

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Dialogue in Truth and Charity

*Pastoral Orientations
for Interreligious Dialogue*



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Tel. 06 69 88 1032 - Fax 06 69 88 4716
www.libreriaeditricevaticana.com
www.vatican.va

ISBN 978-88-209-0000-0

INTRODUCTION

1. “*Dialogue in Truth and Charity: Pastoral Orientations for Interreligious Dialogue,*” was the theme of the tenth Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue held in Rome from 4 to 7 June 2008. It was an important occasion for the Cardinals and Bishops who were Members of this Pontifical Council to reflect on the developments in interreligious relations in the world. The present document, published by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue on the 50th anniversary of its institution by Pope Paul VI in 1964 as “Secretariat for Non-Christians”, embodies the suggestions of some Episcopal Conferences and individual Bishops, as well as the results of consultation with Members during the aforementioned Plenary Assembly. It is aimed at providing some indications for pastors and all the Faithful who live and work with the people of other religions.

2. In our time, dialogue can be understood in many ways. At the purely human level, it is “reciprocal communication, leading to a common goal or, at a

deeper level, to interpersonal communion.”¹ In the context of religious plurality, it means not only discussion, but also constructive relations with individuals and communities of other religions, which, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom, are directed at mutual understanding.² It includes “witness and the exploration of respective religious convictions”.³ With reference to the initiatives of the Catholic Church to reach out to people of other religions, dialogue is also understood as “an attitude of respect and friendship” which permeates or should permeate all those activities constituting her evangelizing mission in the world.⁴

3. Those who promote interreligious dialogue must be persons well-formed in their particular traditions, possessing a clear religious identity. In addition, basic human qualities and virtues are also essential requirements for any interreligious encounter. Interreligious dialogue, in itself, does not aim at conversion. Never-

¹ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 9.

² Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Mission*, 3.

³ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 9.

⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

theless, it does not exclude that it might be an occasion of conversion. All believers are “pilgrims of truth and peace.”⁵ They meet to listen to each other, to come to know and respect one another and thus to work together in society “in projects of common concern”⁶.

4. Thanks to modern means of transport and communication, especially the use of radio, television and internet, the space for the exchange of religious and cultural experiences is expanding through an ever-growing physical and virtual presence. While this phenomenon of coming together can be considered a positive one, it also creates opportunity for the globalization of once localised problems such as misunderstanding and intolerance in society, often expressed in violent conflicts, at times inflamed by the manipulation of religious affiliations and sensitivities.

5. In order to face the growing challenges to peaceful coexistence among believers of different religions, a proliferation of interreligious dialogue initiatives has emerged, not only by religious leaders but also

⁵ POPE BENEDICT XVI, “Address at the Meeting for Peace in Assisi,” 27 October 2011.

⁶ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Mission*, 13.

by civil authorities, individuals and groups from different walks of life. While some of these initiatives are good and useful, there are those that reduce dialogue in a way that excludes bearing witness to any specific religious belief and, therefore, threatens to annul the richness of religious identities and to generate a kind of relativism, which constitutes a danger to one's own beliefs and to the genuineness of interreligious dialogue.

6. These considerations along with the shared experiences of different local churches have made it necessary to rediscover and renew the true sense of interreligious dialogue in order to help Catholics to understand and to participate in an interchange, which is properly guided by faith, animated by charity, and oriented towards the common good, through mutual respect, knowledge and trust.

7. This pastoral resource is meant to furnish Bishops, Priests, Religious and Lay Faithful, who are engaged in interreligious activities with some essential elements to assist in discernment and also to provide some indications for local programmes of formation in interreligious dialogue. It is intended as well, in a more general way, for all Catholics who have questions about the significance and the purpose of inter-

religious dialogue in the Church. As the scope and the intent of the document are limited to the issues raised by the Members, there is no need to reiterate all the points already covered in previous documents of the Magisterium and this Pontifical Council. Occasionally, the issues discussed go beyond the specific concerns of Catholics and can be applied to all Christians.

8. It is to be understood that a document such as this one, directed to the local Churches spread around the world, provides general indications and, therefore, cannot treat all cases particular to local settings. It is recommended that Bishops' Conferences provide guidelines for the specific context of interreligious dialogue in their own countries.

9. With the globalisation of communication, it is to be expected that this document might reach brothers and sisters of other religions who may also want to know not only what the Catholic Church means by interreligious dialogue but also her underlying motivation for such engagement. For a more comprehensive picture of the position of the Catholic Church, it is advisable to read this document alongside those other resource materials, which, drawing upon the Church's Magisterium, the Pontifical Council has

published in the past. The documents, *Dialogue and Mission* and *Dialogue and Proclamation*, explain the nature and meaning of interreligious dialogue and they address the frequently asked questions about the relationship between dialogue and proclamation of the Gospel.

CHAPTER ONE
THE CHURCH AND INTERRELIGIOUS
DIALOGUE

Recent Magisterium on interreligious dialogue

10. Dialogue with adherents of various religions received strong incentive from the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1962-1965), notably in the documents: *Lumen gentium*,¹ *Gaudium et spes*,² *Ad gentes*,³ *Nostra aetate* and *Dignitatis humanae*.⁴

11. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*⁵ summarizes the key teachings of the Catholic Church on the levels of relationship between Christians and followers of other religions and the understanding of salvation in Christ within and outside the visible boundaries of the Church.

¹ Cf. 1, 13, 16, 17, and 48.

