

Bridges

Building relationships between Christians and Muslims



No. 105 December 2024

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From the Editor

For me, the most moving moment in the pope's 11-day pilgrimage to S.E. Asia was the encounter between Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Istiqlal Mosque, Nasaruddin Umar (see pp 4-5). They had just co-signed the [Joint Declaration of Istiqlal 2024](#) which aims at "fostering religious harmony for the sake of humanity". They then showed what harmony looks like. Posing together outside the Istiqlal Mosque for photographs, the Imam leaned over and reverently kissed the Pope on the forehead. The wheelchair-bound Pope clasped the Imam's hand, kissed it, and held it warmly and tenderly against his cheek. It was a profoundly affectionate and intimate exchange between the two religious leaders, representing young and old, Indonesian and Argentinian, Muslim and Christian.

When we focus on the doctrinal teachings of Islam and Christianity, we will find both commonalities and differences. Similarly, when we focus on the moral teachings of Islam and Christianity, we will find commonalities and differences. While the commonalities give us something to work on together, the differences inevitably lead to "othering". However, when we move beyond doctrine and morality to friendship, then the "other" becomes our "brother" and "sister". In friendship, there is unity, harmony, belonging, and community. We are equals, companions on the journey,

encouraging and supporting one another, pilgrims sharing the same journey towards the fulness of Truth and Goodness.

Pope Francis and Imam Nasaruddin Umar have given us an example. I wonder how many priests, bishops, imams and lay believers are ready to follow their example?

The New Testament five times commands us to "greet (each other) with a holy kiss" (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thes 5:26; or "kiss of love," 1 Peter 5:14). It is a familial gesture showing mutual respect, affection, and friendship. But is it among Christians only? Jesus said there is no credit in loving those who love us in return (c.f. Lk 6:32ff). The litmus test for Christians is love of enemies (c.f. Mt 5:44, Lk 6:35, 37).

I encourage Christians, Muslims, and believers of all faiths, to take the risk of friendship. It does not mean that we compromise our doctrines or our morality. We hold and practice them with integrity, but in their proper place, under, not above, the greatest laws of love of God and love of neighbour (c.f. Mk 12:28ff, Mt 22:36ff).

Especially in the context of the ongoing war in the Middle East, it is even more important that Jews, Christians, and Muslims reach out to each other in friendship. Dare we? I fear for our world if we dare not!

REV DR PATRICK MCINERNEY

Regional Director Oceania

The Centre is proud that its director, **Rev Dr Patrick McInerney**, has been appointed Director, Columban Region of Oceania, which includes Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and Fiji. Patrick will continue his interfaith work at the Centre but will prioritise leadership of the Region. He will bring the diplomatic skills and lessons he has learned in interfaith to his new role as leader, and it will also provide him with a new platform for promoting interfaith relations in Oceania and in the Columban Society. We assure him of our prayers, collaboration, and support.



Bridges Receives High Commendation at ACPA Awards

The 100th issue of *Bridges* ([#104 September 2023](#)) won the Highly Commended award for Best Content in the Ecumenical & Interfaith category at the 2024 Australasian Catholic Press Association (ACPA). The award was presented at the 2024 ACPA Annual Awards Night at Rydges North Sydney on Wednesday, 28 August, which Columban co-worker Ajesh Abraham collected on behalf of St Columbans Mission Society. The Centre has published *Bridges* quarterly since 1998. It is one of the few, if only, publications in Australia that consistently produces positive news and feature articles on interfaith dialogue locally and around the world. The 100th edition featured many moving testimonials for this milestone occasion including the Message of H. Em. Miguel Angel Cardinal Ayuso Guixot, M.C.C.J. Prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican City.

Launch of Parramatta Diocese's Pastoral Plan

In August, **Fr Patrick McInerney** and **Kim Chong** attended the launch of the "Diocese of Parramatta's Pastoral Plan for a Synodal Church 2024-2028". This is the culmination of nearly three years work, beginning with consultations in 2022, a synod in 2023, and further consultations on a draft plan in 2024. Patrick and Kim participated in each of these stages. Interreligious dialogue is now officially part of the diocese's plan for prayers (p. 19), formation (p. 23), acknowledgement (p. 25), social issues (p. 27), and pastoral councils (p. 53). What is particularly encouraging is that these commitments are grounded in a synodal process, providing a solid foundation for growing this apostolate in western Sydney. The plan is [available online](#) at Our Diocesan Pastoral Plan. We also participated in an Expo at the launch, where we showcased our interfaith resources for implementing the pastoral plan (and a week later, the chair of the Interfaith Commission presented our resources at a similar Expo for the launch of the RE Curriculum).





