

Drive to update park also aims to heal rifts

HAMTRAMCK

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An interfaith drive to raise money to renovate a mini-park in Hamtramck is evolving into a movement to repair damaged relations between the city's Muslims and Polish Catholics.

Dozens of religious, civic, business and political leaders were in Pope Park on Wednesday to kick off the fund-raiser. The gathering

was peaceful, in contrast to the tension in Hamtramck since last month, when the City Council approved a measure to allow mosques to broadcast the call to prayer on loudspeakers five times a day.

It takes effect May 26.

"We hope what will come out of this is a permanent dialogue between our communities," said Thaddeus Radzilowski, head of the Piast Institute, a Detroit-based Polish-American think tank and sponsor of the event.

Kareem Irfan, chairman of the

Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago, said Hamtramck could be a role model for other communities.

"What we're starting here is a strong show of togetherness," Irfan said. "We will show America and this community that despite difference we can work together."

Franciszek Adamczyk, the counsel general of Poland who is based in Chicago, said he wanted to stay out of the conflict. But he did refer to the pope's teachings.

"As a human being, he did so much for mutual understanding,"

Adamczyk said.

Opponents of the call to prayer have launched a petition drive to force the council to reverse itself before the law takes effect or to allow voters to decide the issue.

Before tensions ran high, Radzilowski's concern was the park at the corner of Belmont and Jos. Campau. A statue there of Pope John Paul II is perched atop a worn-out base.

He wants to raise money — an amount to be determined — and establish a foundation for the care of Pope Park. The park and statue

were dedicated in October 1982 as the first U.S. public park and statue honoring Karol Wojtyla, who visited Hamtramck in 1987 as the first Polish pope.

Now, the pope's statue is turning into a peace symbol.

"For me, the most important thing is peace," said Jaroslaw Nowak, pastor of the Holy Cross Polish National Catholic Church in Hamtramck. "We should respect every religion."

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