



## *Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs*

Secretariat for Evangelization

Archdiocese of Philadelphia

### Newsletter for Parish Ecumenical Representatives

November, 2006

Just days after I wrote the message in the last newsletter, Pope Benedict XVI made his now famous address at the University of Regensburg, in which he quoted a debate between a Byzantine emperor and a Persian Muslim. The speech by the Holy Father was an academic speech in an academic setting that dealt with the relationship between faith and reason. That address is the reason I write once again concerning Catholic-Muslim relations. I am grateful to the *Catholic Standard and Times* for covering this speech with several articles in the September 28, 2006 issue. This event makes it all the more apparent how vital interreligious dialogue is for all peoples of the world.

People of different cultures and faiths speak not only in different languages – but even when speaking the same language they have different understandings of the same words. This has been apparent in ecumenical dialogue – where Christians have understood terms and beliefs differently. The 1999 Lutheran–Catholic Joint Declaration on Justification was the result of years of discussions between Catholics and Lutherans on a fundamental theological point of division for over 400 years. The discussion took years - and misunderstandings were difficult to overcome. *This was a discussion among Christians.* We have much ground to cover towards unity and reconciliation, but this intra-Christian dialogue points to the challenges we have with interreligious dialogue.

In the letter from the Holy See to Muslims at the end of Ramadan this year (traditionally sent by the President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue) the Vatican states that “the particular circumstances that we have recently experienced together demonstrate clearly that, however arduous the path of authentic dialogue may be at times, it is more necessary than ever.” Speaking specifically of how Christians and Muslims need to work together to end violence in the world, the letter states what is at stake in this effort: “As Christian and Muslim believers, are we not the first to be called to offer our specific contribution to resolve this serious situation and these complex problems? Without doubt, the credibility of religions and also the credibility of our religious leaders and all believers is at stake. If we do not play our part as believers, many will question the usefulness of religion and the integrity of all men and women who bow down before God.”

As Pope Benedict XVI stated last year in Cologne: “Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue between Christians and Muslims cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is, in fact, a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends.” Let us resolve ourselves to work together to engage in true dialogue.

Father Gregory J. Fairbanks, Director  
Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs

## VICARIATE NEWS

### Bucks County

A **Bux-Mont Interfaith Disability Awareness Group** meets monthly at Doylestown United Methodist Church on the need to make religious congregations more welcoming of and accessible to handicapped people.

Lou Naglack, of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Doylestown, heads a new program in partnership with the Bucks County Director of Corrections to help ex-offenders to successfully reenter the community. After several months of training and formation, the first mentors of the **Father John Davids Memorial Offender Reentry Program** are ready to begin their work with offenders preparing to leave the Bucks County Prison. Further information is available from Lou Naglack at 215-348-2583.

The **Interfaith Hospitality Network** (soon to be *Just Neighbor*) is a model widely used across the US in which people of faith work together to help homeless people become independent. This model is being discussed in faith circles around Lower Bucks. A network of congregations is enlisted to house a family or single person overnight for a week at a time. Volunteers provide meals, hospitality, supervision and friendship. Contact David Nejako, Family Service Association for information at 215-757-6916 x158.

### Chester County

The **Exton-Lionville Ministerium** sponsored a concert by Robin Mark and his band from Belfast, Ireland. The concert was held in August at SS. Philip and James Church in Exton. Proceeds from the concert were given to "The Lord's Pantry" of Downingtown and "The PA Home of the Sparrow." St. Paul's Episcopal Church will host a Thanksgiving Eve Service on November 22 at 7:30 PM.

### Montgomery County

St. Colman Parish in Ardmore is hosting an **Interfaith Thanksgiving Service** on Sunday, November 19 at 4:00 PM.