Muslims Join Catholics to Mourn Bishop Kevin Manning

Muslims who remembered Bishop Emeritus Kevin Manning DD for his outreach to their communities post 9/11 joined with Catholics for the Solemn Pontifical Mass of Christian Burial on Friday 2 August 2024 at St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta. Bishop Kevin Manning felt sorry for the Muslims who were suffering unjustly from the widespread misinformation and the prejudice that followed attacks on the US on 11 September 2001. He invited them to meet with him, hosted them on special occasions at Masses in the Parramatta Cathedral, and participated in and supported their interfaith encounter events. The Muslims of [Affinity Intercultural Foundation](#) were forever grateful for Bishop Kevin's outreach, welcome, and hospitality during those difficult times. When Bishop Kevin died, **Fr Patrick McInerney** informed them immediately. They offered sincere condolences and expressed a desire to attend his funeral. The Diocese of Parramatta reserved places for them in the Cathedral. Bishop Vincent Long acknowledged their presence in his welcome address at the mass.



Abraham Conference Circles Postponed

This year the Abraham Conference organising committee (pictured), of which **Kim Chong** is a member, decided to conduct small, intimate "listening circles" to allow the compassionate listening of each other's grief in the wake of 7 October and the escalating war in the Middle East. It was a brave attempt for Jews, Muslims and Christians to share their pain safely and without judgement or debate, in the hope that some dialogue and healing could occur. The committee brought in professionals who had experience in holding space for peaceful dialogue. Unfortunately, the scheduled date for the listening circles, 29 September, coincided with a massive Israeli aerial bombing campaign throughout Lebanon in an attack on Hezbollah. On the day of the listening circles, Muslim participants withdrew to attend rallies in the city, protesting the escalating war. The committee hope to hold the listening circles in 2025. It is a challenging time for interreligious dialogue, but committees such as these continue to draw on their long-standing friendships between Jewish, Christians and Muslims, and are unwavering in their commitment to continue fostering renewed and lasting peace together.



"Human Library" Event for Catholic Teachers

On 8 August, the Centre co-hosted a "Human Library" event with the Catholic Schools team at the Diocese of Parramatta. Its purpose was to provide Catholic school teachers in Western Sydney an opportunity to engage with people of different faiths at a personal level, as "open books", so to speak, to hear their stories of faith, and to ask questions of their religions. It was an aid to their professional development to learn about different religions direct from the faithful themselves so that they can better engage their students in the classroom, many of whom represent different religions. The Centre invited representatives from the Baha'i, Muslim and Sikh faiths to share their faith journeys with the teachers. Participants split into three groups to rotate to each person of faith. It was an enjoyable, informative evening, where everybody involved, including the speakers, engaged in genuine dialogue.



Commitment to Peace Reaffirmed in Philippines

Religious leaders in Mindanao have reaffirmed their commitment to peace and sustainable development during the Mindanao Religious Leaders Conference (MiRLeC) held in Davao City in October. Fr Rex Rocamora SSC said MiRLeC gathered 24 Muslim Ulama and leaders, 20 bishops and Christian leaders, three Indigenous Peoples representatives, and 10 members of the Civil Society Organizations as observers. Fr Rex, who serves as the

MiRLeC focal person, said the first meetings held in August aimed at revitalising the [Bishops-Ulama Conference](#) (BUC), which was established in 1996. BUC was created in response to the peace agreement signed between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front. The religious leaders acknowledged their moral obligation to become a “dynamic peace movement” that contributes to governance and the pursuit of peace, not just in Mindanao but across the country. Their [statement](#) highlighted the importance of interreligious dialogue in promoting peace between Muslim, Christian, and indigenous communities by fostering “interreligious cooperation in the spirit of solidarity”, and initiating “dialogues and conversations of peace” with political leaders, youth organisations, and indigenous peoples’ groups. In these efforts, prayer and spiritual gatherings were acknowledged as vital components in building solidarity across different faiths. *Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/48cRzt3.*

Film Wins Award for Promoting Interreligious Dialogue at Venice Film Festival

At the 81st International Film Festival in Venice, 28 Aug-7 Sept, the film [Quiet Life](#), directed by Alexandros Avranas, received the 13th Interfilm Award for Promoting Interreligious Dialogue. In the film, a family is seeking asylum, but they are denied.