² Cf. 22, 42, 45, 57-58, 73, 76, and 92.

³ Cf. 3, 7-11, 13, 15-16, 18, 21-22, 34, 38, and 40-41.

⁴ Cf. 2-4.

⁵ Cf. particularly 839-856. Also *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* 167-173.

12. On 19 May 1964 (the Feast of Pentecost), Pope Paul VI established the Secretariat for Non-Christians, renamed in 1988 as the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, to foster dialogue with people of other religions. In August of the same year, in the Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam* Pope Paul VI pointed out that dialogue is a principal “task of our time,” and that the “Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which it lives. It has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make.”⁶ In the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, he referred to religions as “the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people,” carrying within them “the echo of thousands of years of searching for God.”⁷ Later on, in his several teachings,⁸ he explained the nature and importance of dialogue for the Church in the world.

⁶ POPE PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 65.

⁷ POPE PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 53.

⁸ Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching from the SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL to John Paul II (1963-2005)*, FRANCESCO GIOIA (ed.), 2nd edition, updated and corrected, Pauline Books and Media 2006. Cf. 83-149 and 186-328. (This document will be henceforth referred to as *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching*).

13. Pope John Paul II⁹, through his teachings, Apostolic journeys and meetings with religious leaders, promoted interreligious dialogue, highlighting the common shared values, underlining the role of the Holy Spirit and confirming that dialogue neither takes the place of, nor excludes, *evangelization*, for it “is a part of the evangelizing mission of the Church.”¹⁰ He took a major initiative to promote world peace and understanding among believers by twice convoking “A Day of Prayer for Peace” in Assisi (27 October 1986 and 24 January 2002).

14. Pope Benedict XVI¹¹ stressed the importance of discussing differences “with calmness and clarity.”

⁹ POPE JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis* (1979), POPE JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio* (1990), POPE JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995), POPE JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America* (1999), POPE JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999), POPE JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania* (2001), and POPE JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* (2003). Cf. also *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching*, 331-1409.

¹⁰ POPE JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 55.

¹¹ Cf. “Address to the Delegates of Other Church and Ecclesial Communities and of Other Religious Traditions” 25 April 2005; “Address to Representatives of other Religions in the United States,” 17 April 2008; “Address to the Members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organisation,” New York, 18 April 2008; “Address to the Participants in the Tenth Plenary

Dialogue should not stop at “identifying a common set of values, but go on to probe their ultimate foundation” – truth which “unveils... the essential relationship between the world and God.”¹² He affirmed that it is “a particularly urgent task of religion today to unveil the vast potential of human reason, which is itself God’s gift and which is elevated by revelation and faith. Belief in the one God, far from stunting our capacity to understand ourselves and the world, broadens it. Far from setting us against the world, it commits us to it. We are called to help others see the subtle traces and mysterious presence of God in the world which he has marvellously created and continually sustains with his ineffable and all-embracing love.”¹³

15. In the Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith affirmed the place of interreligious dialogue in the life of the Church, related as it is to the mission *ad gentes*, which “today

Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue”, 7 June 2008; and “Meeting with Representatives of the Muslim Community of Cameroon”, 19 March 2009.

¹² “Address to Representatives of other Religions in the United States,” 17 April 2008.

¹³ “Address to Muslims in Cameroon”, 19 March 2009.

as always retains its full force and necessity.”¹⁴ According to the Declaration, “God wills the salvation of everyone through the knowledge of the truth. Salvation is found in the truth. Those who obey the promptings of the Spirit of truth are already on the way of salvation. But the Church, to whom this truth has been entrusted, must go out to meet their desire, so as to bring them the truth. Because she believes in God’s universal plan of salvation, the Church must be missionary. Inter-religious dialogue, as part of her evangelizing mission, is just one of the actions of the Church in her mission *ad gentes*.”¹⁵ It is the primary duty of the Church, “guided by charity and respect for freedom,” to proclaim to all people “the truth definitively revealed by the Lord,” and to announce “the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ and of adherence to the Church through Baptism and the other sacraments, in order to participate fully in communion with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit”.¹⁶ The Declaration also affirms that all parties in dialogue are equal, but this equality refers to their “equal

¹⁴ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree *Ad gentes*, 7.

¹⁵ CONGREGATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

personal dignity... not to doctrinal content (of their religions), nor even to the position of Jesus Christ – who is God himself made man – in relation to the founders of the other religions.”¹⁷

Foundations of interreligious dialogue

16. Following the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent Magisterial teachings, above indicated, some basic theological foundations have been identified in the Church’s effort to promote interreligious dialogue.

God is the Creator of all

17. God is the creator of all human beings. He made each of us in his “image and likeness” (cf. *Genesis* 1:26). He is the Father of all. Indeed, “One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth. One also is their final goal, God. His providence, his manifestations of goodness, his saving design extend to all men...”¹⁸ God created everything by the eternal Word, his beloved Son.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Declaration *Nostra aetate*, 1.

