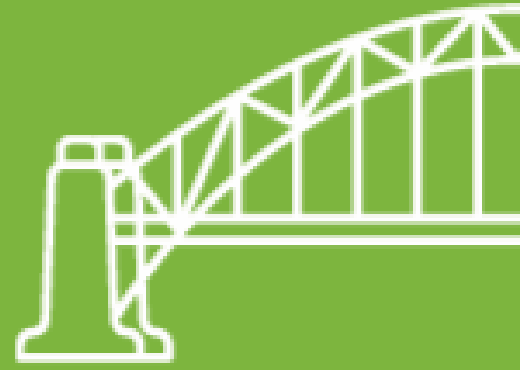


Bridges

Building relationships between Christians and Muslims



No. 101 December 2023

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**Columban Centre for
Christian-Muslim Relations**
c/o Bishop Bede Heather Centre
1-5 Marion St
BLACKTOWN NSW 2148
E: info.cccmr@columban.org.au
P: (02) 9672 3616
www.columban.org.au



/ChristianMuslimRelations
/AbrahamConference
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/YouthPoWR
/WesternSydneyWomens
InterfaithInitiative



/YouthPoWR
/TheSydneyStatement



From the Editor

On 7 October 2023, Hamas terrorists attacked and killed more than 1,400 innocent Israeli citizens – the most Jews killed in a single day since the Holocaust – and took more than 240 hostages. Victims included women, children, and infants.

Subsequently, the IDF cut off water, food, electricity, and fuel from Gaza, ordered the evacuation of more than 1 million people from their homes, and bombed targets relentlessly, resulting in the deaths of more than 11,000 people, nearly half of them children. Christians and people of other faiths are also victims of the conflict.

Jews and Muslims in Israel and Palestine, in Australia, and around the world – whose family, friends, relatives, and co-religionists are caught up in the unfolding tragedy – have been traumatised by the unprecedented violence. They protest the wrongs committed and demand the rights of their faith communities. We join with them in these just demands, and reject both antisemitism and islamophobia, which have no place in genuine civic or religious society.

We know that war will not achieve peace, but only sow the seeds for

yet another round in the never-ending spiral of violence. We know that there must be dialogue, encounter, and a negotiated political settlement.

In the name of our common humanity, we reject all partisanship which allies with one side against the other; we choose solidarity with all victims on both sides.

In the name of compassion, we call for the immediate release of the hostages, an end to the violence, and the provision of humanitarian relief to all who are suffering so horrendously.

In the name of justice and a lasting peace, we ask that the underlying issues of occupation and dispossession be addressed with a view to forging a just resolution which respects the legitimate demands of both Israelis and Palestinians, where everyone may not get everything they want, but everyone will get everything they need.

In our helplessness in the face of the seeming intractability of the forces arrayed against each other for so many decades, we implore God to bring about a change of heart so that all the children of Abraham – Jew, Muslim, and Christian – may live together in peace as sisters and brothers in the land we dare to call “Holy”.

REV DR PATRICK MCINERNEY



Synod Diocese of Parramatta

On 13-15 October 2023, **Fr Patrick McNerney** participated in the Synod Assembly. It was very well prepared. Three months of consultations produced more than 1,000 individual and group submissions (including four from the Centre), representing 5,000 people, synthesised into a 65-page [Working Document](#). There were six themes and 25 proposed resolutions. Table groups of seven engaged with the topics and with each other through a very disciplined process of “spiritual conversations”. It was a wonderful experience

of listening, prayer, and discerning. The final resolution reads: “To continue to promote interfaith and ecumenical dialogue and shared endeavours among our parishes, schools, agencies and ministries.”

House of Sakinah Fundraiser

On 20 August 2023, **Kim Chong** attended a fundraiser for the House of Sakinah, a Muslim-led social service in Western Sydney. The staff of the House of Sakinah, many of whom are volunteers, work tirelessly to provide crisis accommodation, food packages, school breakfast programs, service referrals and more for women and children fleeing domestic violence and homelessness, no matter their race or religion. House of Sakinah does not receive government funding so its staff hosts an annual event to raise much-needed funds to continue their work. This year, our Centre extended the invitation from House of Sakinah staff to the members of the Interfaith Commission Diocese of Parramatta, who gladly accepted. In sponsoring its interfaith commission members to attend, the Diocese of Parramatta expressed official support and recognition of the contribution these Muslim women make to society through their service. As people of faith, we share similar values and a drive for social justice, the outcomes of which are better achieved when we come together.



