

Guest column: Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk

Inter-religious group celebrates 40 years of seeking better community

This month the Metropolitan Area Religious Coalition of Cincinnati celebrates its 40th anniversary. MARCC is a coalition of 17 religious denominations (Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims and Greek Orthodox) in the Greater Cincinnati area working together toward positive social policy reform and change. Over the years MARCC has worked on questions of affordable housing, public education, public school funding, racial equality, police-community relations and the like.

MARCC played a significant role in the drafting and implementation of the Collaborative Agreement, which was directed toward improving the racial atmosphere of the city. One of the less public of MARCC's activities, yet a productive



one, is a semi-annual gathering of congregation leaders (judiciary heads) from the whole Greater Cincinnati area for conversation and an exchange of information. We all seem to benefit from spending an evening together under the auspices of MARCC.

But beneath all this there are a couple of principles that MARCC models which have both theological and social significance.

The first is that church entities (churches, synagogues, mosques) have a role to play in the civic life of the community. The participation of these various religious groupings in a social action entity like MARCC express the churches' conviction that believers have more to do than relate to one another. All church

groups share responsibility for bringing the love and the mercy of God into play in the secular world in which we find ourselves. None of us can stand aside as spectators of the life of the civic community in which we live. The participation of 17 religious denominations in MARCC is an expression of our acceptance of responsibility for the world around us. It's not just a societal activity. It is an expression of a theological reality as well.

The second important principle that MARCC expresses is that we work best when we work together. Probably each religious congregation would agree on the importance of the various issues that MARCC has addressed over these last 40 years. But our attention to those issues would have been much less focused, much weaker if we had tried to address

them as individual groupings rather than as a unified voice. Obviously there has to be some give and take as MARCC's members decide which of many social issues MARCC is going to address in a given year, but the resulting agreed-on agenda becomes itself a source of strength for all the participants. MARCC's mission is "to forgo the luxury of separate ways when a common path can be found." Seeking that common path is a pragmatic undertaking, but it is a religious one as well.

MARCC is not a panacea for all the social evils and weaknesses of our city. But we think it is a source of encouragement for us all. It's good for all of us to know that this large cohort of religious leaders and their congregations acknowledge responsibility for the well-being and improvement of civil society. It's good to be

aware that we have found ways to work together, that we have learned that, despite real and legitimate differences, working together for the common good is not an ideal beyond our reach.

MARCC will hold its 40th anniversary celebration from 5 to 7 p.m. Monday in the undercroft of St. Peter in Chains Cathedral downtown.

The Most Rev. Daniel E. Pilarczyk is archbishop of Cincinnati. Also signing this column are: Most Rev. Thomas Breidenthal, bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio; Rev. Damon Lynch Jr., pastor, New Jerusalem Baptist Church; Rabbi Lewis H. Kamrass, Isaac M. Wise Temple; Imam Ilyas Nashid, Cincinnati Islamic Community Center; Rev. Doris Hoskins, Association of Unity Churches.