

MISSION UPDATE

United States Catholic Mission Association

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Mission: To be everything we can be

By Sr. Francine Costello, CSJ

The stories missionaries share about their mission experience in another culture or country are told from her or his perspective. I listen attentively for the human touches of emotions, common expressions or gestures of relationship in the nuances of cultural expression. At the same time I have and continue to wonder how people of the native culture, persons we have known, and with whom we have worked closely, see us, think about us then and now, after many years of distance, and no communication. A recent experience gave me insight in this wonderment and deep gratitude for the response of the people, a gift of love spanning years of relationship of the past to the present.

I was among twenty sisters of my congregation who returned to Lima in early August of this year to celebrate with our Peruvian community fifty years of mission and presence in Peru. Our reencounter as former missionaries was joyful, with deep emotion and nostalgia for our young years that were marked by high energy, creativity and the need to adapt in language and to the reality of the people.

A highlight of the celebration was the liturgy at a nearby school chapel, the size of a large parish church that was filled to capacity last August 4th. Guests from near and far, especially where we had been years ago, traces of familiar faces and voices now matured, called me by name. I was struck by their warm words of greeting, their embraces,

laughter re-sounding of their younger years, and the real joy of seeing one another again. The encounters with families, friends, co-workers and former students touched me deeply and were mixed with delight and wonderment. They expressed missing us all these years, of their deep appreciation, gratitude for the education, orientation and the formation they received and so valued as they grew into adults and professional citizens. They prided themselves in being our students. They expressed a desire to continue to connect with us by email, and giving us welcome to their homes and families whenever we are



Francine greeting former mission co-workers.

in the country. Years melted away as we picked up an evolving relationship as adults.

The reencounter with students, coworkers, families and friends and their response to us who had been with them years ago emphasize for me that the quality of our presence supported by our ministry with and for them is valued greatly and cherished though distance, silence and years seem to place these experiences in the recesses of our mind.

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"Raising our gaze to God's heaven in an unbroken relationship with Christ, ... in individual and community prayer, we learn to see things in a new way and to grasp their most authentic Significance."

Pope Benedict XVI
(general audience week of September 13, 2012)

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From the Executive Director

REV. JACK NUELLE, MS

During my sabbatical a few years ago I was introduced to the poems and prose of Mary Oliver. In her volume, *Swan*, she shows us **that, though we may be “made out of the dust of stars,” we are of the world she captures here so vividly: the acorn that hides within it an entire tree; the wings of the swan like the stretching light of the river; the frogs singing in the shallows; the mockingbird dancing in air.** In her poem *What Can I Say*, there are a few lines that express vividly how I feel when I think of the Second Vatican Council:

*Inside the river there is an unfinished story
and you are somewhere in it
and it will never end until all ends. ...
The song you heard singing in the leaf when you were a child
is still singing.*

When Blessed Pope John XXIII threw open a window in response to the question of what he was hoping to accomplish by calling the Second Vatican Council 50 years ago, he demonstrated that he was at the same time an extraordinary visionary, a forward thinker and above all a person of deep Faith! How fitting therefore that the 50th Anniversary of the opening of Vatican II will open also the Year of Faith. How appropriate that the *Motu Proprio, Porta Fidei*, of Pope Benedict XVI announcing that 50th Anniversary would begin with the words, ***The “door of faith” (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church. To enter through that door is to set out on a journey that lasts a lifetime.*** (n.1). Coinciding with that anniversary, two other important events are noted: *The starting date of 11 October 2012 also marks the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, [and] the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops that I have convoked for October 2012 is “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith”.* (n.4)

Many new attitudes, new relationships and new orientations were ushered in with Vatican II, not the least of which was a clearly new understanding of mission. For many centuries, mission was seen as a type of supererogation – **something “over and beyond the call of duty.” In biblical terms the actions of the Good Samaritan fell into the category of supererogation.** Missioners were considered to be those dedicated few who dared to venture out for the sake of the Kingdom. Mission theology emanating from the Second Vatican Council radically changed that! In the Decree On the Missionary Activity of the Church (*Ad Gentes Divinitus*), the Church recognized herself as **“missionary by her very nature.”** (n.2) In the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* we read: **“The obligation of spreading the faith is imposed on every disciple of Christ, according to his**

state.” (n.17) In the introduction to the third chapter of the Apostolic Letter *Ecclesiae Sanctae* Pope Paul VI states that **local ordinaries must bring this knowledge to their people “so that the whole Church may become truly missionary and the entire People of God become aware of its missionary obligation...” Being a missionary is no longer just the privilege of a few.** It is the vocation of every baptized Catholic. It is an obligation, which is itself a gift when we recognize and appreciate the importance of how God continually speaks to us – through **God’s Spirit alive in us and working through us, if we care to listen.** Our constant call is to go forth, to preach the Gospel to every creature, to witness to the Good News in all ways possible. Why? Not primarily to increase numerically but rather to **establish “the Reign of God” in people’s hearts – all people’s hearts.** In his Apostolic Exhortation, *On Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi)*, Pope Paul VI points us **in this direction: “[E]vangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.”** (n.18)

