



# Bridges

## Building relationships between Christians and Muslims




**EDITORIAL**

Dear reader, please be assured that the content of this journal is based on the best of Islamic sources. The articles are based on the Quran, Hadith, and Islamic law. We have endeavored to present a fair and balanced view of the Islamic faith, and we hope that you will find this journal to be an interesting and enlightening read. We believe that this journal will provide a valuable resource for anyone interested in the relationship between Christians and Muslims. We hope that you will find this journal to be an interesting and enlightening read. We believe that this journal will provide a valuable resource for anyone interested in the relationship between Christians and Muslims.

Dr. J. M. Sison



**EDITORIAL**

This issue of Bridges celebrates the contribution of young people to healthy relations. The articles and photos will tell the story. Many of these young people have been sent to a group of groups from the same fields involved in their own experiences and to enter their own on the way forward as partners in relations. It is a heartening development.

Dr. J. M. Sison



**EDITORIAL**

From the Editor: In this special issue, we are proud to present a collection of articles and photos that highlight the contributions of young people to building relationships between Christians and Muslims. The stories are inspiring and show the power of youth to create positive change. We hope that these stories will encourage others to get involved in similar efforts.

Dr. J. M. Sison



**EDITORIAL**

Arguing who belongs to the faith is not the best way to build bridges. It is more important to focus on the common ground and shared values that we all possess. We believe that dialogue and understanding are the keys to building a more peaceful and just world. We hope that this issue will provide a platform for such dialogue and understanding.

Dr. J. M. Sison



**EDITORIAL**

Violence is never the answer. It only leads to more suffering and pain. We believe that non-violence is the only path to lasting peace and justice. We hope that this issue will provide a platform for discussing the importance of non-violence in building relationships between Christians and Muslims.

Dr. J. M. Sison



**50**

50th Anniversary of Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations



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# 50th Anniversary Special Issue



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**From the Editor**

The 50th anniversary of the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations is a momentous occasion. We are proud to have reached this milestone and look forward to the future. This special issue highlights the contributions of our members and partners in building relationships between Christians and Muslims.

**World News**

Worldwide news and events related to Christian-Muslim relations.

**Columns**

Opinion pieces and articles from our contributors.

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Detailed list of articles and photos included in the issue.

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Links to websites, books, and other resources.

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Alphabetical list of names and subjects.

Inspiring and informing readers for the past quarter of a century



**Message of H. Em. Miguel Àngel Cardinal Ayuso Guixot, M.C.C.J.  
Prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican City  
On the occasion of the 100th issue of *Bridges***

Dear Rev. Fr. McNerney,  
Director of the Columban Center for Christian-Muslim Relations  
and Collaborators,

First of all, allow me to congratulate you and your whole staff on the occasion of the 100th issue of *Bridges*.

I have been receiving *Bridges* for decades. I am grateful for the opportunity to review information about the impressive variety of interreligious activities and initiatives you have in Australia, particularly regarding Christian Muslim relations. The past issues of *Bridges* present us with a beautiful mosaic of interreligious life, coloured by fraternal encounters, sharing joys and sorrows, discussions and collaborations, enhancing a culture of bridge-building, transmitting a strong message that counteracts the building of walls. This work resonates with the repeated pleas of His Holiness Pope Francis for cultures of encounter.

*Bridges* reminds me of the meetings and wonderful interreligious exchanges I had during my pastoral visit to Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne in 2018. At that time, I experienced for myself the particular dynamics of your daily interreligious life, in a nation that is becoming ever more plural, like many parts of the world.

You have been building “*Bridges*” over decades and have reached a milestone. “Spoken words fly away, writings remain” (Emperor Caius Titus). Actions without reflections will not bestow meaning. *Bridges* documents various activities and offers the possibility to review, recapitulate, reflect and improve. At the same time, it enriches and inspires others to be protagonists of interreligious dialogue for world peace and harmonious living together. Be assured of my prayers for future efforts for peace, particularly in Australia.

Again, congratulations.

+ Miguel Àngel Cardinal Ayuso Guixot, M.C.C.J.  
Prefect



# Readers' Testimonials

We invited some of our long-standing subscribers to share what *Bridges* has meant to them during the past 25 years

*Bridges* has played a wonderful role in bringing us closer to each other. It promotes the culture of encounter and building bridges instead of walls.

**Fr Markus Solo SVD**  
*Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican City*

We live in a multicultural and multi-religious world and it will continue to be – the insightful *Bridges* creates a great link in serving our world. **Fr Martin Maunsell**

When much of the media concentrates on negative news, *Bridges* gives informative accounts of positive endeavours. I am reminded that I, as a Christian, have much in common with my Muslim sisters and brothers. Our differences remind me of the preciousness of my faith while deepening my respect for the beliefs held by Muslims. **Sr Patty Fawkner SGS**

I have been a subscriber of *Bridges* since it began. It's an excellent source of valuable information, insights, and stories that strengthen Christian-Muslim relations. Congratulations on reaching the 100<sup>th</sup> issue. Thank you for creating such a wonderful newsletter! **Mohammed Helal**

*Bridges* is a wonderful service in highlighting and encouraging, one could say "normalising", relations between Christians and Muslims. Echoing Pope Francis, "I thank you for all that you do in your work to build bridges: small bridges, but bridges nonetheless, that together all form the great bridge of peace." **Dr Patricia Madigan OP**

★★★★★  
*Bridges* is a unique and invaluable resource in promoting the evangelising mission of the Church. It educates readers on how to work together to solve problems for the common good at the local, regional, national and international level.