### Philadelphia South

Three Old City congregations are participating in a Jewish-Christian Bible Study this fall. Sessions are held from 7:00 to 9:00 PM on:

October 11 at Old Pine Presbyterian Church - the story of Jacob and Esau

October 25 at Old St. Joseph's Catholic Church - Psalm 23

November 8 at Society Hill Synagogue - Isaiah 49

November 29 at Old St. Joseph's Catholic Church - Parable of the Good Samaritan

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**Deadline for next newsletter: December 15, 2006**

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## VISIT OUR WEB SITE

[www.archdiocese-phl.org/evangelization/ecum/ecum.htm](http://www.archdiocese-phl.org/evangelization/ecum/ecum.htm)

*or*

[www.archdiocese-phl.org](http://www.archdiocese-phl.org)

► Evangelization, then ► Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs

For information about:

The activities and programs of our Office  
The role of a Parish Ecumenical Representative  
Various Clergy Dialogues  
Links to Ecumenical and Interfaith Web Sites  
Current Calendar events

## CATHOLIC-JEWISH RELATIONS

### The Main Line Eruv Project

Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary recently agreed to work in conjunction with the Main Line Eruv Corporation on behalf of the local Jewish community to assist in completing its Eruv Project. In the Jewish faith, an Eruv is a symbolic boundary built around a community using red string connecting to existing fences or utility poles. According to Jewish law, having an eruv is required in order for observant Jews to push or carry items during the Sabbath and on Holy Days. The Main Line Eruv uses part of the fence of St. Charles Seminary to widen to widen the area of the local Eruv.

On Friday, November 10 at 1:00 PM, Cardinal Justin Rigali, along with representatives from Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary, the Main Line Eruv Corporation, and the local Jewish community will gather at the intersection of East Wynnewood Road and South Highland Avenue for a special ceremony to celebrate the completion of the Eruv Project.

### Jewish-Catholic Institute of St. Joseph's University

On October 17, the Institute sponsored a lecture entitled "How God is One" given by Dr. Mark S. Smith, Professor of Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at New York University. His talk examined how different Jewish groups were formulating their ideas regarding God in the Bible, early Judaism, and the early Church.

The Institute is sponsoring a bus trip to New York on December 8 to the Museum of Jewish Heritage to see the current exhibit, *A Blessing to One Another: Pope John Paul II and the Jewish People*. For further information, contact Father Donald Clifford, SJ at 610-660-1439.

### Activities of Office Staff

October 1 Father Gregory Fairbanks discussed Pope Benedict's talk at the University of Regensburg, Germany as part of a program on "Islam and Catholic Relations" that aired on Channel 10's Live@Issue hosted by Steve Highsmith.

October 6-8 Sister Josephine Kase participated in the annual national Evangelical-Catholic Dialogue at St. Thomas University in St. Paul, Minnesota. This year's discussion dealt with issues relating to the authority of Scripture, canonicity, and the development of doctrine. Next year's topic will be Tradition.

October 8 Father Gregory Fairbanks attended the Third Annual Interfaith Dialogue Dinner sponsored by the Interfaith Dialogue Forum at the Holiday Inn Historic District.

This dinner was an "Iftar" meal, which in the Muslim tradition is the meal that breaks the fast in Ramadan at the end of each day of the fast.

Speakers at the dinner included Father Thomas Michel, Jesuit secretariat for interreligious dialogue in Rome, Professors Yehezkel Landau and Ibrahim Abu Rabi' of Hartford Seminary.

The Interfaith Dialogue Forum is an organization committed to promoting dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims. (See [www.philadialogforum.org](http://www.philadialogforum.org))

October 14 Father Fairbanks and Sister Josephine attended the installation service of the Reverend Claire Schenot Burkat, the newly elected bishop of the Southeastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Synod staff.

October 19 Father Fairbanks participated in a panel discussion at the national board meeting of the Jewish Chautauqua Society at Gaithersburg, Maryland. The topic of the discussion was broadly "The Covenant," since Jews, Catholics and Protestants all have views of their own faith's covenantal relationship, and a view of what may, or may not be, the covenantal relationship of the other faiths. The panel included a rabbi and a Protestant minister.

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### **SAVE THE DATE!**

#### **Annual Workshop for Parish Ecumenical Representatives**

**Date: March 24, 2007**

**Time: 9:00 AM - 12:30 PM**

**Place: St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, Vianney Lounge**

Registration forms will be sent in a later mailing.