Accepting the challenge to have “the courage to forge new paths” as presented in the Lineamenta for the New Evangelization, USCMA has chosen for the 2012 Conference in Los Angeles the theme of Interreligious Dialogue. Vatican II has enriched our understanding, calling us to listen to the voice of the Spirit already at work in other religions, to be **attentive to God’s truth lived by others who don’t see it, understand it, experience it or accept it as we do.** As part of our mission as Catholics, are we open to recognizing adherents **to other religions as “people of good will” capable of glorifying God by their lives and their faith?** Are we open to dialogue, as **proposed by the Council’s Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions?**

If you are ready to forge this new path, then you are ready for the exciting dialogue, interchange, sharing, and grace that will nourish your mission spirit at the 2012 USCMA Conference in Los Angeles. Come and be part of this special **aspect of Jesus’ never-ending story of Salvation.** Come, as Mary Oliver could so easily have put it, and be inside the river **of grace, where Jesus’ unfinished story unfolds in mission,** and you are somewhere in it. It is the story of Mission which will never end until all ends.

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USCMA STAFF:

Fr. Jack Nuelle, MS	Executive Director
Ms. Genevieve Mougey	Associate Director
Mr. Stephen Scott	Associate Director of Operations
Sr. Anne Louise Von Hoene, MMS	Accountant

From the Board President

TERESITA GONZALEZ DELA MAZA

A Kevin Costner film long ago, coined a phrase now etched upon us almost like a new American Proverb: "If you build it they will come." I saw it in a parish bulletin recently, and assumed they were referring to a new church construction project, since they had only a multi-purpose use facility. However, they were not raising money for a specific construction project. Rather, they were building to support their ministry to the home bound sick and poor in their city. Their "home bound"-- by definition--aren't going to be able to go to church if you build it...they simply can't. In this parish they saw themselves as the building-- in the action of going out to the members of their community who are in need.

Our upcoming **Mission Conference: "Forging New Paths: Interreligious Dialogue"**, places us in that frame of mind, as we enter into the Year of Faith. As Missionary Disciples, *dialogue is the construction tool by which we share God's love, because to "build it" is not a matter of mere bricks and mortar, but a matter of time and presence and courage, to go beyond our comfort zones where God wants our reach. We can't wait* inside newly constructed churches with fresh paint and new doors, and expect people to come rushing in the building. More often than not, it is we who are called to go out to the world and renew our hope in sharing it with others. Our church projects should not aim to make hiding places for sheltering good Catholics from the world; but rather to tirelessly engage in mission in the world. Mission Conference 2012 will help us look at how we can be better signs of the kingdom, to grow and build.

I am looking forward to seeing you all in Los Angeles. Many of you have asked the USCMA to continue producing tools that you all can use to make the most of these gatherings. I am sure you will find the reflection tool for this conference useful, and we urge you to share it and invite others to join us in October! This is a unique space where the many faces of missionaries in the United States can come together to celebrate, revitalize and be launched forth.... +

NEWS ARTICLES:

Pope: Let us ask God to give this region of the world its longed-for peace

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - On the eve of his departure for Lebanon, the Holy Father Benedict XVI launched a new appeal for peace in this country and the Middle East, at the end of the general audience on Wednesday, September 12, held at the Paul VI Hall at the Vatican. These are the Pope's words: "Dear pilgrims, at this hour in two days' time, I will be

on a plane bound for Lebanon. I rejoice at this apostolic trip. It will enable me to meet many members of the Lebanese society: the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, Catholic faithful of various rites and other Christians, the Muslims and Druze of this region. I thank the Lord for this rich variety, which will be able to continue only if people live in permanent peace and reconciliation. For this reason, I exhort all Christians of the Middle East, both those born there and the newly arrived, to be builders of peace and architects of reconciliation. Let us pray to God that He may fortify the faith of Christians in Lebanon and the Middle East, and fill them with hope. I thank God for their presence and call upon the entire Church to show solidarity, that they may continue to bear witness to Christ in those blessed lands, seeking communion in unity. I thank God for all the individuals and institutions that, in many ways, help them to do so. The history of the Middle East teaches us the important and sometimes primordial role, played by the various Christian communities in inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue. Let us ask God to give that region of the world its longed-for peace, and respect for legitimate differences. May God bless Lebanon and the Middle East! May God bless you." (SL) (Agenzia Fides 13/09/2012)

