

"HOW GOODLY IT IS..." FROM PSALM 133

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH ACTIVITIES
IN WAYNE, NEW JERSEY 1950'S TO THE 1990'S**



**compiled by
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under the auspices of the
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This flyer attempts to serve as testimony to the goodwill of many who believe, in accordance with the 133rd Psalm, "How goodly and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity."

INTRODUCTION

The religious communities in Wayne Township have had a long history. With the earliest arrivals to the area came the first churches and their cemeteries. In the 1950's Wayne began its progression from rural life to suburbia and with it came many denominations of Protestant churches, numerous Roman Catholic parishes, the Russian Orthodox Church, a Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship, Jews, Muslims and followers of the faiths of India and Asia. Many members of the clergy have used their good offices to foster ecumenical and interfaith understanding. This is a brief history of those activities and events.

THE 1950's

Traditionally a Protestant community, in the 1950's there were already Catholic and Jewish families. Rabbi Neil Brief served as a part-time rabbi for the Jewish community from 1957-1960. While he was in Wayne on Fridays-Sundays, he lived with a Protestant Minister from Paterson, Reverend Ostic. Rabbi Brief delivered a Baccalaureate prayer for Wayne High School.

THE 1960's

The turbulent sixties were a mix of good and bad throughout the country, including Wayne. Prejudice and bigotry were being confronted head on. From those interactions developed

numerous interfaith activities, as well as general ecumenical and interfaith ventures as a consequence of the social conscience of the times.

On the lighter side, there was a Wayne Church Softball League, which included the Protestant churches, Our Lady of the Valley and Temple Beth Tikvah.

Since its beginnings in the early 1960's, B'nai B'rith Women (now known as Jewish Women Int'l), a Jewish women's service organization, brought programs of Brotherhood into the Wayne Public Schools each year. In 1964 Rev. Dean Lanning of the United Methodist Church was given the first annual Brotherhood Award by the Pompton Valley Lodge of B'nai B'rith. Dialogues between Temple Beth Tikvah and the Wayne Presbyterian Church took place for about a year in the spring of 1967. This was part of the "New Jersey Reform Jewish-Presbyterian Dialogue Program" promulgated in that era.

The Wayne Clergy Fellowship began informally, but a now infamous anti-Semitic incident galvanized Wayne clergy to create a vehicle for addressing such problems. Nudged by Father Rugel of Our Lady of the Valley and Rabbi Shai Shacknai of Temple Beth Tikvah, they also began to deal with social issues such as open housing and nursing home care.

The CROP Walk began in the late sixties and involved all the local churches and synagogues with as many as 300 walkers. The 10 mile walk commenced at Our Lady of the Valley. Money collected is donated locally, nationally and internationally for hunger needs. Sponsored by the Church World Service of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, CROP donations were presented at the annual Wayne Interfaith Thanksgiving Service.

The Thanksgiving Service began in the late 1960's as a result of Vatican II, and the willingness of priests to be involved in the Wayne Clergy Fellowship. Churches and synagogues participated in this event, using creative worship, a community choir, liturgical readings, interpretive dance, story tellers, dramatic monologues and instrumentalists. It began with a different church or synagogue serving as host each year, then remained at Our Lady of Consolation for many years.

THE 1970's

With the advent of Vatican II and the sting of the 60's behind us, the members of the Wayne Clergy Fellowship continued their involvement with ecumenical and interfaith activities.

In 1972 a unique program in the field of interfaith studies took place. Forty young people of high school age from five Roman Catholic churches, nine Protestant churches and Temple Beth Tikvah presented a worship service.

Preakness Reformed Church established relations with Elmendorf Church in Harlem. Some of their youngsters, as well as youngsters from Paterson, visited Wayne in the summer, and Wayne youngsters became involved in inner city tutoring in Paterson.

Living Room Dialogues took place among the Protestant Churches and there were dialogues between Our Lady of the Valley and Temple Beth Tikvah. Confirmation classes from Our Lady

of the Valley, St. Timothy and Temple Beth Tikvah would also visit each others' house of worship to learn about other religions.

