

Pope meets with World Jewish Congress delegation

Francis highlights common religious heritage, talks of strengthening Jewish-Catholic ties



Pope Francis during a meeting with participants of the World Jewish Congress Conference at the Vatican, November 22, 2022. (Photo by VATICAN MEDIA / ipa-agency.net /MaxPPP)

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Pope Francis, during a meeting with international Jewish leaders, called on Christians and Jews to use their shared religious heritage to work together in making the world more fraternal.

"In light of the religious heritage that we share, let us regard the present as a challenge that unites us, as an incentive to act together," Pope Francis said when he met with some 200 members of the Executive Committee of the World Jewish Congress who visited him at the Vatican on November 22. The delegation was visiting during its biannual meeting, which took place in Rome and the Vatican. "Our two communities of faith are entrusted with the task of working to make the world more fraternal, combating forms of inequality and promoting greater justice, so that peace will not remain an otherworldly promise, but become a present reality in our world," Francis said.

"Common and concrete initiatives aimed at promoting justice call for courage, cooperation and creativity. And they benefit greatly from faith, from the ability to place our confidence in the Most High and to let ourselves be guided by him, rather than by mere earthly interests, which are always immediate and shortsighted, marked by self-interest and incapable of embracing the whole. Faith instead makes us realize anew that every man and woman is made in the image and likeness of the Most High, and is called to journey towards his kingdom," Pope Francis said.

Speaking on the common religious heritage, the pope explained how Jews and Christians "share priceless spiritual treasures." "We profess faith in the Maker of heaven and earth, who not only created humanity, but forms every human being in his own image and likeness. We believe that the Almighty has not remained distant from his creation, but has revealed himself, not communicating only with an isolated few, but addressing us as a people. Through faith and the reading of the Scriptures handed down in our religious traditions, we can enter into a relationship with him and cooperate with his providential will," he said.

"While there may be different conceptions in Judaism and Christianity about how this fulfilment will come about, the consoling promise that we share remains", Francis said.

Hence, "As Jews and Christians, let us seek to do all that is humanly possible in order to put an end to war and to pave paths of peace," he said.

A new stage in the Catholic-Jewish bond

Pope Francis also welcomed the World Jewish Congress' launch of an historic initiative known as "Kishreinu" (Hebrew for "Our Bond"), intended to strengthen Jewish-Catholic ties around the globe. The initiative, according to the World Jewish Congress, will serve as the Jewish community's response to the *Nostra Aetate* declaration of the Second Vatican Council, which in 1965 modernized the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Jewish people. The Kishreinu initiative was launched during a November 22 meeting in the Vatican's Synod Hall prior to the audience with Pope Francis.

"Those of us here today are eager to promote our bond with the Catholic Church. Today, we launch the process of 'Kishreinu,' [which] reinforces the common future of our two people. It presents a new stage in the Catholic-Jewish bond," said World Jewish Congress President Ronald S. Lauder, who led the delegation meeting the pope, in his earlier address in the Vatican's Synod Hall.

Lauder also expressed gratitude to the Catholic Church during a time of increased Jew-hatred worldwide. "We don't ignore it. We don't forget. But we look forward, together. And what could possibly be better for all the children of God to live together in peace, harmony and in the house of the lord, forever," he said.

Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said, "With our shared heritage, we have a common responsibility to work together for the good of humankind, refuting antisemitism and anti-Catholic and anti-Christian attitudes, as well as all kinds of discrimination, to work for justice, solidarity, and peace, to spread compassion and mercy in an often cold and merciless world."

The World Jewish Congress, since its foundation in 1936, represents Jewish communities and organizations in 100 countries around the world. It advocates on their behalf towards governments, parliaments, international organizations and other faiths, fighting for the rights of Jews, advocating for justice for Holocaust victims and their heirs, and countering anti-Semitism and the de-legitimization of Israel. From the time of the Second Vatican Council, the World Jewish Congress has been in dialogue with the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, and for many years has sponsored meetings of great interest.