The rejection results in a mysterious coma for the two children – called “child resignation syndrome”. The jury wrote: “This incredibly dense film is clearly structured;

the actors’ performances are deeply touching and stressful at the same time, and confront us with the hypocrisy of a so-called human, but indeed a bureaucracy as cold as ice. By choosing this film we encourage people to think about human dignity, strengthen solidarity with asylum seekers, and promote our awareness of all kinds of rejection.” [Interfilm](#) is an international network for the dialogue between church and film, linking cinema and church, cultures and religions, by looking beyond the screen.

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/4hdp0zG.



Interfaith Dialogue Struggles in Wake of 7 October

Since 7 October last year, the strain between the Jewish and Muslim communities – and beyond – has challenged the ability of interfaith spaces to function as facilitators for positive dialogue, let alone spaces for solidarity. While various initiatives can claim decades of leadership in interreligious dialogue and relationships built between leaders and laity from numerous traditions, many have struggled to gather communities during the conflict. Longtime dialogue partners Celene Ibrahim, who is Muslim, and Or Rose, Jewish, believe the frictions in the wake of last year’s attack and ongoing war can be generative. Or Rose says honest conversations they had privately

and the public dialogue they shared with others could not have happened without the longstanding relationship of trust and care they already had. “We would not have been able to share and speak our truths without that pre-existing relationship,” said Ibrahim. “And I think there’s a lesson there — that we need to be in dialogue with our friends, family, colleagues, and neighbours before anything horrible happens,” she said. “That way, when it does, we are already there for one another.” *Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3Ao5FeB, bit.ly/4fcS7S6 and bit.ly/4fcS7S6.*

G20 Interfaith Forum Convenes for Upcoming Summit

The [G20 Interfaith Forum](#) and [International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development Forum](#) convened in August to prepare recommendations for the 2024 G20 Summit, which was held under the Presidency of Brazil on 18-19 November, in Rio de Janeiro. The forums were held in the capital Brasília, under the theme “Leave No One Behind: The Well-Being of the Planet and Its People”. The global gathering brought together 300 representatives from a diverse array of stakeholders, including representatives from the World Council of Churches, various faith and Indigenous traditions, civil society organisations, governments, multilateral entities, academia, and developmental experts. The Brazilian G20 Presidency 2024 has identified three priority issues: promoting the establishment of a new Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty; addressing climate change; and reforming global governance, including addressing structural reforms in the UN Security Council. The G20 Interfaith Forum and International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development Forum voiced their wishes to be part of these emerging plans, particularly in light of the upcoming 2025 UN Climate Change Conference that will convene in November 2025 in Brazil. *Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/4eQFzzD.*

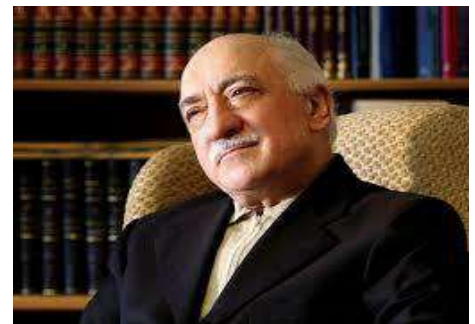


Ecumenical Patriarch of Orthodox Church in Sydney

Dialogue is key to Christian participation in the divine life, the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church told attendees at an historic ecumenical event at St Mary’s Cathedral in Sydney on 7 October 2024. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Divinity from the University of Notre Dame Australia in the presence of Orthodox and Catholic clergy, scholars and laity, in a sign of unity between the two sister churches. “By engaging in dialogue, Christians participate in the divine life, the relational essence of the Trinity, and foster unity, reconciliation and hope,” the Ecumenical Patriarch said. The ecumenical milestone recognised the patriarch’s commitment to Orthodox-Catholic relations, his global stature as the leader of the Orthodox Church, and his significant contribution to environmental theology. *Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3YoRkGE. To read His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew’s address at the Conferral Ceremony, visit bit.ly/4ho39FQ.*