"Year of Faith": a challenge for young people

Rabaul (Agenzia Fides) - The Year of Faith is "an opportunity to renew and revitalize our Catholic faith, and this may be easier for the youth of Papua New Guinea following the footsteps of Blessed Peter To Rot, a model of faith of our time": these are the words the Apostolic Nuncio to Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, Archbishop Santo Gangemi, addressed to the youth of the archdiocese of Rabaul, whom he met a few days ago in a visit to the youth centers of the various parishes and lay realities. Recalling that the "Year of Faith is around the corner, as it will be opened by Pope Benedict XVI on 11 October," the Nuncio urged the leaders of the youth community to "be responsible in the various ecclesial realities, promoting an active participation" in the pastoral life. The youth were engaged in a special formation program, organized by the Commission for the Youth, in the Episcopal Conference of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

The youth of Papua chose two special Patrons: Blessed Peter To Rot, and Santa Maria Goretti. Currently under the guidance of Fr. Shanti Puthussery, PIME, head of the Episcopal Commission for Youth, the youth of the 22 dioceses of Papua and Solomon are following a preparation course for "World Youth Day" to be held in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 2013 (PA) (Agenzia Fides 14/09/2012)

WOMEN AND CHILDREN, BENEFICIARIES OF THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE ROAD

Vatican City, (VIS) - Under the theme of "Jesus himself came up and walked by their side", the first Integrated Meeting for the Pastoral Care of the Road/Street for the Continent of Africa and Madagascar is opening today in the Tanzanian capital of Dar-Es-Salaam.

The initiative, which has been promoted by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples in collaboration with Tanzania's Episcopal Commission for Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, will examine certain crucial issues such as the position of women and girls who, engaged in voluntary and forced prostitution in Africa and Madagascar, become victims of new forms of slavery. "Unfortunately", reads a communique released by the pontifical council, "insufficient recognition of the dignity and rights of women means they have fewer opportunities for formation, work and respect".

The meeting will also examine the situation of street children and adolescents, a problem which arises from family, social and cultural contrasts on the continent. The causes which force women and children to live on the street include poverty, family violence, tribal and civil conflicts, superstition, organised criminality and exploitation.

Attention will also be given to the problems and requirements of transport workers who, on long journeys with low pay and no work or health insurance, have to face multiple difficulties, such as separation from their families, long waits at frontiers and fatigue.

All these issues will be examined in the light of the "Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of the Road" published by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples in 2007, as well as that of two documents of Church Magisterium concerning the African continent and the mission of the Church there: the Apostolic Exhortations "Ecclesia in Africa" (1995) and "Africae Munus" (2011).

The meeting is being attended by more than eighty-five people from thirty-one African nations. They include bishops, priests, religious and lay people, delegates of various episcopal commissions for migrants and itinerant peoples, of Caritas internationalis and of religious institutes which dedicate their efforts to the pastoral care of people who live on or from the road.

During this afternoon's inaugural session a message will be read out, sent to the meeting in the Holy Father's name by Cardinal Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone S.D.B. The first lecture will be given tomorrow by Bishop Joseph Kalathiparambil, secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, who will present his dicastery's core document "Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of the Road", which includes the point of view not only of the "users" of the road, but also of the people who are obliged to live there. Bishop Kalathiparambil will

emphasise the Church's pastoral responsibility to denounce all forms of injustice, to defend the dignity of those exploited or mistreated by family or social situations, and to commit herself to helping them.

Epidemics, famine and severe flooding are lashing the Continent of Africa

Kampala (Agenzia Fides) - Torrential rains and floods are hitting in recent weeks several countries of Central and Western Africa and Sahel, from Senegal to Mauritania, from Benin to Uganda until Chad where the United Nations have certified 13 deaths and almost half a million people affected, 73,412 houses destroyed, and about 255.720 hectares of farmland flooded. Damaged areas include five districts of the capital of Chad, N'Djamena, as well as regions of Dar Sila, Salamat, Moyen-Chari, Tandjilé, Eastern Mayo-Kebbi and Western Mayo-Kebbi, where 81,000 hectares of crops have gone flooded. Compounding the situation of crops, locusts contribute in parts of the northeast and east of Chad that destroying crops, fuel the severe food crisis already affecting 3.6 million people. To the victims and displaced persons the extensive damage to agriculture and pastoralism must be added, the little, if not only, livelihood in this part of the world.

