

**THE JOSEPH CARDINAL BERNARDIN CENTER
FOR
THE STUDY OF EASTERN EUROPEAN JEWRY:
A SUMMARY OF PROGRAMS**

The Center was established in July 1987. Its original scope was perceived in enormously broad terms both programmatically and financially. By Winter 1989, it had become clear that the Center should concentrate on the doable and the fundable, rather than on the unattainable and the fiscally impossible. Once this occurred, efforts began to focus on specific programs. Each of these programs has had limited and specific goals within doable fiscal parameters. Each of the Center's programs has exceeded its goals. Taken as a whole, these programs have had an enormous positive impact upon improving Polish-Jewish, Catholic-Jewish relations both in Poland and in Chicago. At present (1992), a plan is in place for a number of future programs of the Center in Poland. Yet, the Center still needs to respond more fully to Cardinal Bernardin's mandate to mount more numerous and effective programs locally.

Since 1989, the Center has carved out its own programmatic unique niche so as not to duplicate existing programs of other institutions and organizations. Further, the center continuously has operated within the parameters of available in-hand funding for specific projects. The Center has adopted a theological and academic focus, thereby not competing with or duplicating the work of others who take a social and political focus in their work. To date, programs have focused on Poland and on the Polish-American community, rather than including all of Eastern Europe or other local groups of east European origin. This has been because of five factors: (1) the unique historical and demographic relationship of American Jews to Poland; (2) the presence in Chicago of the largest Polish community of any city but Warsaw; (3) the cooperation of the Polish Catholic community of Chicago through

Bishop Alfred Abramowicz; (4) the cooperation and support of the Polish Episcopate's hierarchy; and (5) available funding.

Each of the programs of the Center has exceeded expectations in the area of "relations-building" in Poland. To date, success in local Chicago relations-building programs has not been either as extensive or as successful as abroad, though substantial ground has been broken.

The first and most ambitious program of the Center has been the Summer 1989 Polish Priest/Professor Seminar in Judaism, held at Spertus College. Twenty-one Polish priests and one Russian Orthodox who serve as professors in theological seminaries throughout Poland came to Chicago for two months. Four days per week, 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. for seven weeks, they studied Jewish: theology, liturgy, philosophy, mysticism, law, ethics, homiletics. Classical Jewish religious texts of a wide variety of genre were also studied. In addition, they learned about American religious pluralism. An international high calibre faculty including Jews, Catholics and Protestants from across the United States and from Israel taught the various class sessions. On Fridays and weekends, the participants were given extensive exposure to Chicago "Polonia," Chicago academia, and a "living" Jewish community not currently present in Poland. It should be noted that both in the midst of planning for this program and in the midst of the program itself revolutionary socio-political changes were occurring in Poland, and the Auschwitz Convent controversy had begun and was escalating.

The participants of the Seminar gave it extensive publicity in Poland upon their return – in local and national religious and secular media. However, most significant has been the "multiplier" effect where students taught by the participants have been influenced by what they learned in Chicago. The participants invited representatives of the Center to Poland in Spring 1990.

In May 1990 a delegation from the Center visited Poland. Lectures on Judaica were given at seven seminaries in five cities. Meetings for future planning were held with Cardinals Glemp and Macharski, and the Commission for Dialogue with the Jews. Also, inquiries regarding Judaica artifacts currently in Church hands was made. A reunion with participants of the Seminar was held.

In April 1991, a subsequent visit to Poland was made by delegates of the Center. The Institute for the Study of Judaism was formed with the Center and the Academy of Catholic Theology of Warsaw as co-sponsors. This interinstitutional agreement had already been endorsed by Cardinals Bernardin and Glemp. Discussions for future planning continued with Cardinal Glemp and with the Commission through its president, Bishop Henryk Muszynski. Meetings were also held with the Papal Nuncio, various bishops, and the Ministry of Culture to explore possibilities for exhibitions of Polish-Jewish art at Spertus Museum. Lectures on Judaica were given at a number of seminaries.

In September 1991, Cardinal Primate Glemp visited the Center at Spertus College – his only visit to a Jewish institution in the United States. In November 1991 a groundbreaking public event was sponsored by the Center at the College to further Polish-Jewish dialogue. In all programs, the Polish Consulate was both informed and played an active role. Similarly, Cardinal Bernardin has played an active role in the programs of the Center. Following up on discussions held in Poland in April 1991, a May 1992 visit to Poland is planned.

Finally, through publications an effort is being made to reach those in Poland who do not have direct access to the Center's activities there. Six articles by Rabbi Dr. Byron L. Sherwin, Director of the Center, have been published in Polish in Poland; most significantly, articles by Sherwin and Fr. Joseph Mytych on the work of the Center were published in the Polish Episcopate's newsletter sent to all churches in Poland. The legion and dedicated efforts of Fr. Mytych both locally and in

Poland have been a major factor in the success of the Center's programs. In Fall 1991, a volume in Polish entitled *Children of One God*, including studies in Judaism by participants of the 1989 Seminar was published in Poland. This publication was made possible by the support of Bishops Abramowicz and Muszynski.