**Sr Beryl Amedee RSM**

*Bridges* is a great help in understanding the Islamic faith and updates us with what is happening in Christian-Muslim dialogue. *Bridges* reminds us that we do not live in isolated cells but live with peoples from all faiths in our daily lives.

**Dr Gideon Goosen**

★★★★★  
Congratulations on the 100<sup>th</sup> edition of the highly regarded *Bridges*. The newsletter has showcased interreligious dialogue in a truly remarkable way. In placing us in touch with each other it has really lived up to its name. **Archbishop Christopher Prowse**  
*Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn*

*Bridges* has proved to be an excellent platform for sharing the fruit of interfaith in Sydney and throughout the world. It promotes mutual respect and understanding not only between Christians and Muslims but all faith traditions. **Sr Giovanni Farquer, Archdiocese of Sydney Commission for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations**

*Bridges* is enlightening and inclusive. It explores common ground between religious communities and enables a healthy theological exchange and dialogue that strengthens the spirit of pluralism within our diverse society. **Bashir Sumar, WSU**

*Bridges* has passed the test of time. When it began, Muslims and Christians in this country were just beginning to reach out to each other. Neighbours had just begun to learn from, and about, each other. *Bridges* has assisted the process of dialogue to proceed at a deeper level. Thankfully, it continues to do so today.

**Fr Bill Burt SVD, Janssen Spirituality Centre**

# Readers' Testimonials ...

*Bridges* provides information on Christian-Muslim relations at a depth not seen in popular media, thereby shattering common stereotypes. The news draws attention to events and items that might not otherwise be noticed, giving the reader something to ponder. **Rev Prof Gerard Kelly**

*Bridges* has enlightened and encouraged me to engage with people of other religions. It has brought me to a deeper understanding and appreciation of my own faith. **Lorraine Murphy**

From providing basic information in the early days of the Centre, *Bridges* has evolved into a theologically- and sociologically-based, multi-faceted, professional response to the call of Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*.

**Sr Kathleen Collins SSps**

*Bridges* has formed an indispensable pillar of the Columban Centre's mission to build better relations between Christians and Muslims. It has made available high-quality and engaging interreligious resources. Its strong communicativeness and capacious style have given *Bridges* its unique character. **Assoc Prof Raymond Canning**



My journey in interfaith began when I met Sr Pauline Rae, founding editor of *Bridges*. The newsletter has played a vital role in promoting joint interfaith activities. I eagerly look forward to each issue as it keeps me informed about the latest developments in the interfaith circuit.

**Dr Mehmet Ozalp, Executive Director, Islamic Sciences and Research Academy (ISRA)**



In the rapidly changing world of interfaith relations, *Bridges* has been keeping relationships open and vital for the last 25 years. Congratulations and blessings on this 100<sup>th</sup> issue and into the future. **David Schütz**

I am grateful to *Bridges* for opening windows of knowledge. I have come to know and value the Muslim culture and history. I now follow with interest and prayer the Christian-Muslim dialogue. I look forward to the regular arrival of the latest news from *Bridges*.

**Bishop David Cremin, Archdiocese of Sydney**

I always look forward to receiving *Bridges*. It is conveniently formatted and well produced. *Bridges* provides news of interfaith events in Australia and around the world. It gives good space to women and to what young people are doing, which is very encouraging.

**Cardinal Michael Louis Fitzgerald M. Afr. OBE**

*Bridges* is a beacon in the area of Christian-Muslim relations. It has taught me not to be afraid of diversity, for even in diversity we can find common ground. All are committed to love and service, and we can walk together in unity. This fills me with gratitude and hope for the future.

**Sr Maureen Andrews MFIC**



*Bridges* gives me hope in humanity – when believers work together through their common values, they can achieve justice, peace and harmony. *Bridges* always has an eloquent introduction and is filled with news that stands apart from mainstream media because it informs and inspires about the importance of interreligious dialogue.

**Sr Colleen Foley OSU**

*Bridges* keeps me alert to the importance of interfaith ministry in our everyday lives. It opens windows to past, present and future events throughout Australia and the world, particularly in Muslim and Christian relationships.

**Sr Josapha Lergessner SSps**

Congratulations and thanks to *Bridges* for 100 issues promoting dialogue between Christians and Muslims through sharing the Centre's interfaith activities and articles from around the world.

**Zubeda Raihman**

## Featured throughout the years

[A Common Word Between Us and You:](#)

No. 39 March 2008

Sr Pauline Rae ssm hands over reins as Centre coordinator and *Bridges* editor after 13 years: No. 45 November 2009

Missionary Code of Conduct, [Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World:](#) No. 52 September 2011

Launch of [The Golden Rule Poster:](#)

No. 57 November 2012

[Principles for Interfaith Dialogue and Interfaith Attitudes,](#) Fr Ron Rolheiser: No. 67 June 2015

Reflection on [The Marrakesh Declaration:](#)

No. 70 March 2016

[Youth PoWR](#) 2016: Sydney's Youth Model Harmony, Compassion and Justice to the Rest of the World!: No. 72 October 2016

[Joint Communiqué,](#) WCC & Muslim Council of Elders, 30 Sept-1 Oct '16: No. 73 December 2016

Australian Premiere of *The Sultan and the Saint:* No. 76 December 2017

Attending the [Parliament of the World's Religions,](#) Toronto: No. 81 December 2018

[Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together:](#)

