

Pope Francis makes surprise visit to St. Joseph's University



Full-size clay version of "Synagoga and Ecclesia in Our Time."

(Vatican Radio, 28 September 2015) Pope Francis made an unscheduled stop at Philadelphia's Saint Joseph's University on Sunday, shortly before celebrating the final Mass for the World Meeting of Families.

Pope Francis blessed a new statue –“Synagoga and Ecclesia in Our Time” – which commemorates the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, the Vatican II Document on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions.

The bronze work located in front of the Chapel of St. Joseph is by Philadelphia artist Joshua Koffman, and was dedicated on 25 September.

Saint Joseph's University is a Jesuit institution, and was the first University in the United States to found an Institute for Jewish-Catholic Relations.

“To have him actually set foot on our campus was unforgettable, said Mark C. Reed, Saint Joseph's president.

“This is a truly historic day for Saint Joseph's University, Jesuit education across the country and the importance of interfaith relations,” he added.

Rabbi Abraham Skorka of Buenos Aires, a longtime friend of Pope Francis, was also at the brief ceremony.

Philadelphia Jews and Catholics to Celebrate 50th Anniversary of Nostra Aetate at SJU

Argentine Rabbi Abraham Skorka, Pope Francis' longtime friend, to speak at event.

St Joseph's University, Wednesday 17 June 2015, <http://sju.edu/news-events/news/philadelphia-jews-and-catholics-celebrate-50th-anniversary-nostra-aetate-sju>



Pope Francis and Rabbi Abraham Skorka. Photo courtesy of L'Osservatore Romano.

PHILADELPHIA (June 17, 2015) – Saint Joseph's University with the Philadelphia Jewish community will dedicate “Synagoga and Ecclesia in Our Time,” an original bronze sculpture portraying feminine allegorical figures signifying both religions on Friday, September 25. The statue was commissioned to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the

Second Vatican Council's declaration *Nostra Aetate*. Latin for "In Our Time," *Nostra Aetate* is the 1965 document that changed the relationship between the Jewish and Catholic faiths. Rabbi Abraham Skorka, the rector of the Seminario Rabinico Latinoamerica in Buenos Aires, and co-author with Pope Francis of the book of their interfaith dialogues, *On Heaven and Earth* (New York: Image, 2013), will speak at the dedication.

The event will be held at 3 p.m. at the Chapel of St. Joseph-Michael J. Smith, S.J. Memorial, located on Saint Joseph's campus, and is free and open to the public. (The statue will be installed on the plaza in front of the Chapel). Registration is required. Co-sponsored by Saint Joseph's, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, the World Meeting of Families, the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia, the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Greater Philadelphia Board of Rabbis, further details about the dedication will be released at a later date.

"It is profoundly fitting that Philadelphia Jews and Catholics should come together to mark the golden jubilee of this groundbreaking Vatican declaration," says Philip A. Cunningham, Ph.D., professor of theology and director of Saint Joseph's Institute for Jewish-Catholic Relations. "As our original sculpture will portray, today we are able to converse and study together as never before."

"The Philadelphia Jewish community finds it extremely meaningful to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its transformed relationship with the Catholic Church by hearing from one of Pope Francis's closest friends, Rabbi Abraham Skorka," says Adam Kessler, director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia. "Their friendship is itself a sign of the historic change that is under way."

Released by Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965, *Nostra Aetate* called for friendship and dialogue between Catholics and Jews, instead of the repudiation of Judaism by Church leaders that had existed for centuries. Shortly after, what was then Saint Joseph's College became the first American Catholic college to respond by establishing the Institute for Jewish-Catholic Relations. "Synagoga and Ecclesia in Our Time," which was created by Philadelphia artist Joshua Koffman, also memorializes the Institute's work and mission.

On numerous medieval cathedrals, statues of the female allegorical figures of Church (Ecclesia) and Synagogue (Synagoga) depicted the triumph of Christianity over Judaism. Ecclesia is crowned, majestic and victorious. Synagoga is defeated and blindfolded, her crown fallen at her feet. In sharp contrast, SJU's sculpture renders Jews and Christians using the medieval figures as equals, studying Torah and Scripture as friends, thus expressing Catholic teaching today.

"I look forward to celebrating the anniversary of the watershed statement *Nostra Aetate* at SJU because of the University's long commitment to Jewish-Catholic relations," says Jewish studies assistant professor and Institute assistant director Adam Gregerman, Ph.D. "The Institute enables Catholic and Jewish scholars to teach and do research together, and for almost five decades has built close ties with the Philadelphia Jewish community."