In him “all things were created, in heaven and on earth, all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (*Colossians* 1:16-17). Therefore, dialogue cannot exclude anyone. On this basis, the Second Vatican Council concludes: “We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man’s relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: ‘He who does not love does not know God’ (*1 John* 4:8).”¹⁹

Jesus Christ is the universal redeemer

18. The focal point of the universal plan of salvation is Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, fully divine and fully human. In Him, God entered history, assuming human nature in order to redeem it from within. The mystery of man is clarified only in Him.²⁰ It is in Him and in Him alone, the one mediator between God and the human race, that everything has been reconciled. Through the incarnation,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁰ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 22.

the Son of God “is, in a way, united with each man without any exception whatever... even when man is unaware of it.”²¹

The Spirit blows where He wills (cf. John 3:8)

19. It is the Holy Spirit himself, at work in the heart of every person, who guides the Church to recognise his presence and action in the world even beyond her visible boundaries.²² Although the Spirit “manifests himself in a special way in the Church and in her members”, his presence and activity are universal, limited by neither space nor time and they affect not only individuals but also societies, peoples, cultures and religions as well as history itself.²³ The Spirit helps to recognise the signs and the effects of Christ’s action which are described in various Church documents as “true and good things,”²⁴ “precious religious and human things,”²⁵ “seeds of

²¹ POPE JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis*, 14.

²² POPE JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 28-29.

²³ *Ibid.*, cf. 28. Cf. also POPE JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, 15.

²⁴ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree *Optatam totius*, 16.

²⁵ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 92.

contemplation,”²⁶ “elements of truth and grace,”²⁷ “seeds of the Word,”²⁸ and “rays of truth that illuminate all people.”²⁹

The universal dimension of the Church

20. The Church is the universal sacrament of salvation for all peoples³⁰ because she has been endowed by Christ with the fullness of the goods of salvation.³¹ Thanks to these gifts, she is able “to examine more deeply her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of Revelation which she has received for the good of all.”³²

21. Those baptised in the Church follow the way of salvation established by Christ, with all means pro-

²⁶ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree *Ad gentes*, 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 11 and 15.

²⁹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Declaration *Nostra aetate*, 2. Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and mission*, 26.

³⁰ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 48.

³¹ Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio* 18 and 55.

³² *Ibid.*, 56. Cf. also POPE JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio* 72; POPE JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, 29.

vided in their complete form, for the fulfilment of God's plan of salvation and happiness: the Word of God, faith in Christ, baptism and the other sacraments, and membership in the community of the Church.

22. Thus, the Church is necessary for salvation. "Christ, present to us in His Body, which is the Church, is the one Mediator and the unique way of salvation. In explicit terms He Himself affirmed the necessity of faith and baptism and thereby affirmed also the necessity of the Church, for through baptism, as through a door, men enter the Church."³³ The redemptive grace of Christ pervades the Church, which is thus able to act, in unity with Christ her head, as an effective means for the redemption of all. Whoever is saved by God is without doubt linked to, and in relationship with, the Church, although at times not in an outwardly apparent manner.

23. God "wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth" (*1 Timothy* 2:5). "Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His

³³ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 14.

Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience... Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life.”³⁴

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

CHAPTER TWO

DYNAMICS OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Vocation to promote dialogue

24. *Every member of the Church* may practice dialogue, “although not always to the same degree or in the same way”.¹

25. *Bishops*, as teachers of the faith and shepherds of the People of God, play a central role in educating and encouraging the people of God in different aspects of the evangelizing mission of which interreligious dialogue is a part.² As promoters of *ad extra* ecclesial dialogue, Bishops exercise their particular charism relative to truth by discerning, initiating and monitoring relations with the religious communities within their local Churches and within their regions through Episcopal Conferences. In the Directory of the Congregation for Bishops, the involvement of bishops in this area of the mission is considered a

¹ POPE JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 57.

² POPE JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores gregis*, 68.

manifestation of the “collegial spirit” which belongs to the very essence of the Episcopal Office.³ It would be good for the Bishops to motivate the Church at the national, regional and diocesan level, to have some permanent structure (e.g. a commission or at least a person specifically appointed for this task) to promote and co-ordinate the Church’s relations with people of other religions in response to the challenge of religious plurality. Such a structure may serve to give official character and continuity to interreligious dialogue. It has been found to be very useful that when Bishops through messages, homilies, meetings with the clergy, pastoral and other public contacts give clear directives on how to promote interreligious relations in a local context, there is a greater coherence.

26. *A Priest*, by vocation, is “a man of communion” and “of mission and dialogue,” “rooted in the truth and charity of Christ, and impelled by the desire and imperative to proclaim Christ’s salvation to all.”⁴ Where there is a significant presence of people of other religious traditions, parish priests are to take

³ CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, *Apostolorum successores*, 12.

⁴ POPE JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, 18.

lead in the task of implementing the diocesan policies and directives for interreligious dialogue in their parishes, making them part of the pastoral plan. It may also be fruitful to establish relationships with leaders of other religions in the neighbourhood, starting, when possible, with small groups for dialogue.

27. Through personal example and activity, priests can inspire parishioners to live in solidarity with people of other religions, sharing in their joys and sorrows, such as at times of birth and death, marriage, success and failure, sickness, adversity etc. As circumstances allow, common, social and cultural programmes and celebrations with people of the various religions present in the parish may be good occasions of exchange of friendship and solidarity.

28. *Consecrated men and women*, through their “testimony of a life of poverty, humility and chastity, imbued with fraternal love”⁵ participate in the promotion of interreligious dialogue. The proper charisms of different Communities of consecrated persons are precious resources in the Church’s efforts to engage in dialogue with the followers of other religions. Privileged places for dialogue are educational institu-

⁵ POPE JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, 102.

tions, health-care facilities, social and cultural centres. Contemplatives contribute through their prayers to the Church's ministry of interreligious dialogue, while those who are involved in programmes of social action are able to share the riches of their faith and life with all those who are beneficiaries of their service.

