

## Abrahamic Family House welcomes UAE residents, visitors for worship



*St. Francis Church in the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi, UAE (WAM-Emirates News Agency) (WAM-Emirates News Agency)*

The Abrahamic Family House offers a tranquil haven for the faithful of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam to worship in Abu Dhabi and engage in interreligious dialogue.

**Guendalina Dainelli, WAM-Emirates News Agency, 25 March 2023**

Encompassing three separate houses of worship – a mosque, a church, and a synagogue – the Abrahamic Family House began welcoming visitors on 1 March 2023.

Located in the Saadiyat Cultural District in Abu Dhabi, the Abrahamic Family House is rooted in the UAE's values of bringing people and cultures together. The site has already become an attractive destination for people from various cultural and religious backgrounds.

### **Weekly religious rituals**

All prayers, including Friday prayers, are held at Eminence Ahmed El-Tayeb Mosque. Mass is conducted in English every Sunday at 12 noon at St. Francis Church. Daily services take place at Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue.

Each building has the capacity for anywhere from 200 to 350 worshippers. Visitors are guided around the site by signs written in Arabic, English, and Hebrew. Among the first media outlets to visit the site was the Emirates News Agency (WAM), which interacted with worshippers, visitors, and employees.

### **Centre of interfaith dialogue**

The centre is also a first-of-its-kind site for learning and interfaith dialogue. Guided tours are offered to visitors in English or Arabic and are free of charge.

In addition to the three houses of worship, there is a large reception area that includes a pleasant cafe, a library corner, and a curated gift shop.

As part of that area called the forum there is the Wall of Intentions, where visitors are invited to write down their wishes and intentions. The triangular plates are covered with messages of love and peace in different languages.

A few metres away, the signatures of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates; His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai; Pope Francis; and His Eminence the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, Dr. Ahmed El Tayeb, are framed on a marble surface.



*A monument inside the Abrahamic Family House*

### **Peaceful environment**

Despite the presence of a good number of people, the environment is peaceful, thanks to a special sound-absorbing system that covers the walls.

All objects sold at the shop carry a message of coexistence, such as a candlestick inspired by the three religions and the *kippahs* (the cap traditionally worn by Jewish males) displayed on the stand. They have been hand crocheted by Muslim women in Abu Dhabi.

“The soul of the visitor is deeply touched by the place,” said Nicola Cosmo, retail manager of the gift shop. “I have seen people literally burst into tears. I cannot forget a Polish gentleman, the bus driver of a group of tourists. He sat here next to me, he cried, trembling, and told me that his family has Jewish origins. He was overwhelmed by the emotion of being in a place so meaningful to his personal story.”

Maria, who identified herself by her first name only, is a Russian tourist visiting the UAE for the second time. “I appreciate the modernity of the architecture; the style is particularly attractive for young generations. I am engaged with social media, and I am going to snap many pictures today, the place is so beautiful. I will use my pictures in my stories as the strong message of peace this place embodies is so important.

### **Stunning architecture**

Corinne S., a French national residing in Abu Dhabi, said, “It is magnificent, something never seen before. I was curious to discover what is hiding beyond the columns. Once you step inside you realise everything is so peaceful and warm. You feel embraced.”

Serena C., an Italian national living in Abu Dhabi, said she truly felt she was witnessing everyone fulfilling the dream of peaceful co-existence when she walked around the garden. “Straight lines, quite minimalist, but at the same time grand and majestic. Quietness and stillness only interrupted by birds chirping and the sound of the wind. I found the absence of

colour in the architecture calming and reassuring. And it made me notice and appreciate even more the green of the trees, and the blue of the water,” she said.



*Foundation stone of the Abrahamic Family House*

### **Spiritual connection**

Sitting in the first rows of the church, we met Alejandro M., a young engineer from Rosario in Argentina, who works in Abu Dhabi in the oil and gas industry.

“At home we are devoted to Pope Francis. He is from my country; he is somehow part of the family. It is my first time here. I wanted to start my tour praying for my father who is not well,” he said.

It is clear that the Abrahamic Family House is already providing a tranquil haven for the diverse Abu Dhabi community and for visitors to the UAE, as a place of reflection, spiritual connection, and learning and dialogue exchange.