



International Council of Christians and Jews
Amitié Internationale Judéo-Chrétienne
Consejo Internacional de Cristianos y Judios
Internationaler Rat der Christen und Juden e.V.

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ICCJ President

ICCJ – President's Greetings for Rosh haShanah

Rosh haShanah 5776 / September 2015

Dear members of the ICCJ family,

As Jews around the world prepare to observe Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, their traditions for the High Holydays can also inspire thoughtful reflection in others. This potential for interreligious enrichment struck me when I recently read the New Year's greetings from Archbishop Charles Chaput to our Jewish neighbors and friends here in Philadelphia. He described this season on the Jewish calendar rather beautifully, which in itself is a notable example of the understanding that has grown between many Jews and Christians in recent decades: "During these days of reflection and new commitment to doing good, a person has the opportunity to look into his or her heart, assess the level of integrity there, and evaluate one's relationship with others."

While he was speaking about the individual, the archbishop's words can fittingly be applied to communities or nations—or to organizations with missions to advance interreligious amity. Looking back at the last year, there have been many edifying moments for the ICCJ family. The Executive Board has received numerous reports of outstanding initiatives and developments from many dynamic national member organizations, and more are planned in the coming months! And there was the very rich annual ICCJ conference in Rome. (Materials from which will be published shortly.) The highlight, of course, was the welcome to the Vatican extended by Pope Francis and his generosity in personally greeting all 260 or so ICCJ participants. His message to us included these uplifting words:

In celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* ... we can express our thanks to God for all the good which has been realized in terms of friendship and mutual understanding these past fifty years, as his Holy Spirit has accompanied our efforts in dialogue. Our fragmented

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humanity, mistrust and pride have been overcome thanks to the Spirit of Almighty God, in such a way that trust and fraternity between us have continued to grow. We are strangers no more, but friends, and brothers and sisters. Even with our different perspectives, we confess one God, Creator of the Universe and Lord of history. And he, in his infinite goodness and wisdom, always blesses our commitment to dialogue.

We should keep this long-term perspective in mind as we consider some negative events of the past year. Numerous terrorist attacks motivated by religious hatred have occurred in many countries. The destruction of holy sites, some of immense historical as well as spiritual value, has been justified with absolutist claims driven by religious zealotry and the need to dominate. In widely variant places and social contexts, members of virtually every religious tradition have been targeted for violence. As I write this, Syrian, Libyan, and other refugees in great numbers desperately gamble with their lives in risky efforts to reach safety and build new lives. The loss of human lives, perhaps especially of little children, is gut-wrenching.

Depending on our circumstances, we can feel helpless, frustrated, and demoralized as our vision for interreligious solidarity and enrichment seems to count for little. But as the quotation from Pope Francis illustrates, if we look carefully there are reasons for hope both over time and in the immediate crises.

In the Jewish new year of 5776, let us intensify our personal and group efforts to work together and assist each other in bringing shalom among the religious families of our world and among all people.

L'shanah tovah!

Philip A. Cunningham

ICCJ President