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## The Inter-Faith Experiment That Worked

By ARTHUR L. HODGES

Mr. Hodges, well-known journalist, is editor of the Nassau Daily Review-Star and president of the New York State Society of Newspaper Editors. In the following article he tells the story of an experiment of inter-faith co-operation which since its inception has influenced the development of similar experiments throughout the country.—The Editor.

FREEPORT, L. I., is a suburban New York community of approximately 25,000 population. It is something of a summer resort, pleasure boating centre (having two flourishing yacht clubs) and sports fishing port on the inland island. A great many of its pioneer families still support themselves by fishing and clamming in the waters of the bay and nearby waters of the Atlantic Ocean, accessible through Jones Inlet, which is almost opposite the village.

By far the majority of the present population of the village, however, belongs to the white collar element and probably one-third of the heads of all families are engaged in business or professional work in Greater New York, commuting back and forth between the city and their homes each day.

When Rabbi B. Leon Purwitz, founder of the Freeport Inter-Faith Clergy Council, came to the village in the summer of 1940 to assume his new duties as rabbi of Temple B'nai Israel, he found a friendly community with no visible intolerance or racial and religious prejudices. In the traditional American manner, the various religious denominations went their own way and had nothing whatever to do with one

another except when community-wide events of some nature inevitably brought two or more of the ministers together on the same platform or the same program, just as such an event might bring representatives of the different lay elements together.

There was a rather inactive clergyman's council whose membership was composed entirely of pastors of white Protestant churches in the village. Besides holding occasional meetings devoted almost entirely to the discussion of problems of a general nature that affected their respective congregations in regard to such matters as church attendance, raising money and summer vacations, this council had no program and had never been intended to accomplish anything more than what it was doing. There existed an abundance of goodwill among the members and the periodic meetings of the council no doubt were enjoyable to the ministers, whose lives and daily schedules had so many duties and obligations in common.

Rabbi Hurwitz came to Freeport from Brooklyn where he had been associated for years with a group of liberal and progressive religious leaders, some of them such nationally-famous characters as the late Dr. S. Parkes Cadman, in various inter-faith and fellowship movements. These men, all older and occupied with manifold activities, had availed themselves of Rabbi Hurwitz's ability, tremendous energy and enthusiasm, to do much of the spade work of organizations in which they were interested.

For some time, Rabbi Hurwitz had observed the advantage for those of different races and opposite religious

faiths to perfect a "formula for mutual living". In fact, his entire background has been one of such fortunate experiences and associations. It was but natural that he should desire to see greater co-operation between the various faiths in his new home of Freeport, where there seemed to be so little to discourage such an undertaking.

A fortunate meeting a few months after he came to the village became a factor in the realization of this ambition. One afternoon, at the village station, he encountered the Rev. John J. Mahon, pastor of the Holy Redeemer Catholic church of Freeport. Rabbi Hurwitz engaged Father Mahon in conversation and found that he was on his way to see a ball game at Ebbets Field. As they rode into the city together Rabbi Hurwitz told Father Mahon of his ambition of organizing an inter-faith movement in Freeport and was happy to find that the priest approved of the idea and promised to assist him. Out of this incident grew the Free-

port Inter-Faith Clergy Council into whose membership was drawn every ordained minister in the community, the Jewish rabbi, all of the Protestant ministers, the Catholic priest and the pastors of all the Negro churches.

The Freeport Inter-Faith Clergy Council holds one regular meeting each month, but there have been many special meetings and already the council, less than two years old, can point to several significant accomplishments.

A few months after the council was organized Temple Israel prepared to celebrate its twenty-first anniversary. Rabbi Hurwitz conceived the idea of making this a community-wide meeting in the form of an Institute of Community Affairs at which there would be speakers representing all the leading phases of life of the village. He sought and obtained the co-operation of the council in planning and staging the affair.

The first Freeport Institute of Public Affairs was held in the recreation hall of Temple Israel, March 25, 1941, and was attended by a capacity crowd of several hundred persons. Addresses were limited to seven minutes and included representation from the village government, school system, public library, leading daily newspaper in the area, municipal sanitation department and the Nassau County Department of Health. There was also an address of the newly-organized Freeport Inter-Faith Clergy Council by the Rev. John J. Madden, assistant to Father Mahon.

This year the Inter-Faith Clergy Council took over the sponsorship of the Second Institute of Community Affairs and will make it an annual event, rotating among the churches, with a different member serving as chairman each year. The second institute had a program similar to the first, strengthened as a result of the experience of the original meeting. It was well attended, with an excellent diversified representation of the various elements in the community. The institute was held at the Methodist church and Father Mahon made the address on the work of the Inter-Faith Clergy Council. Rabbi Hurwitz described the program and aspirations of the annual Institute of Community Affairs.

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