Nostra Aetate Conversation Webinar Series

During Sept-Oct 2023, Yarra Theological Union and Garratt Publishing presented a series of webinars on the four religions named in *Nostra Aetate*, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam. The series was designed as Professional Development for teachers but proved valuable for anyone interested in interfaith relations. Last year, four Christian scholars presented topics on each of these religions. This year, on the principle that believers speak for themselves rather than be spoken about, the scholars interviewed members of these religions. On 9 October, **Rev Dr Patrick McNerney** interviewed a Muslim scholar, Associate Professor Zuleyha Keskin. Since he and Zuleyha have known each other for 20 years, it was a very friendly conversation, re-visiting some of the interfaith events of their shared history, enabling Zuleyha to give personal witness to her faith and how it motivates her to engage in interfaith relations. All four interviews in the series were highly appreciated by all the participants.

Together in Peace

On 21 September 2023, the UN International Day for Peace, the Interfaith Commission Diocese of Parramatta and the Centre collaborated in “Walking Together in Peace”. The Centre arranged Hindu, Muslim, and Baha’i speakers. The members of the Commission planned, promoted, and hosted the event. The three guest speakers each became a “Book” in a “Human Library” of the World’s Religions. The participants formed three groups and spent 15 minutes with each “Book”, listening to their stories and asking questions. It was a thoroughly enjoyable and engaging interfaith experience for all. We hope that other similar events are organised in parishes and deaneries to promote knowledge of other faiths.



Interfaith Talks in Suva

Priscilla Magdalin, the Columban IRD Coordinator in Fiji, arranged two talks for **Fr Patrick McInerney** during his August visit to Suva for the Columban Regional Council Meeting. He gave a talk on interreligious dialogue to about 100 trainee teachers at Corpus Christi College. Not having heard about this topic before, they were an attentive audience. Two days later, he gave the keynote address, “Uniting for Peace”, at Toorak Jami' Mosque. Then Hindu, Methodist, Muslim, Anglican, and Catholic leaders shared a prayer for peace and a brief reflection. The event concluded with all getting to know one another over a meal. About 50 religious leaders and representatives attended.

Professional Development Day with Calisha Bennett

On 7 October 2023, CCCMR held its second Professional Development Day for the year. As per the previous Professional Development Day, we invited the members of the Interfaith Commission Diocese of Parramatta to join us. We also extended the invitation to the chancery staff of the Parramatta Diocese as an opportunity for formation in interfaith dialogue. Our speaker was Australian-born Muslim woman Calisha Bennett. Calisha is a community educator who works for interfaith organisation [Together for Humanity](#). She is also the founder of [Grounded](#), which specialises in educating and supporting Muslims, especially women, who are struggling with their faith, identity, and confidence. Calisha was an engaging speaker, well-versed in her faith tradition and practice, and open, knowledgeable, and confident in answering any question posed by the attendees.



Vale Jeremy Jones AM

The staff of the Centre express sincere condolences to the family and friends of Jeremy Jones AM who died on 6 September 2023 after an extended illness. Jeremy was a committed Jewish believer and a ubiquitous interfaith advocate. He served the Jewish community with distinction. He was a friend, brother, and mentor to many of us in interfaith. He was always welcoming, informed, insightful, and gracious, with a quirky sense of humour. He contributed on the local, state, national, and international levels. He leaves a great legacy and an enormous gap in the faith and interfaith scene. May his memory be a blessing. *For tributes see:* bit.ly/40sSDoz, bit.ly/3Qm5Wmd, bit.ly/49jt1i7, bit.ly/3sklUEq.



Names Matter

The Indonesian government has announced that from 2024 it will stop using the Muslim Arabic term for Jesus Christ, *Isa al-Masih*, but will use the Bahasa term, *Yesus Kristus*. This changes the official names of three national holidays, the Death of *Isa al-Masih* (Good Friday), the Ascension of *Isa al-Masih*, and the Birth of *Isa al-Masih* (Christmas). Indonesian Christians use *Yesus Kristus* in their worship and everyday life. Numbering 29 million and making up 10% of the population, they are excited about the change, as they feel the 87% Muslim majority is showing respect by using the term that Christians use. The different names suggest the different understandings of

the role and identity of Jesus Christ in Islam and in Christianity. The change reflects two important interfaith principles: (1) allow people to speak for themselves rather than be spoken for; and (2), when speaking about others, do so in ways that those others would recognise and accept as a true and accurate representation. *Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3uOzYEC and bit.ly/3MylbY3.*

Multifaith Leaders Address Climate Change in Africa

During African Climate Week, 4-8 September 2023, multifaith leaders issued a joint statement that draws on *Laudato si'*, the Encyclical letter by Pope Francis "on care for our common home". *Statement of Faith*, led by the Laudato si' Movement in partnership with various multifaith organisations such as Green Faith was issued at the African Climate Summit in Nairobi, Kenya.

