Rededicating Ourselves to Deepening Interfaith Relationships: A Pledge Sponsored by the International Council of Christians and Jews

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The First and Second World Wars killed over one hundred million people and made refugees of hundreds of millions more. Empires fell. Nations were born. Weapons with unimaginable power were devised, threatening the very existence of life on our planet. Nonetheless, from this carnage and chaos positive initiatives arose, including in many places an historically unprecedented transformation in relationships between Jews and Christians.

Appalled and traumatized by the industrialized slaughter of two-thirds of European Jewry, people in both communities sought rapprochement after nearly two millennia of estrangement and antipathy. Christians had to confront a long history of anti-Jewish rhetoric and violence, while Jews had to risk hoping that Christian overtures were truly sincere. Crucial turning points were a conference in Seelisberg, Switzerland in 1947, which led to the founding of the International Council of Christians and Jews, and the Catholic Church's 1965 Second Vatican Council declaration Nostra Aetate and the 1967 report of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, "The Church and the Jewish People."

The quest for open dialogue and sincere friendship between Jews and Christians raised many moral, theological, and social questions and shed new light on each community's self-understanding. After centuries of mutual ignorance and polemic, it took time to build trust and to learn how to speak to one another. Gradually, a unique era of dialogue, understanding, and mutual enrichment began. As never before, unfolding differently in various parts of the world, Christians and Jews, while forming civic collaborations and deep personal friendships, studied together in exceptional depth, some becoming expert in the other's history and texts. These dialogue partners explored religious ideas that previously were avoided. Understanding themselves to be journeying together in God's covenantal presence, they found new respect for each other's religious integrity, leading many churches to disavow missions to convert Jews. Such efforts and experiences were models to engage with other religious communities, especially Muslims.

Over the years there have been disputes and missteps. The journey has been a complicated and uneven one. The post-Shoah geographic concentration of Jews in Israel and major cities in the United States means that most Christians around the world cannot personally engage in interreligious dialogue with Jews. In various times and places, religious radicalism dehumanizes people by setting them against each other along religious lines. Even though peace often seems an impossible dream, there are Jews, Christians, and Muslims who have nevertheless steadfastly pursued dialogue and friendship for decades. Their courageous efforts are signs of hope to people everywhere.

The war between Israel and Hamas in the wake of October 7, 2023, which has longstanding regional and intercontinental aspects, has shaken interreligious amity to a degree not seen since World War II, and will have long-term consequences. Among some Christians and Jews old stereotypes and suspicions about each other have resurfaced. Around the globe, antisemitic bigotries and even violence have surged, provoking fear. Although people view and are impacted

by the current crises in diverse ways, all are haunted by the tragic death toll. Yet we who cultivate interreligious friendships yearn for and must prepare and work for the day when peace will dawn and both Palestinians and Israelis, Christians, Muslims, and Jews, will prosper in peace and security.

THE SIGNATORIES OF THIS PLEDGE RESOLVE that interreligious dialogue cannot be a victim of these or any other attacks or conflicts. Indeed, dialogue is more important than ever. We believe it to be God's will and our holy calling. Wherever we live and whatever our circumstances, we pledge to:

- Be blessings for one another and therefore for the world,
- Support one another in our covenantal responsibilities to God,
- Share each other's joys and sorrows,
- Actively oppose religious prejudice, including especially antisemitism, Islamophobia, or anti-Christianity, and bear truthful witness for each other when misrepresented or defamed,
- Review our religious teachings, rituals, and practices to address any elements that caricature or teach disrespect for each other, or that in any way racialize or dehumanize anyone,
- Continue and deepen the joint study of subjects that urgently need attention, such as: Christianity as more of a credal religion in comparison to Jewish self-understanding as a peoplehood, the land and state of Israel in Jewish and Christian spirituality, the meaning of the Jewish identity of Jesus for Jews and Christians today, the ongoing implications of the Shoah for Christians and for Jews, their bonds in the scriptural Word of God, their traditions of ethical reasoning, and how they can speak and act together for the good of humanity and creation,
- Seek to develop deeper interreligious friendships with Muslims, and
- Better discern the divine Presence in each other's communities, traditions, and rituals.

In making these commitments, we pray that God will bless our efforts and continue to accompany us in our search for deepening and lasting interreligious friendship and understanding.

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS – ICCJ
MARTIN-BUBER-HAUS, HEPPENHEIM
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To sign the pledge, please go here...