No. 82 March 2019

Apostolic journeys of Pope Francis to [UAE,](#) [Morocco,](#) [Iraq,](#) [Kingdom of Bahrain,](#) [Kazakhstan:](#) No. 82 March 2019, No. 83 June 2019, No. 91 Jun 2021, No. 97 December 2022

Interfaith charter released: [New Alliance of Virtue:](#) No. 86 March 2020

Blessed Charles de Foucauld to be Canonised; [The Sydney Statement;](#) New Resource on Islam: [Ten More Things:](#) No. 88 September 2020

[Fratelli tutti:](#) On Fraternity and Social Friendship: No. 89 December 2020

Faith and Science: Towards COP26: No. 93 December 2021

[NSW Interfaith Declaration Against Domestic Violence:](#) No. 98 March 2023

[Vatican Message for the Month of Ramadan and Eid:](#) Annually

[The Abraham Conference:](#) Annually

In a world where “fake” news, division and violence contaminate all aspects of our lives, *Bridges* comes as a breath of fresh air. It illuminates truth and provides information that will increase understanding, diminish fear, and support acceptance and respect among those of differing religious belief. **Sr Helen Mary Peters RSM**

Thank you for the many hope-filled stories you have told that shine a light on respectful ways to encounter one another across our religious differences. Now more than ever we need to walk together for a more just and peaceful world and discover in each other a family resemblance.

**Rev Dr Helen Richmond,**  
**Uniting Church**

*Bridges* is a standout in quality, common sense and realistic information that champions human relationships between people who see the world through a different lens. Difference is not a reason to block relationships. *Bridges* knows this well, and shows us how to delight in different ways of seeing the greatness and the beauty of our God.

**Bishop Tim Norton SVD**

Congratulations on your 100<sup>th</sup> edition of sharing inspiring stories of mutual respect, understanding and common action for the rich fruits of interfaith relations.

**Fr Kevin O'Neill, Columban Mission Society**

Affinity Intercultural Foundation began in relationship with CCCMR. Congratulations on your 100<sup>th</sup> issue of the aptly named *Bridges*, the go-to publication in Catholic-Muslim relations.

**Dr Mehmet Saral, Affinity Intercultural Foundation**

Having subscribed to *Bridges* for nearly two decades, I have found in it a wealth of information in Christian-Muslim relations. As a positive media source, it captures the vitality of interfaith relations in our society and promotes dialogue and friendship.

**Sr Ruth Durick OSU**

*Bridges* carries the reader into and across faiths and over continents. Its snippets of local and international interfaith news and features are educational and offer ranges of literary delight. Its narratives are studded with wisdom from myriad sources. **Prof Anthony Johns, ANU**

## From the Editor

I am very proud of *Bridges*. It is the flagship publication of the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations. The Centre was a pioneer in interfaith in Sydney when it was established in 1997. *Bridges* was first published in February 1998 and has been an important part of the Centre's work ever since.

*Bridges* has evolved over the years in content and design. Initially, it provided basic information on Islam and interfaith relations to a church and society that were largely ignorant of these topics. It included resources for discussion and book reviews to learn more. It enabled Christians to get to know Muslims better. In later years, when people had become familiar with the basics, *Bridges* become more international in its reach, reporting on interfaith and Christian-Muslim initiatives from around the world, but always with a view to local implementation.

At the Centre, we scan the internet daily for interfaith news, especially on Islam and Christian-Muslim relations. To counter negative stereotypes, we publish positive stories about Islam and Muslims. We publish news that the mainstream press ignores. I am amazed at the extraordinary range of items we have covered, examples of which are listed on page 5. The *Centre News* and *World News* are snippets that can be read in two minutes. The *Features* provide deeper treatment of major issues. Links enable readers to access the original sources.

I congratulate Sr Pauline Rae SMSM and Sr Kathleen Collins SSpS who initiated *Bridges* and oversaw it for many years. I thank the other Centre staff who have contributed content, design, and publishing over the years.

Most of all, I thank you, the readers. I am grateful for the testimonials you have provided (pp. 2-5). I am touched by your appreciation, support, and encouragement on this milestone achievement, the 100<sup>th</sup> issue of *Bridges*.

REV DR PATRICK MCINERNEY

## Centre News



### Sisters Event: Hate Crime and How to Report it

On 13 July 2023, the Western Sydney Women's IntHERfaith Initiative, coordinated by **Kim Chong**, hosted a lunchtime presentation on hate crime and how to report it. It was delivered by Jo Mackay and Semi Falekakala from the Engagement & Hate Crime Unit of the Police Force of NSW. A hate crime is any crime motivated by hate, prejudice or bias towards a person or group of people because of their race, religion or faith, and more. Hate crime and incidents happen daily in NSW and women are often targets. However, studies show they are under-reported. This means many people are experiencing hate alone. This event was an opportunity for the sisters to empower themselves with the ability to recognise hate crime, report it, and help prevent it happening to others.



### Youth PoWR Meets the Uluru Statement

On 28 May 2023, Youth PoWR (Parliament of the World's Religions), an initiative of the Centre, and the Challenging Racism Project at Western Sydney University, co-hosted "Walking Together: Youth PoWR Meets the Uluru Statement". The aim of the event was to foster purpose and understanding among young adults about the proposed Voice to Parliament so that they could confidently walk the path of reconciliation with Indigenous Australians. First Nations woman Nicole Laupepa and second-generation holocaust survivor Jacqui Parker, both from Youth Off the Streets, facilitated the workshop. Participants gained insight into *The Uluru Statement* and the Makarrata Commission for the purpose of treaty-making and truth-telling about their history. Acknowledging pain and trauma so that healing may begin, not just for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, but for all Australians, are key to these efforts.