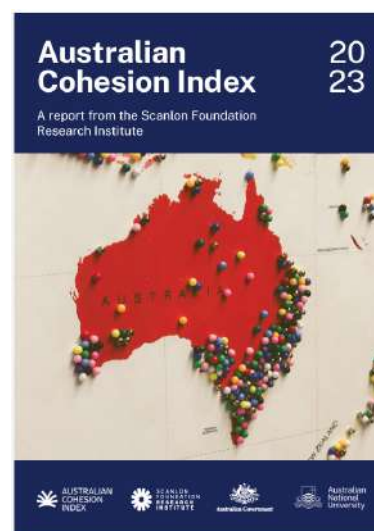


Addressing the Kenyan government, the African Union, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the statement calls on leaders to deliver six specific actions: 1) a global financial architecture that supports those at risk of climate change; 2) a "loss and damage fund" that calls on global financial institutions and rich countries to provide relief to Global South countries impacted by high greenhouse gas emissions; 3) adopt a plan of action that supports growth in green economies and employment of youth in said economies; 4) adopt and implement plans that help African communities adapt to climate change; 5) phase out fossil fuel and support renewable energy; 6) promote food security and sovereignty.

View the statement at bit.ly/45Lzy1S. *Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/470ljpW.*

Latest Report on Social Cohesion in Australia

The Scanlon Foundation Research Institute has released its 2023 report on social cohesion in Australia. Its findings build on national surveys undertaken since 2007. This report provides an overview in five core domains of social cohesion: Trust in Society, Belonging and Engagement, Economics and Material Wellbeing, and Australia's Health and Personal Wellbeing. Results show eight-in-ten Australian adults said they have at least two close friends from different religious, ethnic or national backgrounds from their own. One-in-three adults from non-English speaking backgrounds reported experiencing discrimination on the basis of their skin colour, ethnic origin or religion in the previous 12 months. People who have experienced recent discrimination were found to have a weaker sense of belonging, worth and social inclusion. Encouragingly, prejudicial attitudes appear to have become less common in recent years. Among the examples, the proportion of adults with negative attitudes to Muslims declined from 40 per cent to 29 per cent. *View the report at bit.ly/3Qa3JKn.*





Iranian Human Rights Activist Awarded Nobel

Prominent Iranian women's rights advocate Narges Mohammadi (left) has won the 2023 Nobel Peace Prize for her long fight against the oppression of women in Iran. Mohammadi is serving multiple prison sentences in Evin prison in Tehran on charges which include spreading propaganda against the state. She was named by the Norwegian Nobel Committee for "her fight against the oppression of women in Iran and her fight to promote human rights and freedom for all". In a statement

to the *New York Times*, Mohammadi said she would never stop striving for democracy and equality even if it meant staying in prison. "I will continue to fight against the relentless discrimination, tyranny and gender-based oppression by the oppressive religious government until the liberation of women," she said. Her husband and children have lived in exile in France since her imprisonment in 2015. Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/494cU7V and bit.ly/3S8Yptz.

Religious Vilification Bill Passes NSW Parliament

In August 2023, NSW Parliament passed legislation making it illegal to publicly ridicule someone due to their religious beliefs. The amendment to the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 makes it unlawful to, "by a public act, incite hatred towards, serious contempt for, or severe ridicule of, a person or group of persons, because of their religious belief, affiliation or activity". A "public act" includes any form of communication to the public, verbal and non-verbal. NSW Attorney General Michael Daley (pictured), who pushed for the new laws to be passed, said vilification on the



grounds of a person's religion was completely unacceptable in our community. A wide range of stakeholders were consulted on the amendment, including faith-based organisations, community groups, multicultural associations, legal advocates and NSW Government agencies. The changes bring religious protections in line with existing provisions making vilification unlawful on the grounds of race, homosexuality, transgender status and HIV/AIDS status. People who do not have a religious belief or affiliation or do not engage in religious activity are also protected under the new law.

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/46LVfQU and bit.ly/3tQ6VDL.



