

Education

Prelate offers ways to get aid

By Robert B. Dylak
Catholic News Service

SOUTH ORANGE, N.J. — As they build cooperation, Catholics and Jews could team up to seek constitutionally sound aid for nonpublic schools, Archbishop William H. Keeler of Baltimore advised a recent gathering of Christians and Jews in South Orange.

The archbishop, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, addressed a forum drawing more than 100 people to Oheb Shalom Synagogue in June.

"There can and ought to be a new moment in Catholic-Jewish relations in the United States, as both sides seek higher levels of cooperation," Archbishop Keeler said. One key area could be seeking some form of aid to nonpublic school students or parents, he proposed. "Of course, this aid or relief would have to pass constitutional muster," he added.

Arguments for rethinking the issue "range from an acknowledgement of the primacy of parental responsibility for their children's education ... to the affirmation of pluralism as opposed to governmental monopoly of education," he said.

He stated that Catholic schools are the church's "most effective means" of combatting anti-Semitism. "Surveys have shown that graduates of Catholic high schools in this country are not only more positive toward Jews and Judaism than other Catholics, but far more positive than the general population, which is to say, graduates of public schools." Catholic schools also provide

an opportunity for many minority youngsters to graduate from high school and go on to college, "a way not available to them otherwise — a way now imperiled by rising costs," he said.

Carol Buglio, an official of the New Jersey branch of the American Jewish Committee, thanked the prelate for his efforts, in the United States and abroad, to expand Jewish-Catholic dialogue and work for a deeper understanding and mutual appreciation.

On his part, Archbishop Keeler expressed appreciation for the actions of the government of Israel, which underwrites up to 85 percent of the operating costs of religious schools in that country, including those that are Catholic.

The archbishop also commended Palestinian Latin-rite Patriarch Michel Sabbah of Jerusalem for striving to bring about and maintain peace.

"His continued insistence on this spiritual-minded approach is one very positive ingredient, not generally noticed in either the Jewish or general press, in the current peace process, with its succession of ups and downs," he said.

That progress toward peace in the Middle East and establishment of full diplomatic relations between Israel and the Vatican have provided "a new moment in the world climate," Archbishop Keeler said. New opportunities for understanding and collaboration have opened since the collapse of communism in Eastern and Central Europe, which "ended an era of pain and suffering for both our people," he said.

As a result of talks since the fall of European communism, the European bishops have issued a declaration opposing anti-Semitism; the Polish bishops have issued "a strong call to the people to combat anti-Semitism"; and the German bishops have "condemned the new manifestations of anti-Semitism in Germany and elsewhere," he said. "Pope John Paul did the same in the name of the whole church."

Other steps to improve understanding have included bringing Jewish scholars to Polish seminaries to lecture on Jewish history, he said. Moreover, he said, Polish scholars now have opportunities to present to Jewish groups and Jewish seminaries facts of Polish history, including the Nazi occupation, "to overcome the stereotypes of Poles and Catholics which contribute to continued misunderstanding," he said.

He also lauded the work of the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies at Seton Hall University, and said scholars are developing a better understanding of the Catholic Church's efforts on behalf of Jews during World War II.

Likewise, he warned against generalizations about inaction during the Holocaust. "There is no question that some Christian leaders failed, nor is there a question that others acted heroically," he said.

The archbishop emphasized that the Holy See "contributed to the rescue of many" and quoted directly from wartime news reports that praised papal opposition to Nazism and Nazi propaganda reacting to papal concerns.

Religious educators are effective, study shows

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Parish-based religious education is doing an effective job of forming young Catholics, according to a national study by the Washington office of Educational Testing Service.

"Students in Catholic schools and students in parish programs were generally similar in their perceptions of God, their perceptions of themselves as followers of Christ, their participation in the Eucharist and their identity as Catholics," said the recently released study.

"In religious knowledge, Catholic school students tended to hold a slight edge," it said, but "both school and parish programs seem to be effectively communicating a basic understanding of Catholic doctrine."

It concluded that the out-of-school catechetical programs — despite inadequate funding and material resources and their overwhelmingly volunteer corps of teachers — are basically sound, effective programs doing what they were meant to do.

More than 4.1 million U.S. Catholic school-age children are enrolled in parish religious education programs. Catholic elementary and high schools have an enrollment of nearly 2.7 million.

Comparisons of the religious knowledge, percep-

tions and commitment of those in parish programs and those in Catholic schools was drawn from a nationwide survey conducted in 1992.

Data for the study came from the education programs of 1,822 Catholic parishes — nearly one-tenth of all U.S. parishes — and from surveys of some 4,000 Catholics of junior high and high school age in those parishes.

Other major elements in the study included:

— A survey of the nation's bishops and diocesan religious education leaders to determine what adult Catholic characteristics they considered the most important among possible outcomes of religious formation programs. — A national survey of 530 randomly selected registered Catholic parishioners and a comparable survey of 333 parishioners named by pastors as exemplary Catholics.

The adult survey segment was designed to compare the religious formation background of the two groups, their religious knowledge and attitudes and their involvement as adults in parish activities and adult formation programs.

One of the main conclusions was that Catholic adult formation programs today are diverse and numerous and clearly contribute to forming the kind of adult

Continued on page 11A



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