## Interfaith Consultations for Diocesan Synod

The Diocese of Parramatta is having a Synod. Parishioners, priests, religious, and agencies are all invited to make submissions. An Assembly in October will discern future directions for the Catholic Church in Western Sydney. At the Centre, we are convinced that if the church is to be truly synodal, then it is not just Catholic faithful, priests, and bishop 'walking one path together', but it is also Catholics 'walking one path together' with people of other faiths. Accordingly, we wanted to ensure that interfaith was included. In June-July the Centre and the Interfaith Commission held three synod interfaith consultations in different parts of the diocese. At each, **Fr Patrick McNerney** shared how Western Sydney is the most religiously diverse society of Sydney and Australia. To make the event truly interfaith, a Hindu speaker and a Muslim speaker shared their perspectives on interreligious dialogue. The suggestions that emerged from the spiritual conversations were synthesised and submitted to the diocese. They include formation of Catholics, talks by representatives of other faiths, visiting places of worship, and practical collaboration on social justice issues. The Centre also made a submission on interfaith to the diocese. We hope and pray that Catholics will embrace interreligious solidarity as an integral part of the evangelising mission of the church.

For media report see: [bit.ly/3KidZhI](http://bit.ly/3KidZhI).



## Prayers for Muslims on Eid al-Adha

*Eid al-Adha* (The Feast of Sacrifice) commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. The story is told in both Genesis 22:1-19 and the Qur'an 37:100-110. The feast is the culmination of the Hajj Pilgrimage rituals in Mecca. Around the world, Muslims sacrifice an animal (or pay for one to be sacrificed in a developing country with the meat given to the poor). This year it was celebrated on 28 June. I rose very early in the morning and celebrated the Eucharist alone. Then I attended the 7.30 am *Eid* Prayers at Lakemba Mosque along with 20,000 worshippers. During the Eucharist, I prayed God's blessings for the Muslims completing

Hajj in Mecca and for those celebrating *Eid* around the world. The Facebook post of my prayerful solidarity was highly appreciated, with many likes, comments, and shares. Pope Francis has often invited us to pray for others. I think it is important. It builds bonds of "spiritual communion", which overflow into friendly relations, all sisters and brothers together before the one God Who is Father of all.

## Visit by Superior General Fr Tim Mulroy

On 7 June 2023, Centre staff, **Fr Patrick McNerney** and **Kim Chong**, were pleased to host the superior general of St Columban's Mission Society, Fr Tim Mulroy, during his visit to Sydney from Hong Kong. During afternoon tea, Patrick and Kim were able to share with Tim the numerous works of the Centre, past and present, such as the youth-driven interfaith charter, [The Sydney Statement](#), and current events being hosted by the Centre, such as Youth PoWR Meets the Uluru Statement, and the [Western Sydney Women's IntHERfaith Initiative](#)'s lunchtime presentation on hate crime and how to report it. We also discussed the hopes and challenges of interreligious dialogue in the Region of Oceania. It was great to catch up with and get to know Tim more personally during the visit. Patrick and Kim appreciated Tim's support and encouragement.





## Burning of the Holy Qur'an

On 28 June 2023, the Feast of Eid al-Adha, with a permit from the Swedish government, Salwan Momika, an Iraqi-born refugee, burnt pages of the Holy Qur'an outside Sweden's largest mosque in the capital, Stockholm. The desecration sent shockwaves around the world. Protestors held demonstrations outside Swedish embassies. In some Muslim-majority countries, *jihadi* terrorists threatened reprisals against Christians. Provocateurs

proposed counter-burnings of Torah and Bible. The Swedish Prime Minister, Ulf Kristersson, condemned the offense. Muslims and Christians identified the desecration as an attack on all faiths. Pope Francis said, "I feel indignant and disgusted by these actions ... any book considered sacred by its people must be respected out of respect for its believers, and freedom of expression must never be used as an excuse to despise others, and to allow this, must be rejected and condemned." For media reports see [bit.ly/3OwoOPL](https://bit.ly/3OwoOPL) and [bit.ly/3YbHE1B](https://bit.ly/3YbHE1B).

## Professor Murzaku Accepts Invitation to Vatican Network

Ines Murzaku (pictured), Professor of Religion and leader of the Catholic Studies Think Tank of the International Federation of Catholic Universities, has accepted the invitation to join the International Women's Network, a new initiative of the Vatican's Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue (DID). The network, which developed as a result of an international conference in January, brings together women leaders, scholars, and practitioners in different faith communities throughout the world to engage in dialogue to find mutual understanding, appreciate differences, promote human dignity, and encourage peace. "Women are often on the front lines of dialogue efforts in families and on the grassroots level, exercising their skills to foster peace in situations of conflict," said Msgr Indunil Kodithuwakku, secretary of DID. "Their perspectives also need to be heard more clearly on national and international levels." Murzaku responded, "It is through dialogue that we can better understand and appreciate one another, and that we can learn of the unique gifts we have to promote the common good." Condensed and adapted from [bit.ly/472PjtF](https://bit.ly/472PjtF).



