizes we are all members of the same family.

"We'll differ, but isn't that the way it is in a family?"

"Even though we are different," he continued, the Nostra Aetate "has freed all of us from the tight chains of the past and we can now move to higher ground."

He also quoted another Pope — John Paul, who Rudin quoted as having said in 1980: "Whoever meets Jesus Christ, meets Judaism."

The highlight of dinner came when Brunett, director of ecumenical and inter-religious affairs for the Archdiocese of Detroit, was honored for his work by the American Jewish Committee. He was presented with an original serigraph for his many years as a leader in this area.

AS PART OF THE seminar's format, participants broke up into smaller groups attending seminars of their choice: Living Room Dialogue, Issues That Divide and Educating For Understanding: Vatican II as a Teaching Resource.

Moderators for these sessions included Dr. Eugene J. Fisher, executive director, secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations, National Conference of Catholic Bishops; Rabbi Dannel Schwartz, senior rabbi, Temple Beth El; Rev. James Lyons, Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies; Robert Dugan, Archdiocesan chairperson, Catholic-Jewish Subcommittee; Judy Banki, national associate director, American Jewish Committee inter-religious Affairs Department and Rudin.

Special guest of honor at the dinner was the Most Rev. Edmund Szoka, Archbishop of Detroit, who gave the benediction.

Brunett credited his involvement in inter-religious affairs to Archbishop Szoka.

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There's more to the story

There's more to the anecdote about the flood at St. Aldan that Rev. Alex Brunett used in his opening statements to the seminar audience Monday, in which he likened the calamity to the renewal of covenant between Noah and God at the time of the Great Flood.

Brunett explained that the National Assembly of Ecumenical officers, of which he is a member and a past president, meets each year in January in California to do their writing and plan programs. The meetings are held in California to take advantage of the nice weather.

HOWEVER, BRUNETT said, it hasn't always worked out that way.

In the past 10 years, he's been in two mudslides, an earthquake, a tremendous windstorm and a couple of floods.

This year was different though, he said. For once, he said, the weather was perfect.

Then he got a phone call from Livonia. "It was the day the wind-chill factor was something like 58 degrees below zero. A pipe in a rest room in the front of the church froze and burst. The result was four inches of water in the church."

To overcome the flood of '85, Brunett smiled, was akin to the renewal of a another kind of covenant — this one between all those who were present at the conference.

— Marie McGee



staff photos by HANDE BORGST

Rev. Alex J. Brunett, director of the division of Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs for the Archdiocese of Detroit, welcomed the guests to the meeting.



Dr. Eugene Fisher delivered the opening address to the conference.



Rabbi Dannel Schwartz, senior rabbi at Temple Beth El, was a participant in the Living Room Dialogue seminar.



Judy Banki shared the podium with Robert Dugan for their discussion of Vatican II as a teaching resource. Banki is the national associate director for the American Jewish Committee on Inter-religious Affairs.

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