

Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi to open in 2022



Pope Francis and the Grand Imam Ahmed el-Tayeb of al-Azhar after signing the Document

The cultural landmark in the UAE capital, which includes a synagogue, a church and a mosque, is meant to be a beacon of understanding and peaceful coexistence, inspired by the Document on Human Fraternity.

Robin Gomes, *Vatican News*, 15 June 2021

The Abrahamic Family House, which encloses a synagogue, a church and a mosque in a single complex, and which is scheduled to be inaugurated in 2022, is 20 percent complete, the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity (HCHF) said in a statement on Tuesday.

The Committee, which is also supervising the project, said it is inspired by the 2019 Document on Human Fraternity. Constructed on Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, the project is closely followed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam Ahmed el-Tayeb of al-Azhar, who endorsed the design, the HCHF said. The Abrahamic Family House derives its name from the Old Testament biblical figure, Abraham, who is recognized and greatly revered by Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Shared values

The Abrahamic Family House's design, by architect Sir David Adjaye, captures the values shared by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, through three main buildings, including a mosque, a church, and a synagogue in one place. "As such, the complex innovatively recounts the history and builds bridges between human civilizations and heavenly messages."

The names of the three separate iconic houses of worship in the Abrahamic Family House complex are officially unveiled as "Imam Al Tayeb Mosque," "St. Francis Church," and "Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue". Moses ben Maimon was a prolific and influential Sephardic Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages.

Interfaith harmonious coexistence

Besides the 3 places of worship, the site includes a cultural center that aims to encourage people to exemplify human fraternity and solidarity within a community that cherishes the values of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence, while the unique character of each faith is preserved.



A virtual model of the future Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi.

The design of the Abrahamic Family House was first unveiled by Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, at a global gathering in New York in 2019, during the 2nd meeting of the HCHF. It said the design was also presented to Pope Francis and the Grand Imam during a meeting with them in November that year.

“The Abrahamic Family House epitomizes interfaith harmonious coexistence and preserves the unique character of each religion,” said Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of the Department of Culture Abu Dhabi and an HCHF member. He said, “It personifies Abu Dhabi’s vision for human fraternity and embeds coexistence into the already diverse cultural fabric of the UAE. Overseeing the development of this iconic project is inspiring and reflective of the UAE efforts in realizing the values of the Document on Human Fraternity and fostering its lofty principles.”

The Document on Human Fraternity

He explained that the names of the three houses of worship recognize the work of the Grand Imam, Pope Francis and Moses Ben Maimon, and “harnesses their teachings to forge a message of goodwill for future generations around the world”.

The "Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together", simply called the Document on Human Fraternity, was signed on February 4, 2019, by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam during the Pope’s visit to Abu Dhabi.

Cultural landmark

In the spirit of this Document, the Abrahamic Family House complex will welcome all visitors wishing to worship, learn and engage in dialogue. In addition, it will offer a variety of daily programmes and activities and will host international conferences and world summits that feature harmonious coexistence within communities. “As a place for learning, dialogue and worship,” the HCHF said, “the Abrahamic Family House will be a cultural landmark and an inspiring global symbol that epitomizes the shared values of harmonious coexistence and understanding among the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.”

The iconic geometric architecture of three cubes, representing the separate places of worship, evokes the unified commonality and mutual coexistence between the three religions. At the same time, the design reflects traditional architecture while retaining the individual traits of each of the three faiths.

The supervisors of the project said that during the design phases of the houses of worship, members of religious communities worldwide have been engaged and consulted to ensure consistency with and adherence to the respective religion's requirements and teachings. *On completion, the complex of the Abrahamic Family House will offer the followers of the respective faiths enough spaces for "real peace of mind and soul within an atmosphere in which a spirit of intimacy prevails".* The HCHF said, "Each aspect of the design is brought to life through the architectural features and unique constructional details of the facades, the external and internal views, the columns, and the windows and vaults that reflect the unique characteristics of each of the three Abrahamic faiths."

Meet the architect for the Abrahamic Family House



Sir David Adjaye Obe, Architect of the Abrahamic Family House, United Arab Emirates

Award-winning architect Sir David Adjaye Obe, selected for the Abrahamic Family House, was introduced and the model of the project unveiled during the Celebration of Human Fraternity in New York on Friday.

Bernadette Mary Reis, fsp, *Vatican News*, 21 September 2019

It has only been two weeks since award-winning architect Sir David Adjaye Obe received the news that the plans he submitted for the Abrahamic Family House had been selected. The project was first announced in February by Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince. It is the first initiative to embody the ideals of the Document on Human Fraternity. Sir David Adjaye Obe was introduced and his model for the project was unveiled at the Celebration of Human Fraternity in New York City on Friday. Groundbreaking is expected to take place in 2020. The project may be completed by 2022.

Three buildings, one foundation

A church, a synagogue and a mosque will share the same foundation. It will be a landmark in the United Arab Emirates, located on Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi. Above all, it will mark a significant transformation in human history. As Msgr. Yoannes Gaid explained, it will turn what has been used in the past as a means of division among peoples, into a point of contact.

New architectural typology

Sr David Adjaye said that the project will represent a new typology of world architecture. "There has never been a building which houses the three faiths in one form", he said. Rather

than mixing the three, up he wanted to preserve “the unique experience of each of the faiths” while at the same time “connecting them all with one device”.

Connecting link

The connection Mr Adjaye decided on is a garden -- an image that has important significance in each of the world’s three major religions. Each of the houses of worship can be peered into from the vantage point of the raised garden, which will house an educational centre. The three worship spaces have the same dimensions but orient in the direction and contain structural elements inherited within each specific faith tradition.



Night aerial view of the Abrahamic Family House

Architecture at the service of peace

Mr Adjaye explained that leaders have always come together with architects to “discuss how to make structures that mean things in the world—for civilizations or for a sense of ourselves”. He feels that the Abrahamic Family House project fits within this paradigm. On a personal level, he saw the opportunity to create a building that is completely conflict-free. To create a structure that conveys the message of peace “is a very powerful sort of thinking”, he said. “It’s not about territory and it’s not about us and them. It’s about all. And that’s really, really strong”.

Once in a generation moment

Describing what it was like to have his submission chosen, Mr Adjaye said that it feels like a “once in a generation moment”. As soon as he and his colleagues got over the shock of the announcement, he said that he felt “deeply humbled to have the opportunity to build such a thing in the world”.

About Mr Adjaye

Sir David Adjaye OBE was born in Tanzania of Ghanaian parents. In 2000 he opened his own studio, Adjaye Associates. He is noted for an ingenious use of materials combined with a sculptural ability. Mr Adjaye has contributed to the construction of important buildings in the United States, the United Kingdom, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The National Museum of African American History and Culture, situated on the National Mall in Washington, DC, and completed in 2016, is his largest project to date.