29. *Lay people* – Within their own specific apostolate and competence, the lay faithful are on the front line of interreligious dialogue because they live and work with persons of other religions in the social, political, economic and cultural areas. Participating actively as members in their parishes and associations, they can assume roles as interlocutors and collaborators in social action with individuals and communities of other religious traditions. In such encounters, they can bear witness to their faith in a way that leads to “love and mutual respect, and takes away, or at least diminishes, prejudices among the followers of various religions and promotes unity and friendship among peoples.”⁶

30. A special role is reserved to *theologians* who, through their specialized formation, have acquired a

⁶ POPE JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, 35.

broader knowledge of the Catholic faith and of other religious traditions. Theologians play a specific role in finding linguistically sound and precise ways to explain the Catholic faith to others; identifying points of convergence and divergence between the truths of the Catholic faith and the beliefs of others; and promoting a theology of religions that is consonant with Catholic doctrine⁷.

Formation in dialogue

31. For Catholics, dialogue requires a well-grounded knowledge of the Church's doctrine, "solid faith and spiritual and personal maturity."⁸ Therefore, the need for a sound philosophical and theological formation remains foremost. This kind of formation aims at helping those involved in this enterprise "to be well formed in their own beliefs" and "well informed about those of others."⁹

⁷ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Christianity and the World Religions* (1997).

⁸ POPE JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, 102.

⁹ POPE BENEDICT XVI, "Address to the Participants in the Tenth Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue", 7 June 2008.

32. As they deepen their own faith, Catholics will be better able to understand the meaning, the need for and the importance of meeting believers of other religions, as well as the possibilities and fruits of such dialogue.

33. It is worth considering the formation in dialogue of young people in various states of life. Close attention must be paid to seminarians who will be the pastors of tomorrow. The local experiences of the Catholic Church in a particular geographical, linguistic and cultural area must always be taken into consideration in the formation programme.

Aspects and Praxes of dialogue

Forms of interreligious dialogue

34. The document *Dialogue and Proclamation*,¹⁰ identifies four forms of dialogue helpful to interlocutors reflecting on the possible modes of cooperation: the *dialogue of life* in which people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, to share their joys and sorrows, as well as their human problems and preoccupations; the *dialogue of action* in which

¹⁰ Cf. 42.

Christians and followers of other religions, applying their particular religious insights, collaborate for an integral human development; the *dialogue of theological exchange* in which specialists seek to deepen understanding of those religious heritages represented in conversation, and to appreciate the spiritual values of each of the other; and the *dialogue of religious experience* in which persons, grounded in and convinced of their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches.¹¹

Dialogue in truth and charity

35. The broader purpose of dialogue is adhesion to the truth, motivated by charity, in obedience to the divine mission entrusted to the Church by our Lord Jesus Christ.¹²

36. “Religious belief presupposes truth. The one who believes is the one who seeks truth and lives by it.”¹³

¹¹ Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 42.

¹² Cf. POPE BENEDICT XVI, “Address to the Participants in the Tenth Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue”, 7 June 2008.

¹³ POPE BENEDICT XVI, “Address at the Meeting with Organizations for Interreligious Dialogue” on 11 May 2009, in Jerusalem, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, 20 May 2009, p. 6.

All human beings, “in accordance with their dignity as persons – that is, beings endowed with reason and free will and therefore privileged to bear personal responsibility – should be at once impelled by nature and also bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth, once it is known, and to order their whole lives in accord with the demands of truth.”¹⁴

37. *Dialogue in truth* entails that all believers view dialogue “not only as a means of enhancing mutual understanding, but also a way of serving society at large” by “bearing witness to those moral truths which they hold in common with all men and women of goodwill.”¹⁵ In promoting dialogue in truth, followers of different religions are invited to make the contents of their beliefs explicit. The principal mission of the Church is defined as “service to the truth”: “Truth about God, truth about man and his hidden destiny, truth about the world, the difficult truth which we seek in the Word of

¹⁴ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Declaration *Dignitatis humanae*, 2.

¹⁵ POPE BENEDICT XVI, “Address to Representatives of Other Religions in the United States,” 17 April 2008.

God.”¹⁶ Communicating this truth integrally and with clarity in interreligious dialogue must be done by Christians with gentleness and respect (cf. *1 Peter* 3:15), in a manner that does not degrade human freedom, but exalts it, advancing it towards the fulfilment of its aspiration for happiness.

38. *Dialogue in charity* usually happens in daily human relations. It requires respect, attentiveness, kindness, trust, humility, patience, forgiveness, acceptance of the other as a person of the same human family, and finally a desire to share joy and sorrow. The Church teaches that: “Truth, justice and love are not simply ideals, but enormously weighty realities”¹⁷ – realities for which a Christian is willing to suffer. Indeed, “charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of (the Church’s) nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.”¹⁸ Christians are impelled by the love of Christ (cf. *2 Corinthians* 5:14) to reach out even beyond the borders of the visible Church to every human being without distinction. Indeed, the source of this mission is Divine Love and all the

¹⁶ POPE PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 78.

¹⁷ POPE BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe salvi*, 39.

¹⁸ POPE BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus caritas est*, 25.

Church's activities need to be imbued with that same love,¹⁹ which “urges every believer to listen to the other and seek areas of collaboration” and “encourages Christian partners in dialogue with the followers of other religions to propose, but not impose, faith in Christ who is ‘the way, the truth, and the life’ (*John* 14:16).”²⁰ As a form of “dialogue of action”, *Dialogue in charity* is accomplished through various social projects in the service of justice, peace, and integral human development through cooperation. It is service, *diakonia*, offered to all without distinction.