In northern Uganda about 15 000 people have been forced to flee their homes destroyed along with crops, roads and bridges. The districts most affected are those of Acholi, Agago, Kitgum, Lamwo and Pader. In Agago 3,492 families have been affected, about 13 000 hectares of crops have been flooded and about 2,000 latrines destroyed. Some areas of the country have been completely swept away and the spread of epidemics and famine is feared. In Kenya the situation is no better. Homes and schools continue to be submerged in the Rift Valley province, latrines have overflowed contaminating water sources. The poor condition of roads hinder the distribution of medicines, blankets, tents, mosquito nets. In some clinics medical equipment and medicines have been destroyed. Over the past two months, the floods have left more than 200 victims and hundreds of thousands homeless in Nigeria and Niger. In Nigeria alone, according to the local Red Cross, since July there have been 137 deaths and more than 36,000 displaced even though, according to sources of the federal state of Adamawa, in this region alone there are at least 120,000 homeless. The government of Niger has instead said that since July floods have killed 68 people and caused more than half a million homeless. In some centers there is emergency cholera with nearly 4,000 reported cases and over 80 deaths. In Senegal the Archdiocese of Dakar has organized a solidarity concert to raise funds destined to the affected population. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 14/09/2012)

Find out more information about the ways you can help to promote mission and global solidarity on our website:
uscatholicmission.org

Questions or do you have a mission related event? Send us the information and we will help to publicize!
uscma@uscatholicmission.org

Mission Conference 2012

“Religious pluralism has become a fact of life. It has become a necessity to openly and forthrightly deal with other religions because you can no longer truly understand your own faith without seeing how it interacts with other traditions. This seems to be a special grace in ‘the signs of the times’.”
~Fr. Ted G. Keating, SM

Interreligious Dialogue

FORGING NEW PATHS



USCMA

Annual Mission Conference
Los Angeles, CA
October 26– 28, 2012

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

His Eminence Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop Emeritus, Archdiocese of Washington: *“Transforming Dialogue”*

Dr. Scott Alexander, Ph. D., Director of the Catholic-Muslim Studies, Catholic Theological Union: *Listening to the Heart of God: The Mission of Interreligious Dialogue for “Renewed Solidarity”*

FACILITATORS: Sr. Judy Gomila, MSC & Rev. Arturo Aguilar, SSC

PANELISTS: *The Abrahamic Faiths*

Rabbi Hillel Cohn ▫ Dr. Amir Hussain ▫ Rev. Thomas Ryan, CSP

PANELISTS: *Missioners Dialoging with Judaism, Islam and Other Faiths*

Sr. MaryEllen Coombe, NDS ▫ Sr. Maria Hornung MMS ▫ Dr. Carmen Nanko-Fernandez

Dialogue Sessions & Workshops:

Interreligious Prayer: Finding the Way Forward with **Rev. Thomas Ryan, CSP**
“How might we be able to pray together?” A look at the different forms interreligious prayer can take and the various theological and practical considerations involved.

Retrieving Convivencia: Living Religious Pluralism Latinamente
with **Dr. Carmen Nanko-Fernández**: *Latin@ theologies have much to offer ongoing reflections on relationships across ecumenical and interreligious communities and within intercultural spaces.*

The Interfaith Practice of Jesus with **Rev. Thomas P. Bonacci, CP**
Dialogue as the justice of how we speak to and about others of different faiths as seen in the work and life of Jesus.

Interreligious Dialogue: A Sustainable Pathway to Peace with **Mr. Merwyn and Mrs. Kirstin De Mello**: *A Lay Missionary perspective about peace building as experienced in Japan, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.*

Practical Tools for Interreligious Dialogue with **Sr. Madge Karecki, SSJ-TOSF**
Attitudes and understanding help us correctly contextualize where we can engage openly and respectfully in interreligious dialogue.

St. Francis of Assisi’s Encounter with the Sultan: Insights for Today? with **Bro. John Kiesler, ofm**
How might an incident from nearly 800 years ago offer insights into interreligious dialogue for our present age?

REGISTRATION:

(includes meeting materials, refreshments, and most meals)

- ♦ USCMA Member Registration \$315 after September 23
- ♦ Non Member Registration \$375 after September 23

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Call USCMA at 202-832-3112 or
e-mail us at uscma@uscatholicmission.org

Register online at www.uscatholicmission.org

HOTEL ACCOMODATIONS: *Please Contact Hotel Directly*

The 2012 USCMA Annual Mission Conference will be held at the Westin Los Angeles Airport. Special Room Rates for Attendees: \$95.00 (plus tax) until October 4, 2012.

To reserve your room, please call 1-800-228-9290 or 1-310-216-5858. Ask for the special Rate for the 2012 US Catholic Mission Association Annual Mission Conference.

To Book Hotel Room online, follow the link on our website:

www.uscatholicmission.org

*This edition of the Periodic Paper is a compilation of excerpts from the document **A Common Word Between Us and You**. It is included here to help our members in preparation for Mission Conference 2012:
Forging New Paths: Interreligious Dialogue*

A Common Word Between Us and You (Summary and Abridgement)

Please read the full document at www.acommonword.com

Muslims and Christians together make up well **over half of the world's population**. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians.

