

# CONTINUED...

## Holocaust

Continued from page 1

"We know there were Christians who died, who were sent to concentration camps because they helped Jews. We know Jews served as guards ... to keep alive. We know Jews pointed out others who were in hiding. ..." she said.

Appelbaum, Hennessy and Father Michael Upson of Rochester explained at the in-service how they came to feel teaching the Holocaust is so important. Levinson also spoke. They also discussed universal aspects of the Holocaust.

"It's about time somebody do some encouraging things about teaching it in the Catholic schools to the point where it will be effective rather than just, 'The Holocaust happened,'" said Louis Rizzieri, principal of St. Patrick's School in Seneca Falls, who attended the in-service.

"I think Dan and (the Holocaust center) providing a Holocaust survivor to talk to students and providing a class for teachers is going to spark more interest and certainly be a foundation for more learning to come from that."

Since 1994 New York has required instruction in human rights issues — particularly the inhumanity of genocide, slavery and the Holocaust — for students over the age of 8 in both public and private schools.

The instruction, the law states, is in part "to foster ... moral and intellectual qualities which are essential in preparing to meet the obligations of citizenship in peace and in war ..."

In addition, such statements as the Vatican's "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah," released in March, set the stage for further study of the tragedy.

The National Council of Synagogues and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' ecumenical committee, too, encouraged such study and teaching in their own May 5 statement, "Reflections on the Millennium."

Joint studies by Jews and Catholics may frame a common understanding for future educational programming, the statement said. It added, "While much work remains to be done in this regard, we note as well that a solid beginning has been made since

the Second Vatican Council ..."

Eugene Fisher, the committee's director for Catholic-Jewish affairs, said that Christians, by teaching contempt, emphasizing that "Jews killed Jesus" and misunderstanding the New Testament in collectivizing all Jews, "missed the point of the Paschal mystery" and "tainted all of Christianity."

"Digging our way out of that is something that confronts all Christians equally," he said in an interview from Washington, D.C.

Regarding education efforts, he said, "There have been Holocaust education courses, programs in various places here or there," but a more standardized approach is needed.

### A learning tool

Father Upson would agree. His introduction to the Holocaust was the French film, "Night and Fog."

Father Upson saw the subtitled film as a student of about 15, in a preparatory seminary in New York City. "All I remember seeing were bulldozers pushing bodies into mass graves and skeletal figures walking around. It was just horrible," he said. "My classmates were getting quite ill."

It was the last thing kids without any preparation should see, he said.

"The questions I had were where was this, how could this be?" he recalled. "How could anybody do something as evil as this ... why wasn't it being talked about and why was I just hearing about it now? The questions stayed with me a very, very long time."

As he, an African-American, began to experience racism, however, "I got to the point where I could understand how this could happen."

In Rochester, Appelbaum, aware of the priest's knowledge and interest in the issue, asked him to speak with city teachers, to Jewish children and to the Geneva in-service and presentation to students. In turn, Appelbaum has spoken in his church, Immaculate Conception, about African-American liberators during the Holocaust.

The priest-administrator proved ideal for reaching children in the Geneva program, Hennessy said.

"(Father Upson) is built like a tackle for the Philadelphia Eagles. He's thoughtful,

gentle, warm and it was the perfect chemistry."

During the in-service as well, Hennessy added, "He gave a moving testimony, openly and vulnerable to the point we — Helen, Barbara, I and everyone had tears in our eyes."

Father Upson noted that in discussing any such racism or slavery, the "first thing people will say is 'I wasn't there.'"

That's not the point, he said. He approaches the Holocaust from the aspect of basic tolerance — "not tolerant in just putting up with, but to be able to deal with situations in the world and deal with people who are very different."

"It is something we have to grow into," he said. "This is what love is all about."

At Appelbaum's suggestion he recently attended a conference at Harvard University on facing Holocaust issues, which noted the interconnection of other racial injustices — as in South Africa, Japanese camps in the United States during World War II, Rwanda and Bosnia.

"Just studying the Holocaust, studying intolerance, you have to approach the question of evil," Father Upson said. "Your spiritual life has to be balanced. You have to know good as well as bad."

"Studying the Holocaust has helped me understand racism. It has helped me understand why people are afraid to talk about certain things," he said.

### Theology of teaching

In January the Holocaust center offered a program by educators from Yad Vashem, the national Holocaust Memorial Museum in Jerusalem. There, Hennessy said, he learned the Holocaust should be taught, first, by personalizing the teaching.

Second, the teaching should stress Jewish culture and life as it was before the Holocaust. Third, the teaching should include the "life that comes up from the ashes kind of thing," and hope.

Yad Vashem even encourages teaching children down to the first grade, with a generalized approach.

The theology of such teaching is an expertise of Joseph Kelly, a Nazareth College professor. He helped write "Within Context," for the Anti-Defamation League, used by catechists to implement Vatican II

teaching about Judaism. He also helped write the "Rochester Agreement" signed in May 1996. The agreement formalized the commitment of cooperation between Jewish and Catholic communities, and was distributed nationally.

God has covenants both with Christians through Jesus and with the Jewish people through the Hebrew Scriptures, Kelly said. "The covenant for Jews is still in effect," he said.

"This is where more work has to be done," he said, explaining that people still tend to think the New Testament superseded the Old.

Hennessy himself, a 1974 DeSales High School graduate, became motivated to teach the Holocaust — although he primarily teaches math — through experiences such as his prior involvement in a Messianic Jewish congregation in California.

Although there is controversy over such congregations — Kelly said one is either a Jew or a Christian, but not both — Hennessy learned about Judaism while there. And he pursued his interest at the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles. There he met a Holocaust survivor after her talk.

"She and I were holding hands and the doors burst open," he recalled. "A young yeshiva student said to get out, and we left through the emergency doors. There was a bomb threat. In that moment I was pulled into the whole thing, unwillingly."

"Fifty years after the liberation, people were still trying to kill Livia (the speaker), to hurt the Jewish people for some reason."

Last year around Hanukkah he and Cantor Richard Rosenfield of Temple Beth El in Geneva arranged for Jewish and Catholic students to wipe anti-Semitic graffiti from a Geneva bridge. The event drew city officials as well.

"Dan really led the way, and I appreciate what he's doing," Rosenfield said, adding he has visited Hennessy's sixth-grade religion class.

"I guess one of the things that is a lesson here is there are individuals like Dan ... who 'get it,' who understand what the Holocaust was about," Appelbaum said, referring as well to Catholic leaders in other schools and churches. And it is those individuals who are helping increase understanding, she added.

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