



# Cardinal Koch marks 40th anniversary of first papal visit to a Synagogue

01.05.2026 | Cardinal Kurt Koch

**Cardinal Kurt Koch, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Christian Unity and the Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism, in a statement released to Vatican News and L'Osservatore Romano, recalls that “Pope John Paul II charted a significant course for the future reconciliation between the Catholic Church and Judaism.” Today marks the 40th anniversary of John Paul II’s visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome. It was the first time ever that a pope entered a Jewish place of worship.**

The visit of Saint John Paul II to the Rome synagogue on April 13, 1986, was an extraordinary event. For the first time in history, a Bishop of Rome entered a synagogue to bear witness before the world to his appreciation for the Jewish religion and the Jewish people.

The Pope emphasised that the Catholic Church has a relationship with Judaism unlike that with any other religion: “The Jewish religion is not ‘extrinsic’ to us, but in a certain sense is ‘intrinsic’ to our own religion.” He referred to the Jews as “dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, [...] our elder brothers,” thus effectively summarising what had been “noted by the Council.”

In particular, through this visit to the Rome synagogue forty years ago—as well as through many of his other important statements on Catholic–Jewish dialogue, various eloquent gestures, and the personal friendships he maintained with members of the Jewish people—Pope John Paul II charted a significant course for the future of reconciliation between the Catholic Church and Judaism.

Source: [Vatican News](#), April 13, 2026