LGBTQI+ and Islam

LGBTQ+ issues are a point of controversy between liberals and conservatives in every society, especially in religious circles. This controversy is playing out in some cities in the USA, already highly polarised over political issues, where conservative Muslims object to their children attending sexual education which they claim is contrary to Islamic teaching. Two-hundred Muslim scholars issued a statement, [*Navigating Differences: Clarifying Sexual and Gender Ethics in Islam*](#), a traditional account of Muslim teaching on sexuality and gender. Other Muslims opposed the statement on the grounds of tolerance, that if Muslims want others to respect the Islamic faith, then Muslims must respect the mores of others. LGBTQ+ issues are also being raised in the UK, though in a less

confrontational manner, where Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND) published a discussion guide, [*Finding a Voice: A Guide for Muslim Parents & Educators*](#), a traditional account of Muslim moral teaching on sex, marriage, and family. Catholics too raised LGBTQ+ issues in the Australian Plenary Council and internationally in the Synod of Bishops. The way forward is not to judge, but to listen, to respect, to understand, to show compassion, and to trust that God will help us find a way to negotiate these complex intimately personal and social issues in truth, love, mercy, and justice. For USA see: bit.ly/3FGLq16 and bit.ly/3QItkLX.

Interfaith Code of Conduct, Nigeria

Christian and Muslim leaders co-develop document for peace and unity

Christian and Muslim leaders in Nigeria have jointly developed a code of conduct for promoting religious harmony among people of different faiths. Interfaith Dialogue for Peace Forum (IDPF) facilitated the project, in consultation with the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution and the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAIICID).

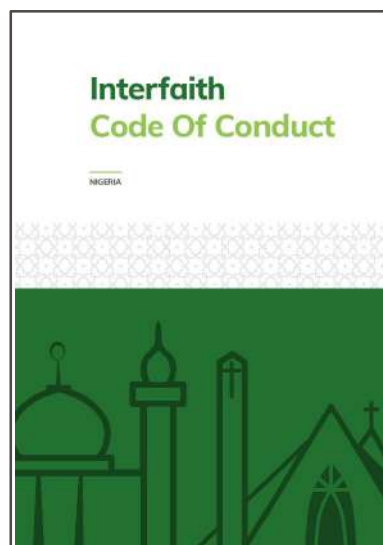
The code aims “to serve as a basis of cooperation between religious leaders and members of the interfaith community in Nigeria to: dispel stereotypes, and ethnic and religious profiling; to prevent, mitigate and resolve violence and conflict; and to improve interfaith relations, understanding, and enable unity and peaceful co-existence”.

The code lists 10 core values (abbreviated below), each of which is supported by Biblical and Quranic quotes:

1. **Mutual Love and Respect:** Religious leaders and members of the interfaith community should work together to build a society rooted in mutually treasured values. Society can only be built on a solid foundation of love, sincerity and mutual respect for each other’s faiths and differences. [...]
2. **Values:** Religious leaders and members of the interfaith community have a responsibility to act and make decisions based on their values. Values are intrinsic concepts and can be defined as the basis by which an individual or group of people select the criterion of right or wrong. [...]
3. **Human Rights and Dignity:** Religious leaders and members of the interfaith community should be sensitive to the moral values, religions, customs, traditions and cultures of others, especially as there is more than one religious group. The family is the fundamental natural group unit of society promoting human rights and human dignity and, as such, every member of the interfaith community should see all people as equals. [...]
4. **Hate Speech and Blasphemy:** Religious leaders and members of the interfaith community shall, collectively and individually, restrain themselves and their members from using any form of hate speech and blasphemous comments, utterances, and insinuations against people of other faiths.
5. **Conflict Resolution:** Religious leaders should be equipped with conflict resolution skills to address

and prevent the factors that influence violent interreligious tensions in their communities. They should deliberate and harmonise the best, most viable and appropriate conflict resolution practices for conflict prevention and mitigation. [...]

6. **Justice:** Religious leaders and members of the interfaith community should at all times work for justice and equity, for without these there can be no peace.
7. **Ethical Standards:** Religious leaders and members of the interfaith community should at all times act with honesty and uphold the highest ethical standards, whether in public or in private affairs, so that the ethics of and public confidence in the interfaith community are preserved, and enhanced.
8. **Truthfulness and Sincerity:** Religious leaders and members of the interfaith community should be honest and truthful in their dealings with donors, project beneficiaries, staff, partner organizations, government agencies, and the public in general, and should respect the laws of any jurisdiction in which they are found. [...]
9. **Legality:** Religious leaders and members of the interfaith community should not engage in activities that are unlawful under the laws of the nation in which they organise or work, and must be strongly opposed to, and not be a partner to, any form of illegality. [...]
10. **Transparency and Accountability:** Religious leaders and members of the interfaith community should strive for openness and honesty. They should be transparent in all of their dealings, be prudent in the management of assets and resources and be open and accountable in their actions.