The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour. These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity. The Unity of God, the necessity of love for Him, and the necessity of love of the neighbour is thus the common ground between Islam and Christianity. The following are only a few examples:

Of God's Unity, God says in the Holy Qur'an: Say: He is God, the One! / God, the Self-Sufficient Besought of all! (Al-Ikhlās, 112:1-2). Of the necessity of love for God, God says in the **Holy Qur'an:** So invoke the Name of thy Lord and devote thyself to Him with a complete devotion (Al-Muzzammil, 73:8). Of the necessity of love for the neighbour, the Prophet Muhammad **said:** "None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself."

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ **said:** 'Hear,

O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. / And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all **your mind, and with all your strength.**' This is the first commandment. / And the second, like **it, is this:** 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment **greater than these.**" (Mark 12:29-31)

In the Holy Qur'an, God Most High enjoins Muslims to issue the following call to Christians (and Jews—the People of the Scripture):

Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him). (Aal 'Imran 3:64)

The words: we shall ascribe no partner unto Him relate to the Unity of God, and the words: worship none but God, relate to being totally devoted to God. Hence they all relate to the First and Greatest Commandment. According to one of the oldest and most authoritative **commentaries on the Holy Qur'an** the words: that none of us shall take others for lords beside God, mean 'that none of us should

obey the other in disobedience to what God has **commanded**'. This relates to the **Second Commandment** because justice and freedom of religion are a crucial part of love of the neighbour.

Thus in obedience to the Holy Qur'an, we as Muslims invite Christians to come together with us on the basis of what is common to us, which is also what is most essential to our faith and practice: the Two Commandments of love.

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,
And may peace and blessings be upon the Prophet Muhammad

FAQ's Regarding A Common Word Between Us and You

1. What is this document really about?

Simply put, it is about the Two Golden Commandments: Love of God and Love of Neighbor, and it is an invitation to join hands with Christians on such a basis, for the sake of God and for the sake of world peace and harmony.

2. Why now (A Common Word was launched on October 13th, 2007)?

The world is living in tension, if not turmoil, and the situation threatens to get even worse. We need peace and justice. The latest Gallup polls show that 60% of Christians world-wide harbour prejudice against Muslims and 30% of Muslims harbour prejudice against Christians. That is about 2 billion people of 4 billion Christians and Muslims in total disliking each other or misunderstanding each other (out of about 6.5 billion people on the planet). This is a recipe for world-wide combustion. Something had to be done.

3. Is it not it too late?

Better late than never; and it is never too late for

hope. The various signatories, and other Muslims, have been vocal before, but individually or in small groups. What is new is the successful getting together to speak with one voice, a voice of mainstream Islam.

4. Is the group of signatures representative?

Yes, in that it includes people with different profiles: religious authorities, scholars, intellectuals, media experts, NGO leader, etc all people of knowledge (Ulama) or society leaders (ahl aqd wa hal). It also includes people from different schools of mainstream Islam: Sunni (from Salafis to Asharis and Maturidis to Sufis — of all 4 'Madhhabs' or 'Schools of Jurisprudence' — Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali), Shi'i (J'afari, Zaidi, Isma'ili), and Ibadi. It includes figures from Chad to Uzbekistan, from Indonesia to Mauritania and from Canada to Sudan.

To date (March 2009) the document has been endorsed by over 300 Islamic leaders, thousands of ordinary Muslims and endorsed by 500 or Islamic organizations.

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7. Who is the author of this document?

H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan is the author of the document, but in fact the document is mostly a careful selection of essential quotations from Christian and Muslim (and Jewish) scriptures or sacred texts. Moreover, the document was thoroughly checked and approved by a group of senior Ulama including Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa of Egypt, Sheikh AbdAl-lah bin Bayyah of Mauritania, Sheikh Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti of Syria, Grand Mufti Mustafa Ceric of Bosnia, Habib Umar bin Hafith of the Yemen, Ayatollah Damad, T.J.Winter and Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr and signed by all 138.

8. What were the mechanics of its production ? Momentum for it started with the Amman Message and its interfaith components. Then the idea was mentioned in summary at the end of **the October 2006 'Open Letter to the Pope' from 38 Muslim Scholars (following the Pope's Regensburg address of September 2006)**. The momentum continued to grow over the following year through several gatherings and conferences, the last of which was one on **'Love in the Qur'an' of the Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought**, held in Jordan in September 2006. The final draft emerged out of that conference, and the process of signing began. The experience of having worked out a document in union to respond to the Pope the previous year **made this year's document easier to achieve**. Shaykh Habib Ali Jiffri, Professor Aref Nayed, Professor Ibrahim Kalin, Shaykh Amr Khaled, Prof Ingrid Mattson, Sohayl Nakhooda and a number of other religious scholars and leaders have been the ones building and maintaining the consensus.