## Pope Francis Stresses Value of Interreligious Talks with Islam

On 4 May 2023, in Rome, Pope Francis met with Catholic and Muslim leaders for the 6<sup>th</sup> colloquium between the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue and the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, which is directed by Jordanian Prince El Hassan bin Talal. Addressing the key topic of the meeting, 'Creative Concordances between Christianity and Islam', the

pope stressed the importance of sincere and mutually respectful dialogue between Christianity and Islam, with emphasis on what unites believers from the two faiths on religious-spiritual and ethical-moral levels. Among examples of convergence between the two faiths was "attention to the disadvantaged and to those who suffer: orphans, widows, the sick, the elderly, immigrants, refugees". Condensed and adapted from [bit.ly/3OaQBDL](https://bit.ly/3OaQBDL).





## Pope's Message Highlighted at Embassy IRD Meeting

On 17 May 2023, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the pontificate of Pope Francis, the Embassy of Argentina to the United States hosted an interfaith dialogue of religious leaders, including Washington Cardinal Wilton Gregory (pictured, centre), who echoed the pope's emphasis on encountering, listening to, talking with, and learning from others to build bridges of solidarity, understanding, and peace. Joining Cardinal Gregory were Washington DC-based religious

leaders such as Mythili "Lee" Bachu, a Hindu woman originally from India who serves as chair of the Interfaith Council of Metropolitan Washington, Dr Talib Shareef, the president of Masjid Muhammad, and Rabbi Abraham Skorka, senior research fellow for Jewish Studies and Jewish-Christian Relations at Georgetown University and a close friend of Pope Francis in their native Argentina, among others. Together they highlighted Pope Francis' call for fraternal encounter as the antidote to fear and hatred. Bachu noted, "What Pope Francis is trying to tell us is please come together, work together, be together [...] When people come together, we can do a lot of great things." Condensed and adapted from [bit.ly/3O7nbqo](https://bit.ly/3O7nbqo).

## Youth Peacemakers Conference

On 5-14 July 2023, the World Council of Churches, Muslim Council of Elders, and Rose Castle Foundation hosted the Emerging Peacemakers Forum (EPF) at the Ecumenical Institute in Geneva, Switzerland. EPF is an international community of young adults from different beliefs and backgrounds who gather to participate in an intensive program that shapes their peacekeeping efforts. A young Christian, Jew, and Muslim each addressed about 50 young graduates of the program. The Christian speaker, Frederick Kratt, an Anglican from the UK, highlighted a need for inter-generational cooperation, stating, "Several speakers have spoken this week about the need for young people to find solutions to the world's issues, issues young people have inherited. But such is the weight of this responsibility that we are left feeling disempowered. In truth, the young people of the world need the older generations, but the older generations also need the younger generations. I ask that our senior leaders speak less of young people as 'you' leaders of the future, but rather about 'us' as we are all equal leaders." UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi was the keynote speaker. Condensed and adapted from [bit.ly/3rTfYm0](https://bit.ly/3rTfYm0).



Condensed and adapted from [bit.ly/3rTfYm0](https://bit.ly/3rTfYm0).



## Muslim World League Chief Condemns Terrorism

During his five-day visit to India in July, Muslim World League chief Mohammad Bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa criticised terrorist organisations and expressed concern about "escalating conflicts and wars worldwide". He emphasised that these outfits operate on "distorting the image of religions". He said, "Islam and terrorism have nothing to do with each other," adding, "These terrorist organisations don't represent anyone except themselves; they have no religion or country." After visiting the Akshardham temple in Delhi, Al-Issa acknowledged it as a model of India's "unity in diversity". Al-Issa was previously

Minister of Justice in the Saudi Cabinet but has served as Secretary General of the Muslim World League since 2016. He is renowned as an Islamic scholar, a proponent of moderate Islam, and an advocate for interfaith dialogue and global peace. Condensed and adapted from [bit.ly/44YTEWK](https://bit.ly/44YTEWK).

# First World Meeting on Human Fraternity

## Pope's encyclical inspires international event on human fraternity and peace

**O**n 10 June 2023, the first International Meeting on Human Fraternity, “Not Alone”, was held simultaneously in Saint Peter's Square and eight other squares in cities around the world. Inspired by the Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, and organised by the Vatican's Fratelli Tutti Foundation, the event aimed to promote a culture of fraternity and peace. The day culminated with participants signing the Declaration on Human Fraternity, composed especially for the occasion by 30 Nobel Peace Prize laureates. It is a commitment to build “a world of peace, justice and equality, to the benefit of the single human family”. Below is the text of Pope Francis' address, which was read by Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, OFM Conv, president of the Fratelli Tutti Foundation.

In the Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, I wrote: “Fraternity necessarily calls for something greater, which in turn enhances freedom and equality” (n. 103), since the one who sees the other as a brother or sister sees in him or her a face, not a number. The other is always “someone” who has dignity and merits respect, and not “something” to be used, exploited or thrown away. In our world torn apart by violence and war, tweaks and adjustments are not enough. Only a great spiritual and social covenant born from the heart and centered on fraternity can restore the sacredness and inviolability of human dignity as the core of relationships.

This does not require theories on fraternity but concrete gestures and shared decisions that make it a culture of peace. The question to ask ourselves is not what society and the world can give me, but what can I give to my brothers and sisters. When we return home, let us think of some concrete gesture of fraternity that we can make: reconciling with family members, friends and neighbours, praying for those who hurt us, recognizing

and helping those in need, speaking words of peace at school, university or in society, “anointing” with closeness those who feel alone ...

