



# We extend an invitation to the Church to broaden the dialogue

01/03/2024

**February 12th, 2024 - Response to the Pope's letter, dated from 2 February 2024.**

**Your Holiness,**

We received Your Holiness' letter with deep gratitude for your enduring trust and friendship. "Words that emanate from the heart, enter the heart" [Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra, Sefer Shirat Yisrael/ Kitab almakhatzrah wa-almadakrah] -- we are moved by this expression of closeness and take comfort in your extension of a hand to Jews around the world, and especially in Israel, in this time of great distress.

We join Your Holiness in prayer for the hostages; may they return to their homes speedily, as "God's salvation comes in the blink of an eye" [Rabbi Nissim Gaon]. We also appreciate Your Holiness' commitment to actively resist antisemitism and anti-Judaism, which have recently gained intensity in dimensions unknown to most of us during our lifetime.

Indeed, it has been almost sixty years since the Church unequivocally decried antisemitism, embarked upon the arduous work of reconciliation, and opened a door to fraternal dialogue between Catholics and Jews. The Church's effort to cultivate understanding where there was once rivalry, friendship where there was once animosity, and empathy where there was once contempt has transformed our communities and left an everlasting imprint on our histories. We find in Your Holiness' letter an affirmation of this commitment, evermore significant at this time when instability threatens even relationships which have been cultivated for many decades. We extend an invitation to the Church to broaden the dialogue between us and reveal more of its boundless treasures.

We are living in a historic moment that necessitates persistence, hope, and courage. The transformative power of Nostra Aetate is an inspiration for us, demonstrating that brotherhood can be retrieved even in the most difficult of conflicts. We join our Catholic brothers and sisters in their trust that religions can be creative forces, imbued with the power to open paths which otherwise remain closed, not unlike our sacred texts that can always be reopened by fresh interpretations. We hope to be ever guided by the dictum "judge all men with the scale weighted in their favor" [pirkei avot 1:6], and we wish to be judged fairly by others, too. Despite the whirl of political turmoil, we strive to never lose sight of the universal horizons that our traditions carry in their midst.

Our hearts, too, are broken by the anguish that torments this land, a land that we ardently love, to which we belong, to which we have longed from time immemorial. The pain of this land's inhabitants, be they Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others, pains us all, and impacts our lives and our futures. The obligation to heal this fractured world, beginning here and now, penetrates our being, holding a mountain over us like a barrel [Shabbat 88a].

We join Your Holiness in praying for peace, for the end of terror, for the healing of the wounded, and the comfort of all those who are mourning and afflicted.

“He will judge between the nations  
and will settle disputes for many peoples.  
They will beat their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not take up sword against nation,  
nor will they train for war anymore”.  
Isaiah 2: 4

**beShalom,**

**Karma Ben Johanan, Jerusalem**  
**Malka Zeiger Simkovich, Chicago**  
**Rabbi Jehoshua Ahrens, Frankfurt/Bern**  
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