



Vol. 43 No. 33 November 10, 2004

In Catholic-Jewish relations, Bishop Murphy is 'friend and partner'

By Mary Gorry

Wantagh — Catholics and Jews from around Long Island met at the Suburban Temple here on Sunday, Nov. 7 to hear a panel of Catholic and Jewish leaders, including Bishop William Murphy, discuss the great strides made in Catholic-Jewish and Vatican-Israeli relations and the work that still needs to be done.

“Jews and Catholics, Israel and the Vatican: Building Bridges,” presented by the South East Nassau Synagogue Enterprise (SENSE), the Pave the Way Foundation, and the Diocese of Rockville Centre, marked the 10th anniversary of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Israel and the Vatican.



Bishop William Murphy chats with Oded Ben-Hur, ambassador of Israel to the Holy See, at a conference Sunday in Wantagh marking the 10th anniversary of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Israel and the Vatican. (TLIC photo by Gregory A. Shemitz)

In addition to Bishop Murphy, the panelists included Rabbi Jack Bemporad, director of the Center for Interreligious Understanding and a professor of Interreligious Studies at the Vatican’s Angelicum University in Rome; Father David-Maria Jaeger, a Franciscan Friar and legal representative for the Franciscan custody of the Holy Land; Father Priamo Etzi, associate dean of the Pontifical Athenaeum at the Franciscan University in Rome; and Oded Ben-Hur, the Israeli Ambassador to the Vatican.

“My first impression as a seminarian, as a young priest, was of Cardinal Cushing of Boston,” said Bishop Murphy. “Through-out his life he was an unabashed and unapologetic fighter for changing Catholic-Jewish relations.”

“At the second Vatican Council, he rose onto the floor for only two reasons,” said the bishop. “He spoke with great gusto in favor of religious freedom. Two weeks

later he was on his feet again to give a ringing endorsement to a declaration on the Jews, to an end to anti-Semitism.”

Since the opening of dialogue between Catholics and Jews, Catholics have begun to see Jesus “in the perspective of his Jewish-ness,” noted Bishop Murphy. “We’ve learned to like each other and we’ve also learned that we want to understand each other better.”

“Our two faiths use the same words but often mean very different things,” said Rabbi Bemporad. Catholics and Jews will never understand the others’ religion “unless we talk to each other theologically,” he said.

It’s important to remember, however, that “it’s not religions that communicate. It’s human beings that communicate,” noted Rabbi Bemporad. It’s also important to remember that the issue is not whether or not Catholics and Jews agree on matters they are discussing. “The issue is rather whether we understand one another,” he said.

The Catholic Church “has had the courage and is the leader and has established the model” of working with Judaism, noted Rabbi Bemporad. Because of the Catholic Church, Judaism is viewed as Christianity’s “dearly beloved elder brothers,” he said. “Jesus was born, raised, and died a Jew,” said Mr. Ben-Hur. “We have so much in common but we were afraid to talk about it. Two thousand years of unpleasant history between Jews and Christians created a kind of suspicion, fear, among Jews. It created fear and this fear created detachment, and this detachment created something that is very sad, ignorance,” ignorance about what it means to be a Christian on the part of the Jews, and on the part of Christians, what it means to be a Jew.

Israelis have spent so many years defending the right of Israel to exist that they never gave much thought to the future, noted Mr. Ben-Hur, but they are now, and that’s what having a dialogue with the Vatican is about.

In a relationship of love and friendship, “it is important to say ‘I love you,’” said Father Jaeger, but it also important to act in ways that show that love. “Together we must stand for justice, we must stand for peace which is the fruit of justice.”

“We have come a long way in 40 years,” noted Bishop Murphy. “Whatever the future is, I pledge to you I will always be your partner and your friend.”