Vale Fethullah Gülen 1941-2024

Fethullah Gülen, Turkish leader of the Islamic movement Hizmet, has died in exile aged 83. Gülen died on 20 October in a United States hospital where he was being treated. He had lived in the US in self-imposed exile since 1999. Hizmet (meaning “service” in Turkish) seeks to spread a moderate Islam that promotes Western-style education, free markets and interfaith dialogue. Followers of the movement describe the Muslim scholar, preacher and social advocate as a leader who empowered millions to live lives rooted in service, compassion, altruism, and peaceful coexistence, through education, philanthropy and dialogue. He espoused the principles of treating each other with mutual respect; to understand our commonalities and differences and accept each other for who we are. *To learn more, view bit.ly/40aWV62.*



Pope Francis' Pilgrim Visit to S.E. Asia

The pope continues to promote interreligious dialogue on apostolic journeys



From 2-13 September 2024, Pope Francis visited four countries, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and Singapore. It was the 87-year-old pope's longest trip since assuming the papacy, both in terms of distance and time, flying more than 28,000 kilometres over 12 days. Below are selected excerpts from some of his speeches on interreligious dialogue.

At the Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta, Indonesia, on Thursday, 5 September 2024

Two Suggestions

[...] I would like to leave you with two suggestions to encourage you on the path of unity and harmony that you have already embarked upon.

The first is always look deeply, because only in this way can we find what unites despite our differences. Indeed, on the surface there are spaces in both the Mosque and the Cathedral that are well defined and frequented by their respective faithful, but below ground in the tunnel, those same people can meet and encounter each other's religious perspectives. This image reminds us of the important fact that the visible aspects of religions – the rites, practices and so on – are a heritage that must be protected and respected. However, we could say that what lies “underneath”, what runs underground, like the “tunnel of friendship”, is the one root common to all religious sensitivities: the quest

for an encounter with the divine, the thirst for the infinite that the Almighty has placed in our hearts, the search for a greater joy and a life stronger than any type of death, which animates the journey of our lives and impels us to step out of ourselves to encounter God. Here, let us remember that by looking deeply, grasping what flows in the depths of our lives, the desire for fullness that dwells in the depths of our hearts, we discover that we are all brothers and sisters, all pilgrims, all on our way to God, beyond what differentiates us.

The second suggestion is to preserve the bonds between you. The tunnel was built in order to create a link between two different and distant places. This is what the tunnel does: it connects, creating a bond. Sometimes we think that a meeting between religions is a matter of seeking common ground between different religious doctrines and beliefs no matter the cost. Such an approach, however, may end up dividing us, because the doctrines and dogmas of each religious experience are different. What really brings us closer is creating a connection in the midst of diversity, cultivating bonds of friendship, care and reciprocity. These relationships link us to others, allowing us to commit ourselves to seek the truth together, learning from the religious tradition of others, and coming together to meet our human and spiritual needs. They are also bonds that allow us to work together, to move





Pope Francis is guided by Grand Imam into the Tunnel of Friendship during his visit to Istiqlal Mosque in Indonesia.

forward together in pursuit of the same goals: defence of human dignity, the fight against poverty and the promotion of peace. Unity is born from personal bonds of friendship as well as mutual respect and defence of the ideas of others and their sacred spaces. May you always cherish this!

Joint Declaration of Istiqlal

Dear brothers and sisters, “fostering religious harmony for the sake of humanity” is the path that we are called to follow. It is also the title to the joint declaration prepared for this occasion. By adhering to it, we take on the responsibility to address the serious and sometimes dramatic crises that threaten the future of humanity such as wars and conflicts, which are unfortunately caused at times by the manipulation of religion, and the environmental crisis, which is an obstacle to the growth and coexistence of peoples. In the face of these crises, it is important that the values common to all religious traditions be effectively promoted in order to help society “defeat the culture of violence and indifference” ([Joint Declaration of Istiqlal](#)) and promote reconciliation and peace.