Willowbrook Ministries (1971-1989) was created when the planner of Willowbrook Mall, James W. Rouse, approached the Wayne Clergy Fellowship, inviting them to bring a human impact to the Mall. The Ministry evolved into an interfaith social service agency in the midst of the Marketplace. Programs for Women Alone, Senior Citizens and Young Adults were among their projects, as well as performing and visual arts programs, special events, community forums, adult education, and field work supervision for college and graduate students. Outreach programs from the Ministry included Starfish, which provided rides for the aged or infirm to get to doctors' offices. It used the fish symbol (Ichthus) of Christianity and the Star of David of Judaism. Most churches, synagogues and local service organizations participated. By 1980 Starfish activities were replaced by the Senior Citizen Bus and Dial-A-Ride. Also, the Ministries oversaw the CROP Walk, Nursing Home Volunteers, emergency food and clothing relief drives, Thanksgiving Baskets and cooperated with community agencies.

THE 1980's

On December 10, 1980, Human Rights Day, there was a simultaneous display at the Willowbrook Ministries and at the YM-YWHA of Wayne on behalf of The Women's Plea for Soviet Jewry, prepared by the Albert Einstein Chapter of B'nai B'rith Women. It chronicled the plight of the Jewish population of what was then called the USSR and their plea to immigrate to Israel.

The Protestant Pulpit Exchanges began during this era with the Lenten Community Services. About 6-7 congregations met each Wednesday at a host church which provided the leadership, choir, and refreshments. Another pastor spoke at the host church. Offerings were given to local charities.

For about seven years, Preakness Baptist Church and Temple Beth Tikvah met for 6-8 weeks each year for adult education classes. Rabbi Israel Dresner or Reverend Lloyd Kenyon would speak followed by small group discussion.

The School of Religion began with Rev. Lloyd Kenyon of Preakness Baptist Church and Reverend Juanita Connerly of Packanack Community Church. Classes were taught by Protestant, Catholic and Jewish leaders. It was held at Neumann Preparatory School on Monday nights. This project lasted for three years.

In the late 1980's the Social Concerns Committee of Packanack Community Church and the Social Action Committee of Temple Beth Tikvah provided two forums on the Aids crisis before this subject was openly discussed. These two houses of worship also joined for a joint model Passover seder where Cantor Charles Romalis explained Passover traditions and Rev. Archie Aitcheson explained the Holy Communion.

The Interfaith Human Relations Coalition of Wayne was a loose interfaith connection between Temple Beth Tikvah and the Packanack Community Church. An organizational meeting on May

22, 1989 formalized it into the Wayne Interfaith Network with about 17 founding churches, synagogues and service organizations. This coalition promotes interfaith understanding through ecumenical and interfaith cooperation and education. It operates the local food pantry. It is supported by local houses of worship, service organizations, businesses and schools.

THE 1990's

On February 2, 1994 the Albert Einstein Chapter of B'nai B'rith Women (now Jewish Women Int'l) sponsored an Evening Discussion of Interfaith Community Action. The Lakeland Unitarian Universalist Fellowship and its pastor, Reverend Robin Capoor, provided meeting facilities and served as host to representatives of Pequannock Reformed Church, Shomrei Torah Congregation, the United Methodist Church and Packanack Community Church. From that event came the idea of this brochure, to inform and enlighten as to the positive interaction among and between religious congregations in Wayne.

CONTRIBUTORS

Much of this information contained in this brochure came from letters, phone calls and personal interviews with the following individuals. Many thanks for your time and energy, as well as thanks to all others who passed along referral names and addresses. Please forgive any oversights or omissions.

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(in alphabetical order)

Rev. Archie Aitcheson, former Pastor,
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Our Lady of the Valley RC Church
Rev. David C. Van Sickle, former Pastor,
Preakness Reformed Church

Additional Reference Sources:

Fifty Years at Packanack

Growing With A Community...The Story of a Christian
Congregation (United Methodist Church)

A History of the Preakness Reformed Church,
1798-1973