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CAPE COD TIMES: LETTER
319 MAIN ST.
HYANNIS, MA 02601

2 Sept 89

"COUNCIL OF CONGREGATIONS"

Removing the cross from the Cape Cod Council of Churches stationery would not be going far enough. Jewish congregations are offended when called "churches." In our pluralistic society, each community needs a "council of congregations" (or "of religious congregations").

Alternatively, many American communities have kept their "council of churches" as a Christian fellowship and established, parallel with it, an "interfaith council." As I helped establish one of these in a community where I was a Christian pastor, I can testify to its value.

Some communities are experiencing a new pathology in Christian-Jewish relations. Jewish congregations join the council of churches, and in the presence of the Jews the Christians go easy on Jesus' name (and remove the cross from the organization's stationery). Then, by pathological projection, the Jews get blamed for not "letting" us Christians be Christian in our language. Then something happens that eliminates the Jews from the organization, and the Christians feel relieved, freed from restriction on their faith's vocabulary.

When I wear a cross to preach in synagogues, the Jews know that I refuse to contibute to antiSemitism by repressing the sight or sound of my faith in their presence.

In light of the above, I trembled when I read, in today's TIMES, that the cross may be removed from the Council of Churches' stationery. As for the fish, a secondary interpretation is given to it. It's primary meaning, as a cryptic, is "Jesus Christ, God's Son, is our Savior."

Wilkis Elliott

Next day, p.2, the TIMES printed a 12-line retraction, so I didn't mail this letter, though its basic concerns are not invalidated by the retraction....FACT: The Council of Churches is Christians only but has an "Interfaith Committee" whose stationery has (and should not have) only a cross. BEST SOLUTION: **No** symbols on the I.C.'s stationery.

Attach to # 2348

CAPE COD TIMES, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 1989

Rooting out 'innocent insensitivity'

Cape Council of Churches to begin reflecting its Jewish membership

That the council never stopped to consider that their letterhead contained no symbols representing their Jewish members, or that the cross has been used for centuries as a symbol to persecute Jewish people, is a reminder that even well-meaning people can demonstrate "an innocent prejudice," says Alexandra Clark, director of the Cape Cod Council of Churches.

KAREN JEFFREY
STAFF WRITER

HYANNIS — The director of the Cape Cod Council of Churches looks no further than the top of her desk when asked to provide an example of the kind of insensitivity that leads to barriers between people of different religions.

"There is an irony in this somewhere," says Alexandra Clark as she plucks a copy of the council's letterhead from neat piles of books and stacks of reports atop the desk.

She points to a cross that has long been incorporated as part of the council's insignia.

"Looking at this letterhead, would you ever guess that our council includes anyone other than Christians?" she asks.

Next month the council's interfaith committee is sponsoring the first in a series of meetings aimed at eliminating the kind of "innocent insensitivity" that produces a letterhead like that used by the council.

"Interfaith Circles," a program based on a nationwide program of the same name, will involve 30 lay people from Eastham to Falmouth who will meet once a week in September and then again on a weekly basis in November.

Participants will meet in private homes to "foster a personal exchange about ourselves and our faiths, rather than the notion of a formal group discussion," says Ms. Clark. "We want people to talk about themselves, about their childhoods, their families. We want Christians and Jews to come to know one another personally. We want to build personal friendships and eliminate the stereotypes that keep people apart."

Jewish, Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy will initiate discussion during the meetings. Meetings in September will focus on getting acquainted with one another, religious observances, and what the Bible means to each of the participants, she says.

The second series of meetings, which will be held in November, will focus on "God in Everyday Life," and offer the opportunity to examine patterns of worship, places of religious worship and life's major decisions in light of one's religious beliefs.

Although registration for the meetings is closed, Ms. Clark says, the council hopes to sponsor another round of meetings early next year.

The purpose of these meetings is to allow "a dialogue to develop between Christian and Jewish people who might never get around to talking about this issue otherwise," says the Rev. Albert R. Ryan, the Roman Catholic clergyman who will lead discussion.

"Through the centuries so much hatred and persecution has been predicated on ignorance and misunderstanding. What we want to see is some of that misunderstanding and ignorance eliminated through personal discussion," he says.

"We are not going to be trying to convert one another. These meetings are not for proselytizing. They are opportunities to recognize our common heritage and appreciate that we all worship one God in different ways," says Ryan.

Associate pastor at St. Francis Xavier Church in Hyannis, Ryan believes his own background lends a special understanding to the need for interfaith communication.