The Tunnel of Friendship

[...] the purpose of this “Tunnel of Friendship” (connecting the Istiqlal Mosque and the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption) is to be a place of dialogue and encounter [...]

We who belong to different religious traditions have a role to play in helping everyone pass through the tunnels of life with our eyes turned towards the light. Then, at the end of the journey, we will be able to recognize in those who have walked beside us, a brother, a sister, with whom we can share life and support each other.

In the face of today’s many challenges, we respond with the sign of fraternity. Indeed, by welcoming others and respecting their identity, fraternity urges them on a common path travelled in friendship and leading towards the light.

Interreligious Meeting with Young People at Catholic Junior College, Singapore, on Friday 13 September 2024

Religions as Paths to Reach God

One of the things that has impressed me most about the young people here is your capacity for interfaith dialogue. This is very important because if you start arguing, “My religion is more important than yours [...],” or “Mine is the true one, yours is not true [...],” where does this lead? Somebody answer. [A young person answers, “Destruction”.] That is correct.

Religions are seen as paths trying to reach God. I will use an analogy, they are like different languages that express the divine. But God is for everyone, and therefore, we are all God’s children. “But my God is more important than yours!”. Is this true? There is only one God, and religions are like languages that try to express ways to approach God. Some Sikh, some Muslim, some Hindu, some Christian. Understood? Yet, interfaith dialogue among young people takes courage. The age of youth is the age of courage, but you can misuse this courage to do things that will not help you. Instead, you should have courage to move forward and to dialogue.

Full Addresses

For Pope Francis’ full address at Istiqlal Mosque in Indonesia on 5 September, see bit.ly/3V6t37m.

For Pope Francis’ full address in Singapore on 12 September, see bit.ly/4eJWxij.

Media Reports

For background on the papal visit, see Michel Chambon’s ‘[Pope Francis Returns to Asia-Pacific Frontlines](#)’.

For background on the Istiqlal Declaration, see Christopher White’s ‘[Pope and Indonesia’s grand imam sign declaration to fight climate change, dehumanization](#)’.

For a beautiful appreciation of the significance of the pope’s gestures and words, see Baptist former missionary to Indonesia, Robert Seller’s, [Modelling How to Live from 10,000 Miles Away](#).

60th Anniversary of Ecclesiam Suam

Catholic church document foundational to dialogue celebrated in Sydney

The Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations had many reasons for celebrating the 60th anniversary of Pope Saint Paul VI's encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, published on 6 August 1964. The document introduced the word “dialogue” into the teaching of the Catholic Church, laying the foundations for the work of the Centre. The document also inspired the director Fr Patrick McInerney's 45 years in interreligious dialogue. It significantly shaped Vatican II's positive outreach to the world, and laid the foundations for much of what Pope Francis is now doing.

With cooperation from the Diocese of Parramatta, on 13 August 2024, Fr Patrick McInerney and Sr Trish Madigan OP gave talks on the encyclical (pictured). Fr Patrick repeated his talk at the Catholic Institute of Sydney on 25 September 2024.

Ecclesiam Suam, translated literally as “His (i.e. Christ's) Church”, also known by its English title, *Paths of the Church*, is Pope Paul VI's first encyclical. Like most first papal documents, it is his policy statement, setting the agenda for his papacy – think of the Christocentrism of Pope Saint John Paul II's *Redemptor Hominis* and the missionary vision of Pope Francis' *Evanqelii Gaudium*.

Pope Paul VI is very clear about his intention: The aim of this encyclical will be to demonstrate with increasing clarity how vital it is for the world, and how greatly desired by the Catholic Church, that the two should meet together, and get to know and love one another. (ES, 3)

He develops this theme through 3 principal priorities:

1. Deeper self-knowledge = Self-Awareness (ES, 18-40)
2. Struggle for Renewal = The Renewal (ES, 41-57)
3. Relations with the world = The Dialogue (ES, 58-115)
4. and concludes with an Encouragement (ES, 116-119)

Pope Paul VI's main focus is dialogue. It takes up half of the document. The word is used 81 times. He proposes a series of four concentric circles:

- All humankind (ES, 97 - 106)
- All believers in God (ES, 107 – 108)
- All Christians (ES, 109 – 112)
- All Catholics (ES, 113 – 115)



And here is the nub – each circle is an arena for dialogue, giving us, in order, religious-secular dialogue, interreligious dialogue, ecumenical dialogue, and intra-faith dialogue. Startlingly, Fr Patrick proposed that with *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis had added a fifth circle, that of “all things”, and correspondingly, “ecological dialogue”.