Dialogue and proclamation

39. Christ has sent his Church on a mission (cf. *Matthew* 28:18-20 and *Acts* 1:8). This mission, “a single but complex and articulated reality,”²¹ is expressed in many forms,²² and carried out “by means of that ac-

¹⁹ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Ad gentes*, 2-5; POPE PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 26; PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Mission*, 9.

²⁰ POPE BENEDICT XVI, “Address to the Participants in the Tenth Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue,” 7 June 2008.

²¹ POPE PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 21.

²² Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 42-60; PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Mission*, 13.

tivity through which, in obedience to Christ's command and moved by the grace and love of the Holy Spirit, the Church makes herself fully present to all persons and peoples"²³ including those of other religious traditions. Both dialogue and proclamation are "authentic elements of the Church's evangelizing mission... intimately related, but not interchangeable."²⁴ Depending on the circumstances, one or the other is given more emphasis, but, in encounters with people of other religions and indeed all human beings, Christians must always "make Jesus Christ better known, recognized and loved."²⁵

Dispositions of partners in dialogue

40. There are personal qualities and attitudes²⁶ particularly suited to those engaged in interreligious dialogue, among which are: firmness of religious conviction

²³ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree *Ad gentes*, 5.

²⁴ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 77.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 77. Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores gregis*, 68.

²⁶ Cf. POPE PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 58-91, 107-108; POPE JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 56; PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 47-50.

tion; readiness to understand people of other religious traditions without pretence, prejudice, or close-mindedness; genuine love; humility; prudence; honesty, and patience.

41. In order to realize sincere and fruitful dialogue among people of different religions, it is fundamental that there be reciprocal respect, not only theoretical but also practical, in recognition of the inherent dignity of the dialogue partners and, in particular, their religious freedom.²⁷

42. Clearly, religious identity is a necessary condition for any genuine interreligious dialogue. Experience has shown that for the individual firmly rooted in his or her own religion, dialogue can offer a unique occasion to deepen one's own religious beliefs, thereby facilitating growth and maturity. In the measure that a person is strongly aware of his or her identity, he or she becomes capable of mutual enrichment with the other.

43. The essential elements of the Christian identity, founded on scriptural teachings and tradition, have

²⁷ Cf. POPE BENEDICT XVI, "Address to the Ambassadors of Countries with a Muslim Majority and to the Representatives of Muslim Communities in Italy," 25 September 2006; cf. also "General Audience," 22 September 2010.

been articulated through the centuries by the Magisterium of the Church. Likewise, the sense of belonging to the Church founded by Christ as a community of salvation entrusted with the task of announcing His message of love and believing that Christ's salvation reaches out to all people of good will is also fundamental to the Christian identity.

Obstacles and dangers to dialogue

44. In *Dialogue and Proclamation*,²⁸ some of the obstacles and dangers to be avoided or overcome in interreligious dialogue have been highlighted. It is deemed useful to recall them here along with new ones.

45. *Lack of enthusiasm* in witnessing to and proclaiming Christ and *substituting proclamation with dialogue* constitute a danger to the evangelizing mission of the Church.

46. Related to this is the error of *relativism* in which a partner in dialogue tends to reduce religious truths to mere individual perspectives, holding that one religion is as good as another. This is a fruit of the

²⁸ Cf. 51-54.

“mentality of indifferentism”.²⁹ Pope Paul VI teaches: “Our apostolate must not make vague compromises concerning the principles which regulate and govern the profession of Christian faith both in theory and in practice.”³⁰

47. Relativism can also lead to *syncretism*, which is a blending of elements, especially doctrines and practices of different religions.

48. *Irenicism*, which is an inordinate attempt to make peace at all costs by eliminating differences, is “ultimately nothing more than scepticism about the power and content of the Word of God which we desire to preach.”³¹

49. In a world, which is becoming increasingly secular, there are more and more people with *insufficient grounding in their own belief*. Those who do not know the doctrines of their religions very well and attempt to engage in interreligious dialogue at times can cause confusion, giving inaccurate information to the partners of other religious beliefs.

²⁹ CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, 22.

³⁰ POPE PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 88.

³¹ *Ibid.*

50. *Insufficient knowledge and misunderstanding of the beliefs and practices of other religions* can create difficulties in dialogue as well. While an interlocutor is not expected to be an expert in the doctrines of the religion of the other believer, one must make the effort to understand at least the basic aspects of the beliefs of the partner in dialogue.

51. *Feeling of self-sufficiency* is also an obstacle to dialogue. Christians know that all religious truth is in Christ. Nevertheless, a person who does not appreciate the positive elements in other religions – as monuments for the human search for God – is clearly an inappropriate interlocutor for interreligious dialogue.

52. *Placing limitations on the issues of belief to be discussed and lacking openness* can render interreligious dialogue a futile exercise. Such an approach can create an impression of “meeting for the sake of meeting” without any intention of building real bridges of mutual understanding and collaboration.

53. *Instrumentalization of dialogue* for personal, political or economic gains is an abuse.

54. Even though the Catholic Church has been engaged in interreligious dialogue officially for decades,

there are still people who are suspicious about her motives in reaching out to others. Where there is no mutual trust, interreligious dialogue is difficult to conduct.