9. So, is this document really a consensus?

Yes, in the sense that it constitutes a normative **'ijma' by the Ummah's scholars. This consensus** will get stronger and stronger as more people sign it and uphold it. One mechanism for doing so, through the common word website (www.acommonword.com), is already in place and others are in the making.

10. Is this a Jordanian government document?

No, it is not. It is a joint document by the **Ummah's scholars. Jordan is indeed a welcoming and respected nexus of peace and harmony**, which makes it a good place of consensus building. The King of Jordan has indeed been extremely supportive, and this would not

have been possible without his help. But the document is international in scope and from religious leaders to religious leaders.

11. Is this a document of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Academy?

Yes, but only in so far as that Royal Aal Al-Bayt Academy includes 100 leading international scholars who offered a core base of signatories and supporters that could be expanded, and helped in the networking needed for achieving the document.

12. How will the gains made in consensus building and peace making be safeguarded against erosion and dispersal?

A lot of traction has been achieved already in 2008 by way of spreading the consensus at the highest levels, with major conferences at Yale University, Cambridge University and discussions involving the Archbishop of Canterbury and the H.H. the Pope himself (the document was the basis for the first Catholic-Muslim Forum in November 4-6th 2008). Already MA theses in major universities have been written on it, and discussions have been held at the local in joint Christian-Muslim groups in a number of countries all over the world. In 2009 the Common Word initiative aims to move from **'traction' to 'trickledown' with a major independent institute** being created to follow up its work; books and films being made about it; joint websites with approved Christian and Muslim reading lists being created as a basis for curricula, and a movement to bring it to political fruition, God Willing.

13. Why are certain Eastern Patriarchs not addressed? Why are many Protestant Churches not mentioned?

The Eastern Patriarchs who are not mentioned (e.g. the Melkite, Maronite and Chaldaean Patriarchs all recognize the Primacy of the Pope and are in Communion with the Catholic Church: they are therefore addressed through the person of the Pope. The mainline Protestant churches are mentioned, but since there are over 30,000 churches nowadays, it was evidently easier to address everyone with the phrase **‘Leaders of Christian Churches everywhere’**. Thus everyone is indeed included.

14. Why is it that Jews are not addressed?

Jewish scriptures are invoked repeatedly and respectfully in the document. It is quite normal for documents to be bilateral without implying the exclusion of others. Moreover, this is a Theological document and the problems between Jews and Muslims are essentially political and thus religious de facto and not Theological de jure, with both religions having essentially the same understanding of the Unity of the One God — as we see it at least. Also, Jewish Scholars and Rabbis have participated in the Common Word Conferences in Yale and Cambridge.

15. Why is it not addressed to people of other faiths, for example Hindus and Buddhists?

It makes sense to start with the two biggest, most intertwined and yet most conflicting religions in the world and try to help there first. More documents will be forthcoming, God Willing.

16. Are you deliberately excluding secularists and non-believers?

Muslims are concerned about all of humanity, and must respect and seek peace with every single human being, who were all made by God in the fairest image, but again it makes sense to

start here first.

17. What if no one pays attention to this? What if it is simply ignored?

This has not been the case, by the Grace of God, but if it were Muslims would have to keep trying to get through. That is a religious duty for all Muslims to wish the best for humanity, no matter what the response is like. That is part of Love of the Neighbor, precisely.

18. What of the few skeptical responses?

Muslims should still strain to respond with more gentleness, compassion, and love. The **Holy Qur’an and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)** teach Muslims to ward off bad with good. We have kept a very interesting special **log of the ‘naysayers’ on the** A Common Word website (in the news section, at the end). They are a small minority, but there is still a lot of bitterness.

19. Should you not fix your own problems first and stop your inner fighting before you address others?

The basis of inner-healing and reconciliation has already started with the Amman message **and the historical consensus on its ‘3 Points’ (see:www.ammanmessage.com)**. The two tasks are not mutually exclusive, and in fact must go together. Indeed, addressing others unites Muslim hearts in ways that can be **healing to our own inner wounds. Only God’s compassion** can unite people. The more compassion Muslims practice towards others, the more inner compassion they will have.

20. Why do you think a document between religions is so important? Religions always fought each other, but the world still spun on its axis. Religion is too important a factor in human his-

tory and life to ignore. It is the single greatest impulse in the lives of the majority of people in the world and over history. It has tremendous energies that can have positive or negative consequences. It is very important to unite positive religious energies for the good of humanity. Religions must be used as part of the solutions not misused as part of the problem — and the problem includes violence, conflict, war, injustice, hatred. Love and understanding is the solution — **'love', we say, not mere lust, but rather** compassionate love, with wisdom. The Twin Golden Commandments of Love — and the knowledge of them — are the basis of A Common Word — this is true religious love.