Pope Paul VI's model of four concentric circles impacted the documents of Vatican II, especially *Lumen Gentium* pars. 14-16, and *Gaudium et Spes* par. 92, where the same schema is presented in reverse order.

Fr Patrick also argued that this schema is the foundation for Pope Francis' emphases on synodality and universal fraternity – all people walking one path together, listening to and learning from each other, supporting each other on the pilgrim path through life towards the fulness of Truth.

Re-engaging with this ground-breaking, inspirational, and prophetic document has been a great encouragement to us at the Centre. We invite others to do the same. The text of Fr Patrick's talk is available on the Columban website at bit.ly/3Y1Sjfl.

Dialogue During Times of War and Division

The courage to dialogue during times of conflict paramount to peace

Interreligious dialogue is not easy, particularly in times of war and division. Just showing up to dialogue can be a brave act. Here are some common objections to interreligious dialogue that individuals must courageously grapple with before entering a conversation on Israel and Gaza, or any topic where participants are deeply divided:

Objection 1: Dialogue is not possible on this topic

For those utterly convinced of the justice of their position on a given topic, engaging in dialogue is at best a waste of time, and at worst an act complicit with injustice. They are not interested in developing a mutual understanding of divergent viewpoints, but only in convincing others of the justice of their position. They want to debate, not dialogue.

I understand and respect this position. There are certain topics and certain times when debate may be the right mode of engagement for both individuals and for organisations. But the choice to engage in dialogue aimed at keeping strained interreligious relationships from breaking under the weight of war is a courageous choice that I hope is also respected.

Objection 2: Dialogue is not possible at this time

For some, the timing of a dialogue is not right. They have replied to interreligious dialogue invitations on Israel and Gaza in the past year by saying, “Not now. But maybe someday.” Most of these participants have had positive experience with dialogue in the past. Many are emotionally spent, and the capacity to take on more pain is too much for their heart and head to bear. Dialogue requires significant mental, emotional and spiritual reserves. When such people have the courage to dialogue, they can rejoin the conversation.

Objection 3: I don't know enough to dialogue

Many people worry that their knowledge is not adequate to enter into a dialogue on Israel and Gaza so will opt not to participate until they “know enough”. They worry that they need to engage in a kind of “debate-prep” before entering into dialogue. They are not alone in feeling inadequate. Please be brave and join a dialogue and add to the conversation.

Objection 4: Relations will be adversely affected

Many people don't want to talk about Israel and Gaza for fear of personal and professional consequences. Some are concerned that family, neighbours and friends will think less of them if they share a position

that their loved ones do not agree with and thereby changing their interpersonal dynamic, and possibly irreparably harming a treasured bond. Some have expressed concern that their professional life might be harmed if they take a position on the war, or even enter into a dialogue about this topic. Recognising both the real and perceived harms that may come with talking about Israel and Gaza, my organisation has prioritised creating small, face-to-face dialogue encounters with people who know one another in order to mitigate these harms, and create the conditions for authentic conversations.

Objection 5: This war is not religious/interreligious

While I don't claim that the situation in Israel and Gaza is exclusively (or even primarily) an interreligious matter, you cannot avoid the religious/interreligious elements that are part of the conflict. This conflict is complex, but religion is part of this mix. There is an important contribution that interreligious dialogues can make in building peace.

Pope Francis is right – interreligious dialogue is a risky endeavor. We need courage to listen and to speak. Silence around this war advances neither justice, nor peace. Avoiding conversations with friends, colleagues or neighbours will not solve conflict, nor will it slow the spread of antisemitism and Islamophobia. We must be willing to say hard things – and importantly, to hear hard things – from neighbours, colleagues, family and friends. We must have courage to dialogue.

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3UCJWGO.



Sant'Egidio Meeting for Peace, Paris

Movements fostering interreligious dialogue gather to discuss paths to peace

The [Sant'Egidio](#) and [Focolare](#) movements continue to play vital roles in fostering dialogue and building bridges between different religious communities, demonstrating that faith-based action can contribute to peace in a fractured world.