CHAPTER THREE

SPECIFIC FIELDS OF INTERRELIGIOUS
RELATIONS

55. There can be many and varied areas, according to specific situations, for engagement in interreligious dialogue with others. However a few specific fields, drawn from experience, are deemed important for further comment:

Defending human dignity and promoting the exercise of human rights

56. In the Biblical tradition, the human person bears the divine image and likeness (cf. *Genesis* 1:26) and is given the responsibility of caring for creation. The human person is imbued with the capacity to reason, to know and, in freedom, to choose what is right and to avoid what is wrong. From this derives the inviolable dignity and inalienable fundamental rights, which are recognized, at least in part, in many religions and cultures, although based differently from biblical anthropology.

57. Religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person. The affirmation of the right to religious freedom “places the human being in a relationship with a transcendent principle which withdraws him from human caprice.”¹ Christian revelation “gives evidence of the respect which Christ showed toward the freedom with which man is to fulfil his duty of belief in the word of God and it gives us lessons in the spirit which disciples of such a Master ought to adopt and continually follow.”²

58. The right to religious freedom opposes any form of interference from outside the religion itself. It connotes the liberty, without any hindrance from outside, to practice one’s own belief, individually and collectively; to transmit the teachings of one’s religion to people of that religion and, with respect, to bear witness in the public square and also before followers of other religions. Everyone has the right to invite others to an understanding of one’s own religion, but such an invitation should never deny

¹ POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2007.

² SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Declaration Dignitatis humanae*, n. 9.

another's rights and it should take into account religious sensibilities.

59. The natural right to civil freedom of religion also includes the right to adhere to or not to adhere to a religion or to change from one religion to another. This right is enshrined in the laws of many societies and in international charters. The Catholic Church fully respects such decisions of conscience, even as she laments the fact that in some regions civil and even religious authorities adopt a one-sided approach in this matter. There are countries where Christians are pressured and sometimes coerced into adopting another religion. Besides, those who seek entrance into the Christian fold often face reprisals that include social marginalization, denial of civil rights, loss of job, jail, extradition, and even death. Such a lack of respect for the fundamental right to religious freedom deserves thoughtful and persistent reflection and discussion at the table of interreligious dialogue, resulting in joint action.

60. Catholics are called to work with all people of goodwill, including followers of other religions, to build a peaceful society. But peace can come to fruition only when human rights are respected, especially the right to profess one's own religion according to

the dictates of a properly formed conscience and within just limits legitimately set by civil society.

61. All forms of religiously motivated violence are to be considered an attack against religion itself and the true good of human society. Christians are called to work with followers of other religions to prevent instrumentalization of religion for political or other ends and to counter terrorism positively. As Pope Benedict XVI has affirmed: “No situation can justify such criminal activity, which covers the perpetrators with infamy, and it is all the more deplorable when it hides behind religion, thereby bringing the pure truth of God down to the level of the terrorists’ own blindness and moral perversion.”³

62. The challenges facing the Catholic Church in the field of human rights vary according to the dominant religion in a region and local socio-political circumstances. In countries with a long tradition of theocratic rule, the Christian minority often struggles to exercise its rights, especially in public expression of faith. In regions in which a liberal, secularized ethos dominates, the Church and religious communities struggle to witness to the transcendent nature of man

³ “Address to the Diplomatic Corps,” 9 January 2006.

in an environment that is often indifferent, or even hostile, to religious belief and practice.

63. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of persons reacting negatively towards any public display of religious symbols and other expressions of religious beliefs. As part of the exercise of religious freedom, followers of different religions have the right to public teaching and witness to their belief, whether by the spoken or by the written word and should not be hindered in their expression.⁴ They must work together to defend the right to display religious symbols in public places as an aspect of religious freedom, insofar as such display is devoid of political manipulation, respects human dignity, and does not include any form of unjust provocation.

64. It is the responsibility of governments “to help create conditions favourable to the fostering of religious life, in order that the people may be truly enabled to exercise their religious rights and to fulfil their religious duties”.⁵ The Church must work with institutions of other religions to ensure that the

⁴ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Declaration *Dignitatis humanae*, 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

governments honour their obligation to protect the rights of individuals as well as communities to choose, profess and practice their religious beliefs privately and publicly, “as long as the just requirements of public order are observed”⁶ and the rights of others are respected.

65. Proselytism in the biblical sense of bringing people to conversion is good, but the term can also be perceived with a negative connotation. It has been described in recent times as the use of unethical and unlawful means to win over another to one’s religion by coercion, such as psychological pressure, spiritual and physical threats and violence, or fraud or enticements, without respect for a person’s dignity and freedom.⁷ Such behaviour undermines the good inherent in the pursuit of a religious path. At the table of dialogue, this kind of negative proselytism must be recognized for what it is: an affront to conscience and a transgression of natural law. Pope Paul VI reminds Christians that presenting Christ to the one who has not yet heard the Good News must never be an act of aggression, but an act

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷ CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on some Aspects of Evangelization*, 2.

of “respect.”⁸ The Christian proclamation of the Gospel is and should always be a service of charity on behalf of the human person who is called to accept in freedom the divine offer of life in abundance (cf. *John* 10:10).

66. With regard to those who have converted to Christianity from other religions, they need assistance to grow in their knowledge and appreciation of the treasures of the Christian faith and, gradually transforming old ideas and habits inconsistent with the teaching of the Gospel. The Catholic community is called to provide special assistance to all those who struggle after converting to Christianity, because of greater physical, economic or social insecurity. The new converts are to be shown the love of Christ. These new Christians, when well supported and integrated, can themselves become protagonists in dialogue, following the directives provided by the local Church.