For the full text of the 20-page Interfaith Code of Conduct, Nigeria see: bit.ly/45XDZH5. For commentaries see: bit.ly/47jDsJE, bit.ly/3MvCVmR, bit.ly/3Mvz0qm and bit.ly/3Mqgek0.

Mob Violence in Pakistan is Idolatry

Pakistan Christians attacked over blasphemy allegations by Rev Dr Patrick McLnerney

Twenty-four churches were torched, hundreds of bibles and hymnals burned, and many homes looted and damaged by a rampaging mob. More than 600 Christian families were affected. This devastation took place on 16 August 2023 in Jaranwala in the Faisalabad District of Pakistan.

The burning of the Holy Qur'an in Sweden had agitated Muslims everywhere. A rumour spread that two local Christians had desecrated the Holy Qur'an, allegations which the accused deny. Announcements over mosque loudspeakers spread the rumour. Local Muslim leaders from the hard-line Tehreek-e-Labaik movement, which has led protests against Qur'an burnings in Sweden and Denmark, incited Muslims to take action. Enraged Muslims gathered. Facing imminent threat, the Christians fled. The mob attacked churches and set them on fire. They ransacked, looted, and destroyed homes. The police were slow to intervene. Eventually, Rangers were brought in to quell the mob. It was the most destructive communal violence in recent Pakistani history. Fortunately, this time, no lives were lost. Fearful to return home, some Christians spent the night in the fields without food, shelter, or water. Many of those who did return, afraid their damaged homes might collapse, spent the night in the open.

Bishops, priests, and other Christian ministers comforted those who had lost homes and property. Joint interfaith delegations of Muslim and Christian clerics from other cities visited to show solidarity with the Christian victims. Muslim Imams assured that such anti-Christian violence was contrary to Islam and asked forgiveness. More than 160 rioters were arrested. The government promised to rebuild damaged churches and compensation of 2 million rupees (AU\$10,690) for every Christian home destroyed.

There are about 2.6 million Christians in Pakistan, 1.27% of the total population, the second-largest minority group after Hindus. Although religious freedom is assured, social exclusion and economic disparity are common. Religious extremism in recent years has led to an increase in discrimination, persecution, and outright violence. The use, abuse, and misuse of the blasphemy laws, which carries the death penalty for a convicted person, has exacerbated tensions. The mob violence in Jaranwala is just one of many such incidents in recent years.



The Full Gospel Assemblies church in Jaranwala after arson attack.

Although done under a Muslim pretext, instigated by Muslim leaders, propagated by Muslims using mosque loudspeakers, and carried out by a Muslim mob, this was not a 'Muslim' act. As the Imams had explained, anti-Christian discrimination is contrary to the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the example of the Prophet.

I go one step further. I believe that such violent discrimination, despite being carried out with fervent zeal 'in the name of God' and contrary to this 'religious' guise, is in fact an act of idolatry. The Holy Qur'an attests that God is Almighty, Omnipotent, All Powerful. A 'god' whose honour needs human protection or defence is not God, but a figment of human imagination. It is an idol, and like any false god, demands human sacrifice, in this instance, the suffering inflicted on the Jaranwala Christians.

The Christian Gospel is even more explicit. In the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Almighty, All Powerful, Omnipotent God does not defend God's own Son, but manifests the infinite vulnerability of infinite love. God neither needs nor wants our protection or defence. By kenotic, self-sacrificing defencelessness, by utter divine helplessness, God exposes all violence as idolatry and draws us into God's infinite love. May Christians, Muslims, Jews, believers of all religions, and all people of good will, be drawn into the divine mercy and show compassion to one another at all times and in all circumstances.

For media reports: bit.ly/3MLqyn4, bit.ly/46cavFC, bit.ly/3uq44UG.

For Muslim solidarity: bit.ly/49GOtOO, bit.ly/40K5eUK.

Pope Francis Visits Mongolia

Tiny Catholic community receives pope and shares in interfaith message

In early September, Pope Francis visited Mongolia, his 43rd international journey in the 10 years since his election as successor of St Peter. Living up to his reputation as the “pope of the peripheries”, Mongolia’s Catholic community is among the Church’s smallest groups, with around 1,450 Catholics out of a mostly Buddhist population of 3.3 million.