21. Your stark warning about the future of the world is so exaggerated. Do you not think that you have overdone it?

No, not if you consider that we jointly constitute half of humanity and consider the amount of weaponry combined with huge misunderstandings and mutual-stereotypes. Let us remember also the Bosnian Genocide 15 years ago (where 300,000 Muslims were killed by Christians just for being Muslims), or the 9-11 attacks (and other such in the UK, Spain, Russia, India and even many Muslim countries the) or the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2001-2009 where over 1.5 million people have died and are still dying — I do not think it is possible to over state the case about the tragedy and ever-immanent danger of conflict and war.

22. Is your reference to the danger to world peace a disguised threat?

No, it is a compassionate plea for peace. Anyone who claims that it is a threat cannot have read the document properly and is attributing motives that are simply not there in reality.

23. What use is this if terrorists are not going to heed your words?

God Willing, this will influence young people, and will create an atmosphere in which hatred is less likely to thrive. There is no quick fix to problems, and a patient wholesome discourse is very much needed as a foundation for a better future. Whilst there will always be people who want to resort to violence for whatever grievances imaginary or real, we think that 99.9% of Christians and Muslims (and Jews of course, and all people in fact) would rather have peace, and want a way to achieve it.

24. Why is it that the document doesn't address real issues like violence, religious freedom, women's issues, democracy, etc...?

This document is a first step, but one that strives to lay a solid foundation for the construction of many worthy edifices. The document can not be expected to do everything at once. Moreover, many of these issues were already addressed in the Amman Message (see: www.ammanmessage.com).

25. Is this document just another form of propaganda?

If you mean by that it highlights the precedence Islam gives compassion and gentleness in order to achieve peace, then yes. If you mean by that **is this 'spin' merely for the sake of a hidden political agenda**, then no. God sees our hearts. We want peace. We know from the generous and loving Christian responses that most Christians do too.

Praise be to God, the Lord, the King,
Who gives beyond all reckoning.

+

Mission Reflection for Mission Conference 2012

The headlines today speak of violent reactions around the Middle East in response to the religious intolerance of a few people that went viral on the internet and social media. As we prepare for next month's Mission Conference, how can we find a way to overcome religious intolerance and find a way to progress our dialogue with people from other faiths?

In 1219, near Damietta, Egypt, during a lull in the bloody fighting of the Fifth Crusade, Francis of Assisi somehow made his way safely through the lines of battle to the tent serving as headquarters of the enemy, Sultan Malik al-Kami. (p.17)

What did Francis actually say to the Sultan? We don't know. No eyewitness account of their conversations exists. But clearly the two men did hold conversations, and friendly if challenging ones at that. They did not vilify each other's religions, that much we can assume. Yet we must also assume that they did not engage in "interfaith dialogue" in our modern understanding of the phrase. Within the limitations imposed upon them by the age in which they lived, they still managed to listen to each other and to find much to admire in what each had to say about their respective faiths. There are hints that their response went even beyond admiration. There are hints that they allowed themselves to be influenced by what they heard. (p.18)

The smoke and misery of war did not deter Francis and the Sultan from dedicating themselves to works of peace. Surrounded by comparable ugliness, Christians and Muslims in our

own time continue to be called by the God who is beautiful to be beautiful in his image, and to bring beauty out of ugliness in the world around us. We are called, just as Francis and the Sultan once were, to cross our contemporary lines of battle to meet each other on holy ground, where we see God's beauty all the more clearly by seeing it reflected in each other's faces. and where, strengthened by that vision, we go forth to build the world of the Kingdom, of salaam, of just relationships, that God has called us both to inhabit. (p.19)

* Text taken from In the Spirit of St. Francis & the Sultan: Catholic and Muslims Working Together for the Common Good, by George Dardess and Marvin L. Krier Mich. Orbis Book, New York © 2011

Image accessed on 9-13-12 <http://www.bspenance.org/Archive/Newsletter200609.html>



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Need for US immigration reform at a 'critical moment,' say Speakers

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (CNS) -- Christians, especially political leaders of both parties, have a moral duty to address the plight of undocumented immigrants in America -- as part of the Gospel message to bring justice to the poor, welcome the marginalized and stand up for the powerless. That was the main point during a recent screening in Charlotte of "Gospel Without Borders," an award-winning documentary that tells the story of illegal immigrants in several states, including Arkansas and North Carolina. It depicts how Catholics, Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians address immigration from a faith-based perspective, without delving into the partisan divide on the issue. It was produced by EthicsDaily.com, a division of the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville, Tenn., and funded by a grant from the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas. More than 90 people attended a screening of the film Sept. 4 at St. Peter Catholic Church, followed by a discussion led by religious leaders who were featured in the documentary or who advocate for immigration reform, including Bishop Anthony B. Taylor of Little Rock, Ark. The audience included other religious leaders as well as delegates in town to attend the Democratic National Convention. Bishop Taylor, who has worked more than 25 years in Hispanic ministry and wrote a 2008 pastoral letter on the human rights of immigrants, is featured in the film. The nonpartisan event was about "a moral witness of faith leaders to political leaders about the urgency of addressing immigration reform. Nothing more. Nothing less," said Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics and co-producer of the documentary, in an editorial. He also called on politicians to address the situation of close to 11 million undocumented people living in the United States and to fix a broken federal immigration system.

