



Catholics and Jews Hold Emerging Leadership Conference

31.08.2012 | JCR

NEW YORK - A groundbreaking conference brought together emerging interfaith leaders from around the world, together with veteran interfaith professionals and scholars, to discuss the past, present and future of interreligious relations at an event sponsored by the Vatican and its international Jewish dialogue partner.

The four-day conference, co-sponsored by the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) – a coalition of world Jewish organizations, and the Vatican’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, featured presentations by leading interfaith officials on such topics as: “The Rise and Development of Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity” by IJCIC chair Prof. Lawrence H. Schiffman; “Catholic-Jewish Relations post-Vatican II” by Rabbi James Rudin, former Inter-Religious Affairs Director of the American Jewish Committee and Seton Hall University Professor Father Lawrence Frizzell and “Men, Women, and the Family” by Dr. Adena Berkowitz, Director of the Secretariat of IJCIC, and Fr. W. Jerome Bracken, CP, Professor of Moral Theology at Seton Hall University.

“The purpose of this conference is to bring together young men and women under the age of 40 who have a commitment to interfaith relations, and provide them with background and expertise so both the Vatican and the Jewish community can help expand the next generation of leaders dedicated to interfaith relations,” said Professor Schiffman who serves as Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education at Yeshiva University.

Interfaith community leaders participating in the conference, held at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center in northwest Connecticut, included IJCIC vice-Chair and Executive Director of World Jewish Congress, North America Betty Ehrenberg, Rabbi Eric J. Greenberg, Director of Interfaith Affairs for the Anti-Defamation League, Fr. Norbert Hofmann, Secretary of the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, and Rabbi Noam Marans, Director of Inter-Religious Affairs for the American Jewish Committee.

Betty Ehrenberg said, “Since IJCIC works to encourage purposeful engagement and cooperation among religious groups, by convening these young leaders, we can help to reduce false stereotypes and prejudices. This kind of interaction and dialog is an effective way to build mutual understanding and trust.”

Rabbi Greenberg noted that in addition to the excellent presentations, the retreat allowed participants to get to know each other better and engage in vigorous give and take over meals and late night chats. “Much of the fruit of positive interfaith dialogue occurs away from the official conference table,” he noted.

Rabbi Marans added that the “ELC embodied the perfect combination of academic intensity, field experiences and relationship building. It allowed a new generation of Catholics and Jews to begin equipping themselves with the tools they will need to assure the historic achievements of the past and create new milestones in the future for Catholic-Jewish relations.”

A major highlight for the group was an excursion into Manhattan and a special meeting with New York Archbishop Timothy Cardinal Dolan, who is also president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Speaking at his private residence behind St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dolan reaffirmed the importance of Catholic-Jewish relations, and the ever present need to strengthen bonds between the two faith communities.

The emerging leaders also met with Dr. Arnold Eisen, Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of the Conservative movement of Judaism and Dr. Burton Visotzky, Director of the Milstein Center for Inter-Religious Dialogue and visited the world famous JTS Rare Book Room to view original medieval manuscripts including the Gutenberg Bible and works by Maimonides in his own handwriting. Later the group met Assistant Rabbi Sari Laufer of Reform Congregation Rodeph Shalom and Senior Rabbi Hayyim Angel at Congregation Shearith Israel, the oldest (Sephardic Orthodox) congregation in America.

Conference organizer Rori Picker Neiss said, "This was a wonderful opportunity for those engaged in helping to continue developing stronger relations between Catholics and Jews to gain a grounding in the history of the dialogue and meet veteran interfaith leaders so they can develop into tomorrow's leaders."

IJCIC is a coalition of Jewish organizations including the American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith International, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Israel Jewish Council of Interreligious Relations, Rabbinical Assembly, Rabbinical Council of America, Union for Reform Judaism, Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and the World Jewish Congress.

For more information contact:

Dr. Adena Berkowitz

Director of the Secretariat, International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC)

ABerkowitz@wjcmail.org

(347) 693-6961