We should feel ourselves called to apply the balm of tenderness within relationships between persons and peoples that have become gangrenous. Let us not tire of crying out “no to war”, in the name of God and in the name of every man and woman who aspires for peace. I am reminded of some verses written by Giuseppe Ungaretti. In the midst of war, he felt the need to speak of brothers as “Trembling word/in the night/Leaf just born”. Fraternity is fragile and precious. Brothers and sisters are the anchor of truth in the stormy sea of conflicts that spread falsehood. To evoke brothers and sisters is to remind those who are fighting, and all of us, that the feeling of fraternity uniting us is stronger than hatred and violence. In fact, it unites everyone through the same pain. We start and start again from here, from the sense of “feeling together”, a spark that can rekindle the light that stops the night of conflicts.

To believe that the other is our brother or sister and to greet him or her as such is not meaningless. The most concrete thing each of us can do. Indeed, it means freeing myself from the poverty of believing that I am the only child in the world. It means, at the same time, choosing to overcome the mindset of partners or associates, who stay together only for the sake of personal advantage. It also means knowing how to go beyond the limits of blood or ethnic ties, which only recognise similarities and reject differences. Here, I think of the parable of the Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:25-37), who stops with compassion before the Jewish man in need of help. Their cultures were at odds, their histories different, their regions hostile to each other; but for that man, the person in the street and his needs came first.

When people and societies choose fraternity, policies also change: The person once again takes precedence over profit and the home we all inhabit over the environment to be exploited for one's own interests. A just wage is paid for work, welcome becomes wealth, life becomes hope, justice opens up to reparation, and the memory of evil done is healed in the encounter between victims and perpetrators.

Pope's address: [bit.ly/3O3OJN5](https://bit.ly/3O3OJN5); program: [bit.ly/3DsQ14o](https://bit.ly/3DsQ14o); video: [bit.ly/3Y4y6FE](https://bit.ly/3Y4y6FE); and final declaration: [bit.ly/3OqcvUS](https://bit.ly/3OqcvUS).

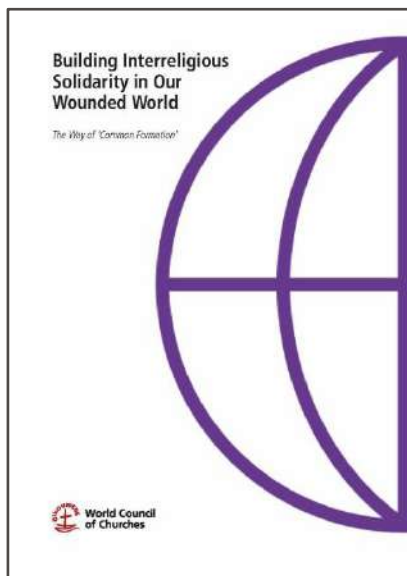


Cardinal Petro Parolin signs the Declaration on Human Fraternity.

# Building Interreligious Solidarity in Wounded World

New resource provides 'common formation' for interreligious relations

Reviewed by Rev Dr Patrick McNerney



The World Council of Churches (WCC) has published a new resource, *Building Interreligious Solidarity in Our Wounded World: The Way of 'Common Formation'*. This 16-page e-book grew out of a 2021 conference on "The Future of Interfaith Dialogue", which discussed "common formation" as a vital element in

educating people for engaging interfaith relations. The book is divided into six sections.

## Why Common Formation?

Common formation brings together both the face-to-face and side-by-side aspects of interreligious dialogue for mutual enrichment and bridges the gap between them. Both the process of learning and its goal build interreligious solidarity.

## What is Common Formation?

Common formation is people of different faiths learning together in a formal educational setting for the benefit of one's community and to prepare members for effective interfaith solidarity and collaboration. It seeks to be intentionally transformational both for the individuals involved and for the communities to which they belong.

## WCC's Credentials in Common Formation?

Since its beginning in 1948, the WCC has been working through the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey in common formation for ecumenism. In the early part of this century, the Institute expanded this formation to include interfaith. The course now runs as a summer school over several weeks, especially for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, who graduate with a Certificate in Advanced Studies in Interreligious Studies.

## Principles and Pointers

WCC's insights and learnings in common formation over the past two decades and the reflections of the

2021 conference are condensed into Five Fundamental Principles and Ten Practical Pointers which are named below. Each of them is explained succinctly, with an added practical application. They highlight the pitfalls to avoid and the positive dynamics that make common formation in interfaith truly transformational.

## Five Fundamental Principles

1. Taking responsibility
2. Building relationships
3. Ensuring respect
4. Considering context
5. Always reflecting

## 10 Practical Pointers for Initiatives of Common Formation

1. Aim for parity of background
2. Show hospitality as host and guest
3. Recognize intracommunal diversity
4. Ensure representation
5. Share goals and boundaries
6. Foster friendships
7. Honour both differences and commonalities
8. Include lived experiences and varied kinds of learning
9. Make use of scriptural reasoning and other spiritual exercises
10. Sustain alumni

I believe these principles and pointers have wider application than the strictly 'educational' setting of common formation. I believe they will enliven any interfaith activity, making it dynamic and growth-producing over the long term. Hence, they are well worth studying in detail and applying to the variety of interreligious dialogues and settings in which believers from different faiths engage.

## Directory of Organisations

The final section is a very useful annotated list of seven organisations around the world providing common formation for interreligious relations.

Download the document: [bit.ly/3pWFy9s](https://bit.ly/3pWFy9s).

