



Walking Together: Catholics with Jews in the Australian Context

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“Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.”
PSALM 124:8

Introduction

Catholic identity is intimately linked to the faith of Israel. Christianity’s relationship to Judaism is unique. It is unlike our relationship to any other faith tradition. Jesus was Jewish and our Christian tradition grew from within First Century CE Judaism. Pope Francis, in his 2013 Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, affirmed this.

The Church ... looks upon the people of the covenant and their faith as one of the sacred roots of her own Christian identity ... Dialogue and friendship with the children of Israel are part of the life of Jesus’ disciples ... God continues to work among the people of the Old Covenant and bring forth treasures of wisdom which flow from their encounter with his word. For this reason, the Church also is enriched when she receives the values of Judaism. (# 247, 248, 249)

Pope Francis’ appreciation of Judaism draws upon the teaching and actions of his recent predecessors, especially Popes John XXIII, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI. The deep respect these popes had for Judaism is grounded in the life of Jesus as a faithful Jew. The teaching of each pope marked a further stage in the reception of *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council’s “Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non- Christian Religions”.

Three affirmations clearly emerged in *Nostra Aetate*. First, an acknowledgement of the Church’s unique and permanent bond with Jews, the “stock of Abraham”. Second, the Church’s recognition of God’s enduring love for and fidelity to the Jewish people—an insight later developed and expressed by Pope John Paul II as the “irrevocable” covenant between God and Israel. Finally, the Church’s condemnation of antisemitism. In his 1986 address in Rome’s synagogue, Pope John Paul II spoke of Jews as his “elder” siblings. This expression captures the heart of Catholic teaching about Jewish-Christian relations.

In 1992, the Australian Catholic Bishops published a set of guidelines and recommendations to enhance Catholic-Jewish relations. They wrote in the light of new developments within the Church and the world. Now, thirty years later, it is timely to issue a fresh document especially in the light of global developments since that earlier publication.

We wish to encourage all people of goodwill, and especially Australia’s Catholics, to deepen their understanding of the Church’s relationship to Judaism by better appreciating the Jewishness of Jesus and of the first generation of Jesus’ disciples. We also offer some guidelines about how we

can enhance our relationships with our Jewish sisters and brothers now and in the future, so that together we may contribute to the flourishing of our society.

These guidelines reflect our belief in the sacredness of each person, made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27). This belief invites us to dialogue with people whatever their convictions, especially with the Jewish people. Our society will only be strong when we acknowledge and honour each person and their right to help build our society. This belief impels us to work against racism and anti-Judaism. It invites us to be instruments of peace.

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