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## Spertus Will Open Bernardin Center

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In a move that exemplifies the continuing dialogue between Catholics and Jews, the Spertus College of Judaica recently announced plans to open the Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Center for the Study of Eastern European Jewry.

The institute is named for the Catholic archbishop of Chicago because ``the cardinal has been instrumental in making contacts with the Polish government and church to make this project a reality,’’ Dr. Howard A. Sulkin, president of Spertus, said.

The interfaith learning center eventually will house art, artifacts and scholarly works of 1,000 years of Eastern European Jewry that were saved during World War II by Polish citizens. It also will open an institute for the study of the Jewish/Christian experience, Sulkin said.

``Because of serious problems with Catholic/Jewish relations, we wanted this to be a joint project,’’ he said.

Sulkin was referring to problems exacerbated recently when Austrian President Kurt Waldheim, accused of participating in Nazi war crimes as a member of Adolf Hitler’s army, visited Pope John Paul II at the Vatican in June.

The visit is ``an issue that hurt the whole Jewish community,’’ Sulkin said. ``I’m totally confident’’ the tensions will be reduced, he said.

Rev. John Pawlikowski, a consultant for the project, and a member of the advisory committee for the Catholic Bishops’ Secretariat for Catholic/Jewish relations, said he is sure that the Waldheim visit created only a temporary rift between the two religious groups.

``There’s been a lot of progress despite the great difficulty of some of the permanent scars that might remain from the Waldheim visit,’’ he said.

``People are still committed to resolving difficulties through intensive conversation rather than turning backs on each other.’’

Cardinal Bernardin is one of the Catholic bishops most identified with the improvement of Jewish/Catholic relations, Father Pawlikowski said. Sulkin said he hoped that naming

the institute for the cardinal ``would bring a certain amount of dignity and meaning to this effort.``

Mira Brichto, the center's project director, said she first generated the idea for the institute about five years ago after traveling in Eastern Europe. ``It's as if the Irish in Boston had had a break in access to their own country,`` she said. ``It happened to the Jews. Their parents and grandparents were wiped out. This was an opportunity to re-establish that flow.``

But Brichto soon realized that she would need help with the undertaking, said Sue Ross, vice president for development at Spertus. ``The political scene wasn't conducive to support this idea at the time,`` Ross said.

So Brichto, a former teacher at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, approached Cardinal Bernardin, then the archbishop there. Cardinal Bernardin, who had traveled to Poland with Pope John Paul II, provided her with contacts, paving the way for her to find out what documents actually existed, Brichto said.

``We American Jews love to remind Poles that they should feel guilty for what happened`` during the Holocaust, she said. ``But we forget to share the period of hundreds of years of cultural sharing. That was the aspect that was most interesting to Cardinal Bernardin.``

In 1985, Brichto contacted Sulkin, who agreed to house the project at Spertus, 618 S. Michigan Ave. Coincidentally, at the request of the cardinal, Sulkin had served on the planning committee for the 20th anniversary celebration in 1985 of ``Nostra Aetate,`` a Vatican II document that condemned anti-Semitism and called for mutual understanding and respect between Jews and Catholics, he said.

``This is the first time we've had such a coming together of three major resources, the existence of a solid urban-based Judaica institute, in the same area as a cardinal who has committed his pastoral life to reduce anti-Semitism, . . . and Brichto,`` Sulkin said. ``Chicago was the ideal location . . . because of the major representation of Eastern European Jews and non-Jews,`` he added.

Sulkin and Brichto also acknowledge that Cardinal Bernardin was instrumental in helping to raise \$41,200 from the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities for the center's first project, an exhibition of Polish/Jewish art scheduled to open at Spertus in 1991.

``They never before had a cardinal ask for funds for a Judaic study project,`` she said. Lending his name to the institution ``is the kind of act and the kind of intuition that gives meaning to the term Judeo-Christian tradition,`` Brichto said.

In addition, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Radov of Winnetka have donated \$20,000 and the Polish government has contributed about \$10,000 for the project, Spertus officials said.

The center eventually will include institutes that will invite scholars from all over the world to study Eastern European Jewish art, compile on microfiche a Judaica catalogue of manuscripts and art that remain in Poland, translate and publish this material to make it available to the public and sponsor programs on the Jewish/Christian experience.

In his remarks at the opening ceremony last month, Cardinal Bernardin said the center allows him to reconfirm his commitment to fight anti-Semitism and promote good will between Catholics and Jews. ``I see the center as a new symbol--and a most powerful one at that--of the strong, indeed unbreakable bond that unites us,`` he said.