67. In the world today, Christians do not always live in an environment where there is freedom to profess and bear witness to their faith. Whenever possible, they need to proclaim the Gospel and promote dialogue. In places where they do not enjoy freedom of

⁸ POPE PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 79.

worship and are *de facto* constrained to live underground, the words of Pope John Paul II remain relevant: “You will be authentic witnesses of the faith, of Christian hope and love, which all come from God, only through a life of prayer, the acceptance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, a liturgical life that expresses the real ties of the community formed by the members of the Body of Christ. The call to be perfect like our heavenly Father (cf. *Matthew* 5:48) is addressed to us by the Gospel in the very context in which we are called to be craftsmen of peace, pure in our hearts, poor in mind, merciful, not judging our brothers and sisters, and even subject to persecution. The Sermon on the Mount is our common charter; you will be capable to meditate it according to the way in which you live it.”⁹

Establishing Bonds of Trust and Friendship among Religious Leaders

68. As participants in the mission of Christ whose redeeming love embraces every human being, Catholic leaders need to reach out in friendship to their

⁹ “Address to the Participants to the Meeting of the *Journées Romaines*,” Castel Gandolfo, 7 September 1989.

local counterparts in other religions. Relationships among local leaders begin and blossom when they share a common desire to meet and to listen to one another in an atmosphere of respect and openness to the values that are found in their respective religions.

69. A sense of solidarity in joy and suffering emerges out of such encounters among religious leaders and is extended to members of their communities who, in turn, strive for peace and harmony, and for the alleviation of poverty and defence of human rights within the wider society. According to Pope Benedict XVI, the religious leaders have their particular responsibility “to imbue society with a profound awe and respect for human life and freedom; to ensure that human dignity is recognized and cherished; to facilitate peace and justice; to teach children what is right, good and reasonable!”¹⁰ In periods of war, famine, or natural disasters, Catholic pastors need to frequently join hands with local leaders of other religions to offer relief to victims. Even in times of tranquillity, gestures of friendship, such as honouring invitations to attend a major religious feast, exchanging greetings during festivities, etc., help strengthen the bonds of trust.

¹⁰ “Address to Representatives of other Religions in the United States of America,” 17 April 2008.

70. As relationships among religious leaders deepen, there may arise opportunities to address painful memories of the past. The healing of such memories is a special task that may be undertaken through joint study by groups of experts and leaders in a spirit of truth and charity as well as by reflection and prayer in forms acceptable to their respective religious communities, for mutual pardon and reconciliation.

71. Ecclesial movements in many parts of the world have undertaken important works of building interreligious relationships. While working in coordination with their religious leaders, such groups bring their particular charisms to the efforts of building bridges with other religious groups.

Educating the Youth for Interreligious Cooperation

72. Educational institutions, both private and public, offer opportunities of nurturing interreligious understanding and peaceful coexistence. Catholic schools, as “part of the saving mission of the Church,”¹¹ com-

¹¹ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *The Catholic School* (1977), 9.

plement the task of parents in providing education in the Catholic faith. These schools might offer the opportunity, according to the local situation, for attaining a basic knowledge about the beliefs and practices of other religions, thereby facilitating a positive attitude towards people of other religious traditions even outside the classroom.

73. As places that welcome also young people of other religions, Catholic schools are, at the same time, to maintain their own specificity, preserving and highlighting the “Catholic ethos.” Particular attention must be paid to the administrative structure of different Catholic schools to guarantee that the leadership is staffed by well prepared and respected Catholics. At times, the State uses coercive means to undercut religious instruction in order to slowly weaken both the identity and mission of the Catholic school. While the Church resists such pressures, she must try to demonstrate to the local civil authorities and to others that the religious formation of the young within a Catholic environment redounds to the benefit of the whole society.

74. One of the topics for dialogue among religious leaders is the manner in which textbooks represent others’ religions. In particular, an objective compara-

tive study of history and of religious texts, used at various grade levels, can demonstrate how religious education can sustain negative stereotypes and unsound interpretations of a religion's beliefs and practices. In preparing such textbooks for the State as well as private schools, religious leaders must work together to agree on the essential and appropriate contents. The State, on its part, has the responsibility of facilitating the approval, production and diffusion of such textbooks for use in schools.

75. Special attention must be paid to universities because they play an important role in advancing peace and interreligious understanding. Whether Catholic or not, private or public, these institutions of higher learning can provide the intellectual capital to broaden and deepen the knowledge of other religions and examine the issues surrounding interreligious conflict, past and present, as well as the ways to promote peace together. Many Catholic Universities have institutes devoted to religious studies, interreligious relations, and other such related specialities. Public universities also offer research opportunities and provide meeting spaces in which lectures and student activities can bring to light the particularities and richness of different religions.

76. The local Church must give also special attention to the spiritual care of Catholic students in institutions of higher learning such as public and private universities. Wherever possible, a full-time or part-time chaplain should be assigned to university campuses in order to assist young Catholics doctrinally and spiritually, to strengthen their self-identity, and to prepare them for interreligious encounters with their peers in other religions.

Interreligious Cooperation in Healthcare Services

77. The witness of the Church in the area of healthcare has always been charity towards all, irrespective of a person's religion, background, or physical condition. Catholics collaborate in dialogue with followers of other religions not only towards the recovery of physical health, but also for the spiritual and psychological support of sick persons and their families.