# 22<sup>nd</sup> Ecumenical Day of Christian-Islamic Dialogue

## Christians and Muslims make common appeal to guard creation, build peace

The Ecumenical Day of Christian-Islamic Dialogue emerged in response to possible belligerent reactions to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA in 2001. To counter interpreting that event through the lens of Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilisations" theory, concerned Christians and Muslims proposed dialogue as the way of the future. For the first six years, the event was held on the last Friday in Ramadan, but since 2008 it has been held on 27 October, to commemorate the 1986 Assisi Interfaith Meeting. This year's organisers make an urgent appeal "to a disarmament of hearts, to an ecological conversion that renews our vocation to be custodians of God's work".

### Appeal: Guarding Creation by Building Peace

Winds of death are continuing to sweep over the world. Wars and guerrilla warfare fed by increasingly sophisticated and lethal weapons eliminate human and animal life, devastate cities and countryside, and cause famine. Exploitation and pollution of water, air, and soil cause droughts, floods, and landslides. The nuclear drift that is upon us would make the world a desert devoid of life. These are signs of the times that challenge men and women of every religion and every form of thought.

We, Christian and Muslim believers, lovers, and builders of peace, reaffirm that God's plan for humanity is the custody of all creation, the sharing of common goods, and the conviviality of differences.

In the Quran, we read, "I will place a *khalifa*, that is, a vicar on earth" (Sura II:30). God places the human being as the custodian of creation so that he can serve it, guard it, love it, and receive benefits from it: the earth gives to the sky and the sky gives back to the earth. God does not place human beings as custodians of creation so that they may indiscriminately exploit its goods, waste food, and destroy biodiversity.

We also read in the Bible, "The Lord God took Adam and placed him in the garden of Eden, that he might cultivate it and take care of it" (Gen. 2:15).

In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis writes, "Living the vocation of being custodians of God's work is an essential part of a virtuous existence; it does not constitute something optional or even a secondary aspect of the Christian experience" (LS, 271).



Members of Bridges of Peace. (Image by Francesco Pierantoni.)

Our faith is a source of ethics, prayer and daily orthopraxis, as the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* also reminds us: "Faith leads the believer to see in the other a brother to be supported and loved. From faith in God, who created the universe, creatures and all human beings – equal because of His Mercy – the believer is called to express this human brotherhood, safeguarding creation and the whole universe and supporting every person, especially the neediest and poorest."

Sixty years after the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, we are called and summoned to a disarmament of hearts, to an ecological conversion that renews our vocation to be custodians of God's work. Religions, as well as politics, schools, and mass media, are responsible for an education for peace and care. We oppose the blessing of armies in the name of God. We oppose the diversion of funds from health and education to the military. We oppose the language of war that sees the other as an enemy. We call for a reconversion of the arms industry.

We invite all women and men of goodwill to organise initiatives on 27 October to celebrate the 22<sup>nd</sup> Ecumenical Day of Christian-Islamic Dialogue "Guarding Creation by Building Peace."

To express endorsements and communicate initiatives to the organisation, email: [redazione@ildialogo.org](mailto:redazione@ildialogo.org).

Condensed and adapted from [bit.ly/43K6kzs](https://bit.ly/43K6kzs).

# One and the Many: Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

Theologian Fr Ron Rolheiser addresses ancient philosophical question

One of the most ancient problems in philosophy is the question of 'the one and the many', whether reality is ultimately a unity or a plurality and how these interrelate. We might ask the same question regarding the plurality of religious faiths, churches, and forms of worship in our world. Is there some inherent oneness there or is it all plurality without anything binding us together in some kind of community that transcends our differences?

At the risk of being misunderstood, here's my perspective. All of us in the world who have a sincere belief share a common faith because ultimately we share a common God. Moreover, since we share a common God, we also share a common problem; namely, we struggle equally in trying to conceptualise this non-conceptualisable God. The first dogma about God in all valid religions is that God is holy and ineffable, meaning that God cannot ever be circumscribed and grasped in a concept. By definition, it is impossible to capture infinity in a concept (like trying to have a concept of the highest number it is possible to count to). Since God is infinite, all attempts to conceptualise God fall short.

All legitimate faiths have this problem and this should keep us humble in our religious language. Further still, beyond our common struggle to have a concept of God, we also all struggle to understand God as actually loving universally and unconditionally. All religions struggle not to make God tribal, biased, and lacking in full love and understanding. In Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, for example, where we all believe in the same God, we also all tend to conceptualise that God as male, celibate, and frowning most of the time. Not exactly the ineffable, unconditionally loving God of revelation.

So what's our task? Our task as believers is to move towards an ever-deepening empathy with each other, across all denominational and religious lines. That is the real route for ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. At the risk of sounding heretical or disloyal to my own faith tradition, I say this. Our task is not to set out to make converts, to try to persuade others to join our own church. Our task is to enter ever more deeply, faithfully, and lovingly into our own church and denomination, even as we strive to be in deeper empathy with all others who worship God in ways different than we do.

The renowned ecclesiologist Avery Dulles taught that the way forward for Christian ecumenism and interreligious



dialogue is not the way of conversion, of trying to get others to convert to our particular church. The way forward (in his words) is the way of "progressive gradualism", namely, of each of us being ever more faithful to God within our tradition so that as each of us grows closer to God (and, for Christians, to Christ) we will grow closer to each other and to all people of sincere faith. The unity we seek lies not in one church or faith community eventually converting all others to join it, but in everyone of sincere faith becoming progressively more faithful to God so that the unity we desire can take place sometime in the future, contingent on our own deeper fidelity inside our own faith tradition.

Our task then is not that of trying to convert others to join our own church, but of moving more deeply into our own church, even as we strive to be in a deeper empathy with other churches and faiths. We need to be brothers and sisters to each other, recognising that we already have a shared God, humanity, and heartaches.