The Sant'Egidio Meeting for Peace, held in Paris on 22-24 September 2024, brought together global leaders, scholars, and religious figures to discuss paths towards peaceful coexistence. Central to this year's discussions was the relationship between interreligious dialogue and global challenges, with particular emphasis on Asia, explored in Forum 9, "The Great Asia: A Challenge for Religions".

Rita Moussalem and Antonio Salimbeni represented the Focolare Movement at the Meeting. Antonio shares his impressions:

I was deeply impressed by the broad participation of representatives from different religions and spiritual traditions from all over the world, accompanied by numerous representatives of various Churches. This generated a rich communion of ideas, perspectives and experiences on the theme of peace, approached from different angles and explored through multiple themes. This exchange concretely demonstrated what was reiterated several times during the conference: diversity, and therefore the other, is a precious resource, not a threat.

We discussed fraternity and a humanism for the future. I would like to underline the importance of events like this, which offer society a concrete testimony of the possibility and urgency of dialogue with a new language, a language that affirms peace as the fruit of recognising the other as a brother or sister, members of the same human family.

In Forum 9, the diversity of the various religious expressions emerged, united by a way of communicating typical of Asian culture, more oriented towards the concrete challenges of the present: from humanitarian crises to the environmental emergency, from widespread social inequalities to the increase in loneliness. The interventions highlighted the need not only for practical responses, but also for a new level of harmonisation between religions. In this sense, Asia, with its



extraordinary religious plurality, is configured as a true laboratory of interreligious dialogue. A dialogue not between religions, but between people of different faiths, based on mutual listening, empathy and respect for differences.

The Pope's message was the perfect synthesis of what emerged in the forums. Although they addressed different issues, the yearning for peace was shared by all those present.

His words deeply touched me: '... Men and women of different cultures and faiths, you have experienced the strength and beauty of universal brotherhood. This is the vision that the world needs today. I urge you to continue: be artisans of peace. If many continue to wage war, we can all work for peace.' I believe that many of us returned from the conference with a renewed drive to do more for peace, to become active builders of that brotherhood that we dream of, asking ourselves if we are really doing enough'.

The Focolare Movement, founded by Chiara Lubich, shares many common values with the Sant'Egidio community, including a commitment to unity, dialogue, and peace. Both movements have long believed in the power of interreligious dialogue to transform societies, advocating for peaceful coexistence between people of different faiths. This shared vision was underscored during the Paris meeting, as speakers from various faiths expressed the need for collaborative action in the face of global conflicts. The Paris meeting concluded with a renewed commitment to peacebuilding, with participants acknowledging that while much has been achieved, much more work remains.

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3NVw8TM.

Coming Events

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

December 2024

- 01** First Sunday of Advent (Christian)
- 08** Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Catholic Christian)
- 20** International Human Solidarity Day, un.org/en/observances/human-solidarity-day
- 25** Christmas (Birth of Jesus Christ) (Western Christian)

January 2025

- 01** The Solemnity of Mary, Holy Mother of God (Catholic Christian)
- 06** Epiphany of the Lord (Christian)
- 07** Christmas (Birth of Jesus Christ) (Orthodox Christian)
- 26** *Al-Isra' w'al-Miraj* – The Night Journey and Ascent (of Prophet Muhammad) (Islam)

February 2025

- 01-07** World Interfaith Harmony Week, worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com
- 04** UN International Day of Human Fraternity, un.org/en/observances/human-fraternity
- 13** *Lailat al-Bara'ah* (Night of Forgiveness) (Islam)
- 27** Ramadan begins (tbc) (Islam)

March 2025

- 03** Great Lent Begins (Orthodox Christian)
- 05** Ash Wednesday, Lenten fast begins (Western Christian)
- 08** International Women's Day, internationalwomensday.com
- 19** Bridge Day, thesydneystatement.org.au
- 21** Harmony Day, harmony.gov.au
- 25** Feast of the Annunciation (Christian)
- 29** *Eid al-Fitr* – The feast marking the end of Ramadan (tbc) (Islam)



Bridges

Building relationships between Christians and Muslims

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