“Often in his words, we hear expressions like ‘go to the outskirts, the peripheries, let us be an outgoing church,’” said Consolata Missionary Fr Ernesto Viscardi, who has served in Mongolia since 2004. “And this is what he practices himself in his many apostolic journeys, especially to those places of major conflicts and tensions. Why then not go to the tiniest, and, by numbers, maybe least significant of the Catholic communities?”

Pope Francis reflected briefly on the origins of this trip. “The idea to visit Mongolia came to me whilst thinking about the small Catholic community,” he said. “I make these trips to visit Catholic communities and also to enter into dialogue with the history and culture of the people, and with the mysticism of a people.”

During his stay in Mongolia’s capital of Ulaanbaatar, the pope met with the country’s political and civil authorities, interfaith leaders, the country’s priests and religious men and women – some 75 missionaries – and celebrated Mass in an indoor hockey arena for the country’s small Catholic population, as well as those traveling from nearby Asian countries.

As with similar papal trips, this visit is meant to both encourage the local Catholic community while also bolstering interfaith relations in a nation where all religions are regaining their footing following the Communist era, which ended in the early 1990s. After breaking from Soviet rule in 1990, Mongolia formed its own constitution in 1992, guaranteeing freedom of religion.

Central to his visit was an ecumenical and interreligious meeting with representatives of all 10 religions in Mongolia – Buddhism (with which 90 per cent of the population identifies), Islam, Shamanism, Judaism and the various Christian denominations, including the Russian Orthodox Church.



Pope Francis welcomed in the Mongolian capital of Ulaanbaatar.

Addressing the representatives and an audience in the hundreds at Ulaanbaatar’s Hun Theater, Pope Francis’s message insisted that hope is possible and that harmony among religions has the power to bear great fruit. He also warned against distortions of religion, in ways that cause scandal, violence, or oppression.

He highlighted that interreligious dialogue is “not antithetical to proclamation” but helps religious traditions to understand one another.

“With humility and in the spirit of service [...] the Church offers the treasure she has received to every person and culture, in a spirit of openness and in respectful consideration of what the other religious traditions have to offer,” Pope Francis said in his speech.

To drive home this openness, Pope Francis twice cited the *Dhammapada*, the most widely-read Buddhist text, which is a collection of sayings of the Buddha, stating, “‘The fragrance of flowers spreads only in the direction of the wind, the fragrance of those who live according to virtue spreads in all directions’. [...]

“Religious traditions, for all their distinctiveness and diversity, have impressive potential for the benefit of society as a whole,” he added.

Mongolia is the 61st country the pope has visited. He has bypassed many major world capitals in favor of visiting places where Catholics are few in number, such as [Kazakhstan](#), [Bahrain](#) and the [United Arab Emirates](#).

Read the pope’s address at the interfaith meeting at bit.ly/47fjPcu. Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/47dnbNn and bit.ly/3QsvvIM.

Parliament of the World's Religions Back in Home City

Defending freedom and human rights top of the agenda at conference

The Parliament of the World's Religions (PoWR) returned to Chicago on 14-18 August 2023 to celebrate its 130th anniversary. It was here in 1893 at the Chicago World's Fair that the organisation began. This year's interfaith event brought together more than 8,000 people from 95 countries, representing more than 200 religions and spiritualities.

The event has continued its mission of bringing together leaders and followers of diverse religious faiths to work together toward a common goal as reflected in this year's theme: "A Call to Conscience: Defending Freedom and Human Rights". Its focus was on combating authoritarianism around the world. The agenda also included discussions on climate change, human rights, food insecurity, racism and women's rights.

Significant to the year's gathering was the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Parliament's foundational document, [*Towards A Global Ethic*](#).

"It was impressive to see how, thirty years on, the Parliament's 1993 document [...] generated a lot of buzz during this year's convening. [...] They appreciated how this clear statement can serve as a conversation-starter and help people connect, whether they come from different religions or the same religion, or are not religious at all," said Dr Myriam Renaud, principal investigator and director of the Global Ethic Project.

In response to the event, Rev HPs Phyllis Curott, this year's PoWR program chair, said it was "a week of recognition of the threats facing our communities and the world".

"Here is the truth we must all confront and change: despots are misappropriating religions to justify the unjustifiable; tyrants proclaim themselves saviours, posturing with religious symbols and exploiting language to affirm their power; and, tragically, there are religious leaders who stand beside them, and religious

communities who cheer them. As people of faith and spirit we have a singular responsibility," Rev HPs Curott said.