I work in a doctoral program in spirituality that draws students from different Christian denominations. During the five years of their program, these students study together, socialise, commiserate, and pray together (though only occasionally in a formal church service). Interestingly, during the 10 years we have had the program, we have not had a single conversion of one person to another denomination. Rather, every one of our graduates has left the program with a deeper love and understanding of his or her own tradition – and a deeper love and understanding of other faith traditions.

This does not imply that all religions are equal, but rather that none of us is living out the full truth and that the path forward lies in a deeper personal conversion within our own faith and a more empathic relationship to other faiths.

*Condensed and adapted from [bit.ly/3OxzU73](https://bit.ly/3OxzU73).*

*Published 9 January 2023.*

# Interfaith Group Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

## Interfaith statement delivered to UN calls for regulation of AI weapons

**O**n 22 February 2023, 68 members of the global Stop Killer Robots coalition gathered in San José, Costa Rica, for their first in-person conference centred on the impact of autonomous weapons.

Autonomous weapons systems, otherwise known as killer robots, or slaughterbots, are weapons that use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to identify, select, and kill human targets without human intervention. Essentially, humans are reduced to data points, on which decisions are made. With growing digital dehumanisation, the [Stop Killer Robots](#) coalition works to ensure human control in the use of force. Their campaign calls for new international law on autonomy in weapons systems.

At the conference, several civil society organisations and individuals representing a range of faiths and beliefs, among them the World Council of Churches, created an interfaith group to draw on the values of their different faith traditions to further condemn all attempts to allow the unregulated development of autonomous weapons. Their purpose is to strengthen “the moral threshold against delegating decisions about the life or death of people to machines operated by digital code”.

In May 2023, the interfaith group formed at the Costa Rica conference in February, delivered the following statement, calling on all UN member states to “establish and protect meaningful human control over the use of autonomous weapons through regulation”.

### Statement of the interfaith group of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, May 2023

Digital dehumanisation is fundamentally repulsive to all people who share a belief in the inalienable dignity of the human person and the inestimable worth of human life.

Our different faith traditions teach a profound respect for life. Furthermore, many scientists who work in the field of artificial intelligence are largely in agreement with the faith-based conviction that machines will never have human consciousness or awareness, and will never experience human emotions such as empathy, compassion, love and hate. Accordingly, strengthening the moral threshold against delegating decisions about the life or death of people to machines operated by digital code is a core issue for us all.



We are all witnesses of war and armed conflict at present. The ledgers of injustice and impunity are growing. Weapons with more and more autonomy are being used to kill, injure and destroy, with technology being developed at an accelerating speed. Civil society, academics, scientists and others have been speaking out and advocating for several years about the urgent need to establish legally binding prohibitions and regulations on autonomous weapons to protect us all from this grave threat to humanity.

We welcome the growing awareness of this need, as evidenced by the large majority of states at the [UN's] Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) meetings who are in favor of negotiating a legally binding instrument on autonomous weapons. We welcome the affirmation by many states that meaningful human control must be retained over such technologies. We also welcome the positions of all states and international organizations calling for specific prohibitions on systems which would target humans. However, we believe that these very positive positions cannot be fully asserted and implemented without the development and universal acceptance of a global regulatory framework, but despite 10 years of work at the CCW, little practical progress has been made.

We therefore continue to call on the UN member states and all people of goodwill shaping policy in this field to establish and protect meaningful human control over the use of force by weapons with limited autonomy through regulation, and to enact and enforce a global ban on autonomous weapons that target people or cannot be used with meaningful human control.

*Condensed and adapted from [bit.ly/3Kki0IO](https://bit.ly/3Kki0IO) and [bit.ly/478NiFZ](https://bit.ly/478NiFZ).*

# Coming Events

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
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<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>			

## September 2023

- 01** World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation (Catholic & Orthodox Christian), [creationjustice.org/world-day-of-prayer-for-the-care-of-creation](https://creationjustice.org/world-day-of-prayer-for-the-care-of-creation)
- 05** *Arbaeen* (Ends 40-day mourning following *Ashura*) (Shia Islam)
- 08** Birth of the Virgin Mary (Catholic Christian)
- 12** *Nayrouz* (New Year) (Coptic Christian)
- 21** UN International Day of Peace, [un.org/en/observances/international-day-peace](https://un.org/en/observances/international-day-peace)
- 24** World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Vatican, [migrants-refugees.va/world-day-of-migrants-refugees](https://migrants-refugees.va/world-day-of-migrants-refugees)
- 26** UN International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, [un.org/en/observances/nuclear-weapons-elimination-day](https://un.org/en/observances/nuclear-weapons-elimination-day)
- 27** *Mawlid al-Nabi* (Birth of the Prophet) (Islam)

## October 2023

- 04** Feast of St Francis of Assisi (Christian)
- 22** Mission Sunday

## November 2023

- 01** All Saint's Day (Christian)
- 02** All Soul's Day (Christian)
- 12-19** Inter Faith Week, [globaldimension.org.uk/calendar/inter-faith-week-england-wales](https://globaldimension.org.uk/calendar/inter-faith-week-england-wales)
- 16** International Day for Tolerance, United Nations, [unesco.org/en/days/tolerance-day](https://unesco.org/en/days/tolerance-day)
- 19** White Ribbon Day Australia
- 25** International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, [un.org/en/observances/ending-violence-against-women-day](https://un.org/en/observances/ending-violence-against-women-day)

## December 2023

- 03** First Sunday of Advent (Christian)



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