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### **HIGHLIGHTS OF CURRENT ECUMENICAL DIALOGUES**

The theme of the 11<sup>th</sup> round of the **Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue** in the U.S. is "The Hope for Eternal Life." Topics included in the discussions are Death, Judgment and Resurrection. Two local participants in the Dialogue are Dr. Christian D. Washburn, lecturer in systematic theology at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, and Dr. John Reumann, emeritus professor at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. The latest meeting of this group was held on October 12-15 in Baltimore.

The **Polish National Catholic - Roman Catholic Dialogue** has adopted a "Joint Declaration on Unity" that spells out the relationship between the two bodies and looks forward to the establishment of full communion between them. This dialogue group has been meeting

semiannually since it was established in 1984. The next meeting is due to take place on November 9-10, 2006.

The sixtieth meeting of the **Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation in the USA (ARC-USA)** took place early last Spring. The bulk of the meeting was devoted to further reflections on the 2004 “Seattle Document” of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, “Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ.” Two papers were presented on the use of Scripture in the document. A session was devoted to continuing discussion of regional levels of authority in the two communions.

The **World Methodist Conference** meeting in Seoul, South Korea in July signed the joint declaration on justification that the Catholic Church and the World Lutheran Federation had signed in 1999. Cardinal Walter Kaspar, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, calls this “one of the principal successes of ecumenical dialogue.”

The ninth meeting of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the **Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church** met in Belgrade, Serbia from September 18 to 25, 2006, continuing the work begun in 1980 to seek the restoration of full communion. It was a much awaited meeting, as it relaunched the official dialogue, which was at a standstill since the plenary session held in Baltimore, Maryland in July, 2000.

Many points of contact were identified on the topic discussed, namely, the Church as communion and the relationship between councils and authority at the local, regional and universal level.

This year’s meeting was hosted by the Orthodox Church of Serbia, and next year’s meeting will be hosted by the Roman Catholic Church.

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## **INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS**

Messages from the Vatican’s **Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue:**

### **To Hindus on the Feast of Diwali - October 16**

It is urgent and necessary that believers of different religions manifest jointly to the world that hatred can be overcome by love. In today’s complex societies, is it not possible for us to join hands and collaborate in seeking justice for all, working together on common projects, for the development of the downtrodden, the marginalised, the destitute, the orphan and the weak? . . . Moral and spiritual poverty, which are caused by breeding hatred in one’s heart, can be eradicated by believers who are filled with love and compassion. Love creates trust, which in turn, promotes genuine relationships, among believers of different religions. (Excerpt)

### **To Muslims for the end of Ramadan - October 23-24**

The month of Ramadan which you have just completed has undoubtedly been a time of prayer and reflection on the difficult situations of today’s world. While contemplating and thanking God for all that is good, it is impossible not to take note of the serious problems which affect our times: injustice, poverty, tensions and conflicts between countries as well as within them. Violence and terrorism are a particularly painful scourge. . . .

Everyday worries together with the more serious problems faced by the world call for our attention and our action. Let us ask God in prayer to confront them with courage and determination. In those places where we can work together, let us not labor separately. The world has need, and so do we, of Christians and Muslims who respect and value each other and

bear witness to their mutual love and co-operation to the glory of God and the good of all humanity. (Excerpt)



### **First National U.S. Catholic Consultation with Sikhs**

Representatives of the World Sikh Council - America Region (WSC-AR) and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops met last May formally for the first time to explore issues of common interest. These included the challenges faced by immigrant communities in the US, the curtailment of freedom and human rights in South Asia, and the challenges of secularism to both communities. A special guest and advisor at the meeting was Monsignor Felix Machado, Under Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

While the Sikh and Catholic communities had interacted in multifaith settings, this gathering was the first of its kind in which the two communities met in a bilateral manner. The participants committed themselves to meet again in 2006 with a focus on “Divinity, Humanity and Creation,” and to continue to meet at least once a year through a working committee.