

Posted on Sun, May. 11, 2008

Baltimore cardinal to visit Jews and Catholics in Miami Beach

BY TANIA VALDEMORO

A local group working to improve the relationship between Catholics and Jews has invited a cardinal from Baltimore to speak at Temple Beth Sholom on Tuesday.

The appearance by Cardinal William Keeler is free and open to the public, and marks the first time that a cardinal will visit a local synagogue, said Bernardo Benes, who organized the visit.

"I'm trying to get students of Jewish and Catholic schools to go. Most of them have never seen a cardinal in a synagogue," he said.

The event, which celebrates the anniversary of Pope John Paul's visit to a Roman synagogue in 1986, is intended to make Catholics and Jews more aware of each other and teach them about the work the pope did to reconcile the two peoples.

Pope John Paul II was the first pope since St. Peter to visit a synagogue. He established diplomatic ties between the state of Israel and the Holy See. And he repented for the Catholic Church's treatment of Jews.

Keeler's visit also comes at a time of sadness and anger within the local Jewish community. The Chabad Shul was burned down in a suspicious fire on April 22. Days later, vandals spray-painted swastikas at the Chabad of Parkland. Both incidents are under investigation.

Benes, a Cuban Jew, became a fan of Pope John Paul II in 1994 after his cousin gave him *Letters to a Jewish Friend*, which recounts the pope's childhood friendship with a Jew named Jerzy Kluger.

When Pope John Paul II died in 2005, Benes met Kluger. Their encounter inspired him to create Our Elder Brothers and Sisters Foundation, which is dedicated to building bridges between Jews and Catholics and reminding people of Pope John Paul II's interfaith work.

John Favalora, the archbishop of Miami, will introduce Keeler, the archbishop emeritus of Baltimore. Benes said Keeler has also been active in reconciling Catholics and Jews. Former Miami Herald publisher David Lawrence Jr., who is chairman of the Children's Trust, is also expected to speak at the event.

There will also be a short re-enactment of Pope John Paul's 1986 visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome.

The visit takes place 7 p.m. Tuesday, at Temple Beth Sholom, 4144 Chase Ave.

For information, call 305-785-7028 or 305-861-4740 or go to www.ourelderbrothers.org