Marietta parish, synagogue come together for Holocaust remembrance service

BY ANDREW NELSON an elson @georgia bull et in. org

MARIETTA—In the beginning, the church sanctuary was in darkness. Small flames passed from one candle to another until finally six large shiva candles were lit, a Jewish symbol of mourning.

The congregation heard the challenging poem by Lutheran pastor and theologian Friedrich Martin Niemöller. "First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out/Because I was not a socialist," began the poem, as flashlights illuminated the faces of the teenaged readers.

With readings, song and blessings. a crowd filled the Church of St. Ann as the Catholic community hosted the congregation of Etz Chaim Synagogue April 15 for a vigil service for Yom Hashoah, the Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day.

There was "a lot of love, a lot of good emotion was felt though the sorrow," said Amir Oren, 41, an analyst, and member of Etz Chaim Synagogue. Oren attended with his wife and two children. "A



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lot of people were rubbing tears in their eyes."

'A remarkable shift in our relationship'

Holocaust Remembrance Day, an observance in the Jewish community, is held every April 16. This joint commemoration took place as some Catholic and Jewish communities in Atlanta have twinned and are being encouraged by their faiths to build closer ties.

The ongoing dialogue between the Marietta church and synagogue can be traced to "Nostra Aetate," which promoted better relations between the Catholic Church and non-Christian religions.

This year the Atlanta Archdiocese is marking the 50-year anniversary of the Vatican II document, which reset the relationship between the two faiths. The document's title is from Latin, "In Our Time" and it affirmed respect for other world religions and called for Jewish-Catholic dialogue for the first time in history.

The document "decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone."

Rabbi Shalom Lewis of Etz Chaim Synagogue said the

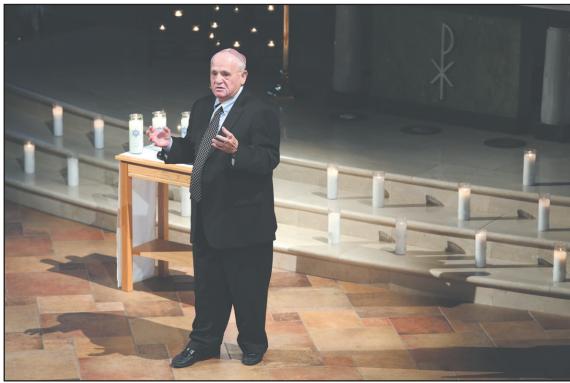


PHOTO BY MICHAEL ALEXANDER

Hershel Greenblat shares his family's story as a survivor of the Holocaust. At the end of his talk he re-ceived a standing ovation from Marietta's Etz Chaim Synagogue and Church of St. Ann congregants in attendance. Church of St. Ann hosted the April 15 Yom Hashoah prayer service.

document created a "remarkable shift in our relationship" that has "created unimagined harmony between our communities." Where once it was considered

a sin for a Catholic to enter a Protestant church or a synagogue, today church leaders engage in dialogue with other spiritual leaders to explore differences and

commonalities. Father John Gabriel, a La Salette priest and associate pastor at St. Ann, recalled how his understanding has softened to see



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ARCHDIOCESAN NEWS



PHOTO BY MICHAEL ALEXANDER

Hebrew, leads the Mourner's Kaddish, the traditional mourner's prayer, as images bearing the names of 17 different concentration camps appear on a screen overhead.



reasons but by the

love, decries hatred,

persecutions, displays

directed against Jews

at any time and by

God's hand in different faiths.

"I used to think in terms of

black and white when compar-

ing my own faith tradition and

everyone else's. Now I can see

that each and every faith tradi-

tion is a beautiful, colorful facet

in the precious diamond of God's

The two faith communities share Roswell Road, about three miles separating their campuses. The collaboration grew out of the liberation of Holocaust prisoners. The father of a La Salette parish

priest was a GI who helped to free the concentration camps. The Jewish congregation in the past invited Father Ray Cadran to

communities have grown tighter since. A tree to represent hope

was planted in the parish prayer

garden and annually in the spring

speak at a memorial. The ties binding the two

anvone."

Nostra Aetate

creation," he said.

Gospel's spiritual

of anti-Semitism,

Seventy-five years ago two Polish resistance fighters fell in love. On this night in 2015, their son, Hershel Greenblat, told his story to the people at the Church of St. Ann about surviving the extermination of European Jews.

dren smiling on a couch.

That's what happened to my family," he said, telling about scores of uncles and cousins and grandparents who were killed by the Nazis.

Greenblat family lived in peril, from the war and the Russian

family made its way to Austria to a displaced persons camp. Greenblat couldn't praise the American soldiers enough. "None of them were trying to kill us. They did everything they could to make things normal for us. We ran around. We were 6, 7 years old.

We had fun." The family five years later boarded a ship to the United States. His first view of the nation was on Thanksgiving Day floating past the Statue of Liberty, "a most beautiful sight," he said.

The family settled in Atlanta in the neighborhood where Turner Field is now. His father opened a convenience store and befriended Martin Luther King Jr. The family grew to four children. Now his family includes professionals, teachers, medical ethicists and more, he said.

Through the "tenacity" of his parents, Greenblat said he and his family have thrived.

"I want everyone to remember (the Holocaust) so it never happens again," he said.

During the service, Rabbi Lewis recalled traveling with some of his congregation to Eastern Europe, including seeing the notorious Auschwitz camp. He talked about a Torah that is "housed proudly and sadly in our congregation," which was used by Jewish prisoners in the concentration



camp. On the trip, Rabbi Lewis unrolled the Torah as the group gathered around to read Scripture

and recite Hebrew blessings "as a group defiant, a group who were alive, and a group who were free."

PHOTO BY MICHAEL ALEXANDER



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Joined by a standing congregation, Church of St. Ann associate pastor and La Salette Father John "Gabe" Gabriel leads the Mourner's Kaddish in English.

Lewis, but Catholics and Jews are

spect and puts America's unique greatness on display," he said in

'I want everyone to remember'

The audience got on their feet to give the 74-year-old a standing ovation before he uttered a word as he traced his family's story from the Jewish ghettos of Poland and his birthplace in a network of caves called "Priest's grotto" in western Ukraine to a photo of college-age grandchil-

Until he was about 5, the army. Life changed when the