"The Church cannot ignore the field of human rights": three important events in the Bolivarian countries

La Paz (Agenzia Fides) - This week, La Paz has become the home of three events organized by Caritas Latin America and the Caribbean. In the first case it is a meeting, with the participation of representatives of Caritas Bolivarian countries, to examine what affects the work of Caritas in the promotion and defense of human rights. This event, which takes place from September 10 to 16 at the headquarters of Pastoral Caritas Boliviana in La Paz, sees the participation of Mgr. José Luis Azuaje Ayala, President of the Latin American and Caribbean Secretariat for Pastoral Social Caritas, several experts in the field, as well as directors of Caritas in five Bolivarian countries (Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia).

In a second meeting, on September 13, the Bishops Presidents and Directors of the Pastoral Social Caritas of the five countries

will meet to discuss and define the institutional agenda of the Bolivarian area.

For the weekend (from Friday 14th to Sunday, September 16) a regional meeting on human rights involving experts and leaders of institutes for the promotion of human rights, and representatives of the Department of Justice and Solidarity of CELAM will take place.

From the note sent to Fides Agency by the Episcopal Conference of Bolivia, we learn that Juan Carlos Velasquez, Executive Secretary of Caritas Boliviana, recalled that the foundation of the love of God is the human person, created in His image and likeness, and clearly this reality involves human dignity. "The Church cannot ignore the field of human rights, because it is linked to the recognition of the centrality of human dignity," the statement concludes. (CE) (Agenzia Fides 14/09/2012)

"With faith in communion we participate in the Mission": meeting of the Missionary Union of the Sick

Tampico (Agenzia Fides) - From 13 to 16 September 2012, the Mexican Diocese of Tampico will host the XVI National Meeting of the UEM (Union Enfermos Misionarios). According to the statement sent to Fides Agency, the main purpose is to manifest faith through an encounter with Christ, who lives in the sick, the elderly and people with different capacities, in order to express the liberating grace of God that is beyond disease and pain, and that leads to the fullness of the Kingdom of God. Under the slogan "With faith in communion we participate in the Mission", the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) of Mexico have invited to be present in Tampico, however for those who physically cannot attend the meeting, the same PMS have prepared an Internet site for the live broadcast of the event. In the proposed agenda of the Meeting there are moments of prayer and formation, videos, conferences and testimonies on the missionary work of the Church. A Mexican party has been organized for Saturday 15 in the evening and on Sunday 16, a Missionary March will conclude the end of the meeting with the celebration of the Eucharist.

The Missionary Union of the Sick, UEM (Union de Enfermos Misioneros), was born in 1928, when Marguerite Godet, who wanted to be a missionary but was immobilized by illness, offered herself as a "sick missionary" in the Seminary of the Foreign Missions of Paris, thus giving rise to the Missionary Union of the Sick. Today the Union is organized and promoted by the Pontifical Mission Societies, and collects all the sick, chronic or old, who want to offer their suffering and their lives for missions. Initiatives and animation are managed at a national or local level. (CE) (Agenzia Fides 06/09/2012)

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An Internet Prayer For Peace

O God, you are the source of life and peace.
Praised be your name forever.
We know it is you who turn our minds to thoughts of peace.
Hear our prayer in this time of crisis.
Your power changes hearts.

Muslims, Christians and Jews remember, and profoundly affirm,
that they are followers of the one God,
Children of Abraham, brothers and sisters;
enemies begin to speak to one another;
those who were estranged join hands in friendship;
nations seek the way of peace together.

Strengthen our resolve to give witness to these
truths by the way we live.

Give to us:
Understanding that puts an end to strife;
Mercy that quenches hatred, and
Forgiveness that overcomes vengeance.
Empower all people to live in your law of love
Amen.

--- Source: Pax Christi

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*Prayer of Pope Benedict XVI at the
Western Wall in Jerusalem
(May 12, 2009)*

God of all the ages,
on my visit to Jerusalem, the “City of Peace”,
spiritual home to Jews, Christians and Muslims alike,
I bring before you the joys, the hopes and the aspira-
tions,
the trials, the suffering and the pain of all your people
throughout the world.
God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,
hear the cry of the afflicted, the fearful, the bereft;
send your peace upon this Holy Land, upon the Mid-
dle East,
upon the entire human family;
stir the hearts of all who call upon your name,
to walk humbly in the path of justice and compassion.
“The Lord is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him” (Lam 3:25)!

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