

Presenter: Alan Silberstein, Tel Aviv University

Title: **“Sister Rose's Battle against Antisemitism”**

Panel: Contemporary History

Sister Rose Thering, O.P., Ph.D., of blessed memory (1920-2006), is credited with a major contribution to the elimination of anti-Semitic language from Roman Catholic liturgy and teaching worldwide, as well as in the United States. In this talk, I attempt to explain what motivated Sister Rose to take on her quest in the first place; and how her research of Catholic textbooks provided the nucleus of the winning arguments in the battle of ideas which resulted in *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration of the Second Vatican Council on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions, promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1965. I then describe her lifetime of activism to seek out and eradicate examples of teaching and preaching when she found that they continued to offer a contemptuous view of Judaism, now in violation of official Church teaching. She actively engaged in interfaith alliances to build mutual understanding and respect among religious leaders. As a teacher, she believed in the transformative power of training teachers and changing the content of Catholic textbooks. She believed that the Holocaust was the result of a culture of religious prejudice; and that the lessons of the Holocaust needed to be taught. Sister Rose worked with the Governor and members of the State Legislature of New Jersey to pass a law in 1994 mandating that lessons of the Holocaust and genocide be taught to every public school pupil in grades K through 12; and then labored to insure compliance. Similar laws have been passed by seven other states, and are being proposed in 20 more. While she remained a fully observant Catholic, she developed deep friendships with Jews and never missed an opportunity to advocate on their behalf. Fully cognizant of her symbolic impact as a religious sister advocating for Jewish causes, Sister Rose took a highly visible role writing, speaking and marching on behalf of Jews, and led 54 missions of Jews and Christians to Israel. All of these efforts have had a lasting benefit to Christian-Jewish dialogue and mutual understanding; and provide us with a model for continuing the battle against antisemitism.