She emphasised that the call to conscience is not just a public service announcement, but a flashing emergency light affirming to the world that faith and spiritual communities are vital partners and first responders in the fight for justice, freedom, a healthy environment, human rights, and for democracy, as outlined in PoWR's vision.

The Parliament's Vision

- Religious and spiritual communities live in harmony and contribute to a better world through their wealth of wisdom and compassion.
- Religious and cultural fears and hatreds are replaced by understanding and respect.
- People everywhere are getting to know and care about their neighbours.
- The richness of human and religious diversity is woven into the fabric of community, civil, societal and global life.
- The world's powerful and influential institutions move beyond narrow self-interest to realise the common good.
- The Earth and all life are cherished, protected, healed, restored. All people commit to living out their highest values and aspirations.

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/40sqy7C and bit.ly/3tWO6P1.



Abrahamic Religions Sign for Protection of Elderly

Document insists assisting older people is a matter of justice, not just mercy

On 28 August 2023, the *Declaration of the Abrahamic Religions: Elderly persons in contemporary society and their protection* was signed under the patronage of the [Pontifical Academy for Life](#), represented by its president, Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, at the headquarters of the Catholic University of Argentina in Buenos Aires.

The Declaration was formalised by representatives of the Abrahamic faiths – Prof Fr Don Rubén Revello, Rabbi Prof Fernando Fishel Szlajen, and Sheikh Prof Abdala Cerrilla.

Recalling Pope Frances’ [Catechesis on Old Age](#) and the commitment shown by the Pontifical Academy for Life to the implementation of palliative care, Prof Fr Rubén Revello said, “We intend to raise awareness particularly among those who make public policy decisions, and create opinion in favour of respecting and protecting the weakest and most fragile in society.”

Rabbi Prof Szlajen highlighted how being united under the common intent to protect the elderly shows that “compassion and justice transcend differences and have a positive impact on society”.

Sheikh Prof Abdala Cerrilla underlined the respect that people professing the Islamic faith have of the elderly, recalling a passage from the Qur'an: "Your Lord has ordained that they worship Him alone and honor their parents. If one or both of them reach old age, do not despise them, but speak kind words to them" (17:23).

Change the paradigms

The increasing aging of the world population could be seen as an opportunity for older people to “contribute significantly to social or community volunteering, education, and intergenerational knowledge transfer, among other activities that have not yet been properly sized in their positive potential for society”, the Declaration notes.

By addressing the issue from a holistic and humanitarian perspective, the document read, “We may be facing an unbeatable opportunity to change the paradigm of conceiving the elderly as a negation and superfluous



stage of life,” transitioning to a phase “worthy of respect, care and participation, recognising the value and experience of the elderly, providing them with the necessary support and building a more inclusive and supportive society for all ages and for the collective benefit”.

This would be possible by dignifying the elderly, as “the physical wear and tear of the passage of time is compensated” by their “acquired wisdom”, which makes them “teachers of life”.

Assisting and integrating

The joint statement stressed the importance of assisting older people not merely out of “mercy and kindness” but, most importantly, “out of justice”.

Integration also plays a crucial role, as “Abrahamic cultures conceive old age as a stage of development and not a period of life condemned to social marginalisation”.

“Our society looks down on old age, linking it with the past and the obsolete, but old age is the future for all of us. To honour the elderly today is to prepare the future dignity with which we aspire to be treated,” the document states.

Archbishop Paglia focused on the importance of religions to “come together, based on their tradition and spiritual heritage, to raise awareness in civil society on the issues of protection and respect for the elderly”.

Read the Declaration at bit.ly/3MoGlm4.

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3QnGkW7.

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 2023

- 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 2024

- 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)

February 2024

- 01-07** World Interfaith Harmony Week, worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com
- 04** UN International Day of Human Fraternity, un.org/en/observances/human-fraternity
- 07** *Al-Isra' w'al-Miraj* – The Night Journey and Ascent (of Prophet Muhammad) (Islam)
- 14** Ash Wednesday, Lenten fast begins (Western Christian)
- 25** *Lailat al-Bara'ah* (Night of Forgiveness) (Islam)

March 2024

- 08** International Women's Day, internationalwomensday.com
- 11** First day of Ramadan (tbc) (Islam)
- 18** Great Lent Begins (Orthodox Christian)
- 19** Bridge Day, thesydneystatement.org.au
- 21** Harmony Day, harmony.gov.au
- 25** Feast of the Annunciation (Catholic Christian)
- 29** Good Friday (Crucifixion of Jesus Christ) (Western Christian)
- 31** Easter Sunday (Resurrection of Jesus Christ) (Western Christian)