78. In Catholic healthcare institutions, there should be chapels available to the staff, the patients and the visitors with the explicit invitation to discover the spirituality that animates Catholic services to the sick. The role of trained chaplains is very important. In public medical institutions, Catholics should work

in collaboration with people of other religions to ensure that provision is made to take care of the spiritual needs of the sick people of different religions.

Ministry to persons in interreligious marriages

79. “Mixed” marriages between Catholics and followers of other religious traditions are increasing in some parts of the world. Such conjugal unions in which there is “disparity of cult” often present difficulties that are cultural, ethical and, above all, religious. Some issues of concern include the Catholic spouse’s continuing practice of his or her faith and the religious upbringing/education of the children.¹² The Catholic married to a person from another religion needs support, and cannot be ignored or treated as if lost to the Church. Pastors are, therefore, invited to maintain close contact with Catholic spouses in such marriages and to follow them with understanding and pastoral care. Encouraging formation of associations or meeting-groups of couples engaged in mixed marriages can be useful for this purpose.

¹² Cf. *The Code of Canon Law* (1983): Canons 1059, 1086, and 1142-1150; and *The Code of Canons of the Oriental Churches* (1990): Canons 780, 803, and 854-861.

80. In some countries and regions, law and custom do not always respect and guarantee the freedom of religious practice for the Christian spouse in a mixed marriage. It is not uncommon for such a person to come under pressure to convert. Good relations among religious leaders are important to accompany spouses in journeying together in faithfulness according to their promises to each other in marriage, and to help them not to become discouraged when tensions arise over differences in religious observance.

Prayer and symbolic gestures

81. For Catholics, prayer “is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.”¹³ It is God’s gift, a covenant, a communion,¹⁴ and a response to God’s self-revelation. Every Christian prayer is through Christ, under the influence of the Spirit “who intercedes insistently for us... because we do not even know how to pray as we ought”, but he prays in us “with unutterable

¹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2559. Also *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 534.

¹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 2559-2565.

groaning” and “the one who searches hearts knows what are the desires of the Spirit” (*Romans* 8:26-27).

82. Often in the context of interreligious relationships, there comes a desire to pray together for a particular need of the society. It is important, however, to understand that being able to pray in common requires a shared understanding of who God is. Since religions differ in their understanding of God, “interreligious prayer”, meaning the joining together in common prayer by followers of various religions, is to be avoided.

83. On very exceptional occasions, people of different religions may come together to pray for particular needs in a “multi-religious prayer” service. Practically speaking, this allows persons to be in each other’s presence while praying, without actually praying in common. Pope John Paul II articulated an important principle regarding this after the first inter-religious meeting at Assisi in 1986: “Certainly we cannot ‘pray together’, that is, engage in a common prayer, but we can be present while others pray. In this way we manifest our respect for the prayer of others and for the attitude of others before the Divinity; at the same time we offer them the humble and sincere witness of our faith in Christ, Lord of

the universe.”¹⁵ Therefore, such a service should be conducted with certain prudence, and the participants need to be of a human and spiritual maturity. It is worth recalling the concluding moment of that historic meeting in Assisi, where the prayers of the representative of each religion, one after another, in a suitably distinct moment, were recited, while all the others present assisted with a respectful attitude, both interior and exterior, of one who is a witness of the supreme effort of other men and women to seek God.¹⁶ In preparing for occasions of “multi-religious” prayer, any practice that may give the impression of relativism or syncretism, such as the invention of “para-liturgical” services and the preparation and use of common prayers acceptable to all religions as well as compiling and reading excerpts from so called “sacred books” of different religions during public ceremonies are to be avoided. Indeed, preference should be given to silence and personal prayer during such gatherings. Thus, it should be evident to all who participate that these occasions are moments of being “together for prayer, but not prayer together.” Similarly, when representatives of other religions are

¹⁵ POPE JOHN PAUL II, General Audience, 22 October 1986.

¹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*

invited to attend Catholic liturgies, they should not be invited to pray or exercise a ritual proper to their religion.

84. It is necessary for Catholic pastors to understand and explain to the faithful the implications of their gestures of friendship, hospitality and cooperation towards followers of other religions. Yet the duty of hospitality has its limits. Offering a Church for use as house of prayer for people of other religions is improper and must be avoided. It is also important to discourage the use of buildings destined for Catholic pastoral activities as venues for prayer and worship by people of other religions.

85. In the occasional difficult moment when it becomes unavoidable that a Church building is to be sold, Catholic pastors must ensure that the conditions of sale include the provision that the edifice retain its sacred character, destined, if possible, for Catholic or other Christian use.

CONCLUSION

Interreligious dialogue, by its very nature, adapts to local cultures, traditions, languages and world-views. Partners in dialogue need to be acquainted with these as well as with the local sensibilities and sensitivities to be better able to promote meaningful encounter and collaboration with one another. Considering recent proliferation of interreligious initiatives, discernment is necessary. There is need for sound theological formation and information, both of which are an important foundation for right discernment. Catholics engaged in interreligious dialogue are encouraged to build on the recommendations provided in this booklet, always bearing in mind their local context and implementing them in the light and the spirit of the teaching of the Catholic Church.

Rome, 19 May 2014

Cardinal JEAN-LOUIS TAURAN
President

Father MIGUEL ÁNGEL AYUSO GUIXOT, MCCJ
Secretary

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