



Eugene Fisher



NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON CHRISTIAN-JEWISH RELATION

Background

In late November of 1973, some seventy-five people came together at a retreat center outside Dayton, Ohio, for what the organizers billed as the first national workshop on Catholic-Jewish relations. Addressing the forum were such luminaries of the dialogue as Dr. Eva Fleischner, Rabbi Irving Greenberg, and Rev. Edward Flannery. Subsequent workshops (Memphis 1975; Detroit 1977; Los Angeles 1978; Dallas 1980; Milwaukee 1981; Boston 1983; St. Louis 1984; Baltimore 1986; Minneapolis 1987; Charleston 1989; Chicago 1990; Pittsburgh 1992; Tulsa 1994 and Stamford 1996) have enlarged the sponsorship to include Protestant and Orthodox Christians and major Jewish agencies such as the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League, as well as both the Reform and Conservative branches of Judaism.

The national workshops, which were the brainchild of a local women's "living room" dialogue group, have over the years both reflected the cutting edge of the relationship and moved forward its agenda. Many, perhaps most, of the leading figures of the Jewish-Christian dialogue, nationally and internationally, have addressed the Workshop in its plenary or seminar sessions. Its attendance has grown to over a thousand participants.

One of the reasons for the success of the Workshops has been their ability to attract and involve not only professionals in the field but advanced amateurs and beginners from the local community. This, in turn, may be because the local host community participates equally with the national sponsoring and cooperating agencies in developing the program and list of speakers. As chair of the national planning committee for the past fifteen years, I attest that this mixture of differing perspectives is guaranteed to be both lively and creative! It also ensures that the different needs of different groups will be addressed.

Not everything important to the Workshop, of course, comes from the plenary and seminar platforms. It could be argued that even more important are the exchanges of information in the corridors and at meals among people from all across the country and abroad concerning what works and what doesn't; what's hot and what's not in the kaleidoscope of issues that frames the contemporary dialogue between our two ancient peoples. Likewise, there are interest groups, such as denominational leaders, and seminarians and educators, who track through the experience together and become intensely involved on their own levels.

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