Help us spread the news about the Centre and *Bridges* by sending us the names and addresses of all those who may be interested in subscribing to a hard copy (please complete the form), or invite them to subscribe directly online at columban.org.au/media-and-publications/newsletters-and-bulletins/bridges/

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www.thesydneystatement.org.au

The screenshot shows the 'Gathering' website with a blue header and a list of events. The events are listed in a table-like format with columns for the event name, date, and location. The events include 'Gathering 2019', 'Gathering 2020', 'Gathering 2021', 'Gathering 2022', 'Gathering 2023', 'Gathering 2024', 'Gathering 2025', 'Gathering 2026', 'Gathering 2027', 'Gathering 2028', 'Gathering 2029', 'Gathering 2030', 'Gathering 2031', 'Gathering 2032', 'Gathering 2033', 'Gathering 2034', 'Gathering 2035', 'Gathering 2036', 'Gathering 2037', 'Gathering 2038', 'Gathering 2039', 'Gathering 2040', 'Gathering 2041', 'Gathering 2042', 'Gathering 2043', 'Gathering 2044', 'Gathering 2045', 'Gathering 2046', 'Gathering 2047', 'Gathering 2048', 'Gathering 2049', 'Gathering 2050', 'Gathering 2051', 'Gathering 2052', 'Gathering 2053', 'Gathering 2054', 'Gathering 2055', 'Gathering 2056', 'Gathering 2057', 'Gathering 2058', 'Gathering 2059', 'Gathering 2060', 'Gathering 2061', 'Gathering 2062', 'Gathering 2063', 'Gathering 2064', 'Gathering 2065', 'Gathering 2066', 'Gathering 2067', 'Gathering 2068', 'Gathering 2069', 'Gathering 2070', 'Gathering 2071', 'Gathering 2072', 'Gathering 2073', 'Gathering 2074', 'Gathering 2075', 'Gathering 2076', 'Gathering 2077', 'Gathering 2078', 'Gathering 2079', 'Gathering 2080', 'Gathering 2081', 'Gathering 2082', 'Gathering 2083', 'Gathering 2084', 'Gathering 2085', 'Gathering 2086', 'Gathering 2087', 'Gathering 2088', 'Gathering 2089', 'Gathering 2090', 'Gathering 2091', 'Gathering 2092', 'Gathering 2093', 'Gathering 2094', 'Gathering 2095', 'Gathering 2096', 'Gathering 2097', 'Gathering 2098', 'Gathering 2099', 'Gathering 2100'.

The screenshot shows the top portion of the University of Michigan's website. The header is dark blue with the university's name in white. Below the header, the page is divided into three columns. The first column, 'Our History', discusses the university's founding. The second column, 'Our Mission', outlines the university's commitment to research, teaching, and service. The third column, 'Our Values', lists values such as integrity, respect, and excellence. At the bottom, a navigation bar contains links to 'Home', 'About Us', 'Academics', 'Admissions', 'Research', and 'Contact Us'.

SUITABLE for teachers, pastoral workers and all involved in community relations, especially between believers from different religions/faiths.



THE GOLDEN RULE

- 1. **Om**: "The Golden Rule is the basis of all religions." - *Om*
- 2. **Wheel of Dharma**: "The Golden Rule is the basis of all religions." - *Wheel of Dharma*
- 3. **Yin-Yang**: "The Golden Rule is the basis of all religions." - *Yin-Yang*
- 4. **Khanda**: "The Golden Rule is the basis of all religions." - *Khanda*
- 5. **Cross**: "The Golden Rule is the basis of all religions." - *Cross*
- 6. **Wheel of the Dharma**: "The Golden Rule is the basis of all religions." - *Wheel of the Dharma*
- 7. **Star of David**: "The Golden Rule is the basis of all religions." - *Star of David*
- 8. **Crescent and Star**: "The Golden Rule is the basis of all religions." - *Crescent and Star*
- 9. **Om**: "The Golden Rule is the basis of all religions." - *Om*
- 10. **Wheel of Dharma**: "The Golden Rule is the basis of all religions." - *Wheel of Dharma*
- 11. **Yin-Yang**: "The Golden Rule is the basis of all religions." - *Yin-Yang*
- 12. **Khanda**: "The Golden Rule is the basis of all religions." - *Khanda*

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December 2023