Now a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force Reserve, Ryan served eight years as a full-time chaplain in the Air Force. As a chaplain, he has worked with and provided pastoral services for people of many faiths.

Ryan says he grew up in Boston in a neighborhood that was predominantly Protestant. "At the first Mass I celebrated, the Protestants from the old neighborhood far outnumbered the Catholics." Within his own family there is religious diversity that one might not expect.

"My grandmother's second husband was Jewish, so one branch of my family is Jewish. I happen to come from the Catholic branch," he says.

While the council, an organization of churches and synagogues, has never received any complaints about its letterhead, members of the council's interfaith committee are using drawings of a menorah and fish atop their letters announcing the start of next month's "Interfaith Circles."

The menorah, symbolizing Judaism, is a seven-branched candelabrum that, according to tradition, was used in the temple in the wilderness and symbolized the presence of God within the temple.

The fish is a symbol used by early Christians in connection with Christ's admonition to the apostles to become fishermen of humanity.

That many members of the council never stopped to consider that their letterhead contained no symbols representing their Jewish members, or that the cross has been used for centuries as a symbol to persecute Jewish people, is a reminder that even well-meaning people can demonstrate "an innocent prejudice, an innocent insensitivity, that causes hurt or misunderstanding all the same," says Ms. Clark.

Bruce Malin, cantor and director of education at the Cape Cod Synagogue, is very familiar with this.

Last month one of his children came home from preschool clutching a Santa Claus made as part of a classroom celebration of Christmas in July.

The next day Malin asked teachers if another activity could be found for his child.

"They were very nice about it and did find something else for him to do but their reaction was 'What, you don't celebrate Christmas?' They seemed surprised," says Malin.

"Sometimes I am surprised, and I guess at this point in my life it has happened enough that it shouldn't surprise me, but a lot of people don't understand that Jews don't worship Christ, and we don't celebrate Christmas as a religious or even as a secular holiday," he says.

"I grew up in an area that was predominately Jewish. I remember the first time I went to a church. It was an amazing experience for me. I'd always assumed that everyone worshiped the same way we did. But I learned that they don't," he says.

"While it is true that Jews and Christians have a lot in common, we are people of different faiths. It is important to recognize what we share, but it is important to recognize and respect our differences."

The New Hope Community Baptist Church
541A Main St., Hyannis
790-0646
9/3/89 Sunday Worship — 11:30 A.M.
We remember a soldier whose revolution was NOT televised
HUEY P. NEWTON – PhD
Rev. J. Taylor, Pastor, NBC/ABC & Progressive

CHATHAM BAPTIST CHURCH
195 Meetinghouse Rd., Rte. 137
So. Chatham 432-8022
Evangelical Christ Centered
Sunday School for all ages 9:00 a.m.
Sunday Worship Service 10:00 a.m.
Sunday Evening 7:00 p.m.
Wednesday Night Study 7:00 p.m.

EVANGELICAL BAPTIST CHURCH
Route 28 & Pond Steet
South Yarmouth • 398-3531
9:30 – Bible School
9:30 – Morning Worship
6:00 P.M. – House Churches
Wed. 7 P.M. – Prayer Meeting
Ronald S. Wolfe, Pastor
Earl B. Hunt, Minister of Visitation
"Affiliated Baptist General Conference"

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Route 132, West Barnstable
(Between Routes 5 & 6A)
362-2011 Office Phone or 432-7813
Biblical Preaching – Reformed Doctrine – Evangelical Outreach
11:00 A.M. – Morning Worship
Guest Minister
The Rev. Richard Kroeger
Prayer & Bible Study
Wednesday Evening at 7:30 P.M.

BASS RIVER BAPTIST
(American Baptist)
Olde Main Street • Yarmout
Reverend Kenneth T. Hand, Past
Sunday Worship – 10:30 A.M.
"Temptation to Easy Alternatives"
Scripture: Matthew Chapter 4
Communion will be observed during the worship service.
Coffee hour and fellowship will follow the morning service.

OSTERVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH
Main Street • Osterville 428-2787
8:30 A.M. – Bible School
10:00 A.M. – Morning Servic
"When you don't know what to d
P.M. – Family Fellowship
Prayer Meeting, Wed. Evening at 7
Reverend Michael Rowe

FAITH BAPTIST CHURC
245 West Barnstable Road
Osterville, MA 02655
Pastor Gary Coleman
Assoc. Pastor Mike Hunter