



Bill Cosby appeared this Christmas at the United Nations to entertain the children of the delegates, and to remind the world that even in the midst of international crises, humor is a very good response to despair. (RNS)

Interfaith Worship Center

By FATHER JOSEPH CHAMPLIN

If someone asks for a simple explanation of ecumenism, we might respond with two words: sharing and unity. These notions summarize efforts to share common beliefs and practices with a hope this will lead to the eventual union, or reunion, of Churches.

Early in the ecumenical movement imaginative pioneers speculated about a logical consequence to these discussions—construction of a single church or building for diverse faith communities. The Interfaith Center at Wilde Lake Village Green in the new planned city of Columbia, Md. midway between Washington and Baltimore has now turned this abstract concept into a concrete reality.

Under the roof of a \$1.1 million structure are separate worship areas for Protestants, Catholics, Jews and Unitarians, with shared office space for the clergy and administrative personnel of six participating major denominations. Title to the building is held by the Columbia Religious Facilities Corporation. Tenants lease their spaces and make regular payments which provide for interest, debt service, maintenance and repairs. Weekly rental for the Catholic community amounts to \$1,160 and according to the present schedule financing of the edifice will be completed in about 20 years.

In these days Church leaders understandably hesitate to construct huge brick and mortar monuments while countless flesh and blood poor go hungry or live in hovels.

This awareness of world poverty and the need to remedy these conditions partly explains the Interfaith Center at Columbia. It is an experiment in economy, an attempt to determine if various congregations can save many dollars by sharing a single roof. No one knows yet.

This innovative religious building, however, also grew out of a desire for unity among believers. The Center's motto taken from Psalm 133 (132) expresses this wish. "How pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity."

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space is termed, descriptively, a "multi-celebration" area and, according to architect William L. Gaudreau, conveys the idea that it has been designed for a multitude of functions or celebrations: liturgical, social, educational, and theatrical. To assure the visual and audible success of activities which take place in this Catholic section, the artists finally agreed on a modified arena style with center-stage effect and sloping floors.

The angular shaped altar and pulpit, done in plexiglas and chrome, are portable in detail. All the furniture is of such a movable nature so that the areas used for worship can become a center stage for drama, recitals, lectures, and other forms of education and recreation during the rest of the week.

Articles 279-280 of the Roman Missal's General Instruction speak about art and architecture. "Church decor should be of noble simplicity. The layout of the church and its surroundings should be contemporary. It should meet the

needs for the celebration of sacred services and also the usual needs in places where people gather together."

Those who have worked for many years in bringing the Columbia dream to fruition feel their obviously contemporary Interfaith Center is of noble simplicity and does fulfill the worship needs of a congregation. Apparently Lawrence Cardinal Shehan, archbishop of Baltimore, holds similar convictions. He wrote to the community at Wilde Lake Village Green:

The opening of the new Interfaith Center at Columbia provides a unique opportunity for long-time growth in ecumenism and brotherly spirit.

The mutual ownership of land and facilities and the sharing of space, administrative personnel and costs, and the development of co-ordinated programming, will testify to the good stewardship of the resources God has given these congregations to administer. We ask God's blessing upon this endeavor, so full of promise.

KNOW YOUR FAITH

A Zest for Life

By MONIKA HELLWIG

Have you ever been overwhelmed with the feeling that life has no meaning? That nothing really has any point or purpose? That the colors in your life have all turned grey? That no one really cares about you and so there's no reason why you should care about them or about yourself? That life is intolerably boring?

I was talking with a college student, and that is how he described his life. He was surrounded by friends who were on drugs. They were looking for something to lift them out of themselves, beyond themselves. When they took "trips" on LSD they had an experience of ecstasy, of being saved. They referred to it as a religious experience. But this experience of salvation turned out to be "phony." It did not radiate meaning over the rest of their lives. Sometimes they had bad trips. Even when they had good ones, they came out depressed and confused. Some had ruined their health.

The student who spoke with me had tried to help his friends "kick" the habit. He had worn himself out and felt he had achieved nothing. His fellow students turned to drugs to satisfy a real need—the need to have something to live for. The more he tried to help, the more he was dragged down into their depression. Everyone seemed to be asking for love, for hope, for reassurance. And there was no one to give.

Some weeks later, the same student was completely transformed. He himself had found something to live for, or rather someone. He had met a girl. She was friendly, sincere, concerned, compassionate. She was willing to share her goal, her hopes, her vision. She was alive in a world of people dead from despair.

The student said it was as though a battlefield full of dead bones had jumped up and begun to dance. He felt himself

come alive in response to her life, and he saw others come alive in response to his life. This ought to happen to more people, he said. But where is the promise of life to come from?

It seems that human effort is always doomed to frustration, when it seeks to give an all-embracing meaning to life, a zest for life that overcomes hatred and fear. Martin Luther King tried and he was killed. Mahatma Gandhi had tried and he was killed. Long before that, Jesus had tried and he was killed.

When Martin Luther King died, something died in all his followers. Many lost hope of bringing about justice by conversion of conscience. They said it had failed and there could only be the way of force, of hatred, of bitterness. The same with Gandhi. The same with Jesus.

When Jesus died there was utter bewilderment and quiet despair among his followers.

The higher the hope, the deeper the despair when it fails. The worse the sense of futility and senselessness. The history of mankind is full of incidents like this. It is so cruel, so unjust, so utterly meaningless.

According to the records they left us of themselves in the Acts of the Apostles, that is more or less how the disciples of Jesus reacted, huddled together in a room like tuned out drop-outs.

But something happened. A truth dawned on them that made them free, the truth on which they could found their trust, the truth which restored their zest for life. First one, then more, then many, they came alive in response to the living Christ. Alive in faith. They tuned in and it made sense—a sense that could not be destroyed again because Jesus had already passed through death to life.

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