

February 24th, 2009

A most auspicious event took place recently (Feb 24) at Christopher Columbus High School in Miami. As part of a Student Awareness Day organized by history/government teacher Ms. Mary McCullagh, the entire 10th grade class gathered in small groups to hear Holocaust survivors tell the story of perhaps the most tragic chapter in the recent history of humankind. At each of the roundtable discussion groups, students heard survivors tell his/her story of what happened and how, by luck or chance, they were able to elude the fate of organized extermination. The students also saw a videotape titled "Children Remember the Holocaust" and heard the firsthand account of Leo Rosner's ordeal in a small village in Poland, and his life at various concentration camps during his childhood years.

Organized by The South Florida Holocaust Documentation and Education Center, led by Rositta Kenigsberg, these presentations aim at raising awareness and educate the new generations on the issues of racism, hatred and bigotry.

To close the gathering, Dr. Bernardo Benes, President of Our Elders Brothers and Sisters Foundation, an organization promoting reconciliation between the Catholic and Jewish communities, reminded the audience that it was Pope John Paul II who took extraordinary steps to initiate a new era of rapprochement to help erase centuries of Church animosity towards the Jews. His Holiness words and actions, said Dr. Benes, left no doubt that the Church recognized its dark past of anti-Semitism, and committed to creating a "genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant". A student leader, Joshua Griffith, read the text of the short prayer that John Paul II wrote and inserted in a crack during his pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Western Wall in March of 2000. It read as follows: "God of our fathers, You chose Abraham and his descendants to bring Your name to the Nations; we are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who, in the course of history, have caused these children of Yours to suffer, and asking Your forgiveness we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant."

Benes and his associates of the Foundation present delivered 1,400 brochures to be given to every student of this very prestigious Catholic High School in Miami.