

Catholic

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Lighting the Way to Interfaith Peace

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Our faith calls us to warmly accept those we encounter in our lives from different faiths. While this is our reality in Catholicism, current U.S. policy and public sentiment show alarming increases in anti-Muslim activity, and many hate crimes in America target Jews. More than ever before, we need to stand up for and practice religious tolerance individually, in our parishes, and in our countries.

Each year, January 1 marks World Day of Peace, which is fitting since New Year's Day is traditionally devoted to personal reflection, renewal, and adopting resolutions to do better. Peace in the modern world has never been easy, intuitive, or inevitable. And it appears to be ever more fragile and challenging to build in a world rife with acts of terrorism and political tensions. Challenging, but not impossible. In *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* Martin Luther King, Jr., advocates that opposing forces have the potential to infer change—light drives out darkness and love deters hate. Jesus and the Scriptures are the driving lights of our faith, which have the power to inspire and inform as well as provide spiritual direction and hope on our paths.

Consider the biblical narratives of Jesus' interactions with people of other faiths. Religious differences bitterly divided Jews and Samaritans in first-century Palestine, but Jesus showed great respect for the Samaritan woman at the well, and used her (a woman in an adulterous relationship) as the first missionary to her people (John 4:4–42). Furthermore, Jesus said upon a mountain, “The hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth” (John 4:23). It's the attitude of the heart, not the location of the body that makes worship holy. In his message for the Fiftieth World Day of Peace, Pope Francis underscores this sentiment: *Whoever accepts the Good News of Jesus is able to acknowledge the violence within and be healed by God's mercy, becoming in turn an instrument of reconciliation. In the words of Saint Francis of Assisi: “As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that you have greater peace in your hearts”* (3).

What Does Interfaith Peace Look Like?

- † It means respectful, harmonious relationships with people of different religions.
- † It upholds the dignity of every human being as created in the image of God, and recognizes his or her inalienable human rights.
- † It fulfills Jesus' command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31).
- † It appreciates the positive aspects of other faiths while agreeing to disagree about the differences.
- † It does not mean compromising one's own beliefs, nor does it ask others to compromise theirs.
- † It precludes calling anyone an enemy based on that person's faith.

