

Gathering explores race issues

By JOHN TRAINER
STAFF WRITER

More than 100 people gathered Tuesday night at Emmanuel United Methodist Church for a group discussion on racism led by members of the Clergy and Laity Concerned (CALC), an evening that surpassed nearly everybody's expectations.

The workshop, entitled "The Best Get Better," focused on how race relations can improve even in cities such as Evanston, which is generally thought of as a model for integration.

"It's about you and your community," CALC member Sue O'Hallahan told the mostly white group at the beginning of the three-hour workshop.

"Three hours is not much time, but it's a start of looking at what we can do better," she said.

O'Hallahan and Charles Jones encouraged people to share both their positive and negative experiences with other cultures, first by just talking with one person in a rapid-fire format, then by addressing the whole group.

The result was a gathering highly receptive to discussions about an issue often difficult to articulate.

Many people stood up and spoke of their experiences with other cultures, including Jones, who related some of his experiences growing up in an all-white community and O'Hallahan, who talked of her encounters with institutionalized racism.

"At first, people were hesitant, but things really got going," said the Rev. Robert Oldershaw of Evanston's St. Nicholas Roman Catholic Church.

"The candor at times was striking, at others touching."

"It's rather exciting," said Teresa Forman of the Evanston Ecumenical Action Council, sponsor of the event.

"The discussion really delved into specifics and people felt very comfortable."

Jones and O'Hallahan also showed a segment from the ABC news program "Prime-Time Live," which showed subtle racism in day-to-day American life, with hidden cameras trained on two middle-class men: one white, one black. The gathering watched as the black man was turned down for housing and job opportunities, and was quoted higher prices on cars.

"A lot of the de facto racism is gone," O'Hallahan said. "But the 'de jour' racism is still there. Most people never see the privilege."