

"As the Father has sent me, so am I sending you" John 20:21

KAULOTU

FOR PACIFIC MISSIONARIES



God is **FOUND**
when we **LOVE**
one another

Inter-Religious Dialogue

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Editorial

Adi Mariana Waqa

The third Kaulotu for 2019 centres on Inter-Religious Dialogue (IRD) and although new to many Catholics in Fiji, the Vatican has been engaging with Inter-Religious Dialogue for over 50 years now.

In 1964 Pope Paul VI issued the Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* which became the first papal document from the Vatican to promote Inter-Religious Dialogue. Following 1965 was a landmark declaration titled, *Nostra Aetate* which opened with the following words: In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.

Other notable mentions by the Vatican have included a strong interreligious theme in the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) as well as the declaration *Dominus Iesus* (2000) which asserted that IRD – does not diminish the evangelisation of Jesus Christ.



Pope Paul VI is cheered on by crowds in Jerusalem's Old City on January 4th, 1964. He was the first Pope to visit Jerusalem.

So with these ecclesial traditions we present you with a Kaulotu that takes a closer look at interreligious work throughout Fiji.

This edition opens with a Vatican history from Father Donal McIlraith, and is followed by IRD stories and experiences that have shaped the

lives of local Catholics as well as one Bhai Preetam who makes it a truly IRD edition with his insights as a Sikh Head Priest. Father Patrick McInerney then closes with wise words of counsel to some common questions about Inter-Religious Dialogue.

Our hope is that this Kaulotu Magazine will help Catholics step beyond their religious boundaries and be open to understanding and respecting other faith traditions.

As Father McInerney will later share, Inter-Religious Dialogue will not weaken or dilute your faith; it will deepen and widen it to make it stronger.

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Washing of feet painting at the Hare Krishna Temple



Pope John Paul called for dialogue between Muslims and Christians during his visit to Morocco in 1985



Pope Francis called for 'closer relations' between Muslims, Jews, and Christians while in Jerusalem in 2014



Love your neighbour as yourself

Father Donal McIlraith

The Atomic Bomb was used on Nagasaki and Hiroshima in Japan to bring an end to World War II. If this type of bomb is used again widely, it could mean the end of humanity. Pope Francis wrote *Laudato Si'* to make us aware of the ecological threat to the world, so to ensure a future for humanity we must all work together. This also means that the great world religions must also work together for peace and for the future.

At Vatican II, the Holy Spirit showed Catholic Church leaders the need to work together with other religions and to love and respect each other for the world to survive. In its document on Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Nostra Aetate* (1965), it says, "The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in [other] religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings, which though different in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of truth which enlightens all men."

After the Council, in his great missionary Encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope St John Paul II reminded us of the importance of our faith in Christ as the only Redeemer and of our need to share

this with others, stating, "Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice interfaith dialogue."

He called us to be evangelists and to dialogue respectfully with people of other religions.

Pope St John Paul II gave us an amazing example of this when he visited some 129 countries all over the world proclaiming Christ and making friends with leaders and people of other religions. In 1985 the King of Morocco invited him to address 80,000 Muslim youth in Casablanca. He spoke to them on the values that Christians share with Muslims. This is a new area for Catholics and other Christians.

To help us, the Popes have set up a commission in Rome to give guidance. This is called the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue (PCID) and its three aims are to:

- Promote mutual understanding, respect and collaboration between Catholics and the followers of other religious traditions
- Promote the formation of persons dedicated to dialogue
- Encourage the study of religions

Every year on behalf of the Holy Father, the Commission sends greetings to those of the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist faiths on their major feast days. This display of interreligious respect and support highlights the second most important commandment found in the Gospels, which is to Love your neighbour as yourself (Luke 10:27; Mark 12:31; Matt 22:39).

Interfaith Search Fiji

Tessa Mackenzie

In 1987 the army take-over of Parliament and the Government upset our casual way of life. Differences of ethnicity, culture and religion suddenly were very real and discrimination and intolerance became commonplace.

Within a few days of the coup a small group of concerned women met and the seeds of Interfaith Search Fiji were sown. They were joined by others and there were regular interfaith meetings to find ways of building respect for others. Within three years there were people from eleven different religious traditions, Christian, Hindu and Muslim, meeting regularly in Suva with an elected Chairperson and a Facilitator, with a short-lived group set up in the West. The word "Search" was added to the name Interfaith to signify the importance of exploring one another's religious understandings and practices.

In 1995 Interfaith Search Fiji was formally registered as a non-governmental organisation with the aim 'to build bridges of respect and understanding between people of different religious tradition for the sake of the wider community'.

Discussion and sharing has become the main way of trying to build respect, together with occasional seminars, workshops and panel discussions. On one occasion I was explaining a Christian topic from the Bible and was interrupted by a man from another faith. I was taken by surprise but before I could respond, his wife gently said, "No dear, you mustn't tell her what the Bible says."

This raised the need for deep respect and sensitivity in discussion with others about our faiths and religious understandings. It was also a learning point for me. That man had read my scriptures, but I had not read his!

Over the years the meetings have become monthly and more formal, with presentations of scripture texts relevant to the topic before discussion. People from all walks of life and religious persuasion are welcomed and do join in.

During the first years of Interfaith Search a book was developed and published in 1990 titled, 'Fiji's Faiths: Who we are and what we believe.' Through the 1990s there were numerous outbreaks of religious intolerance, acts of desecration and sacrilege and this has continued sporadically through the years. Interfaith Search tries to respond in the media urging respect and understanding.

From the mid-nineties, multi-faith prayers have been organised on request from various organisations, and Interfaith Search Fiji occasionally organises national prayer for special intentions, the most recent being after the Christchurch massacre. These prayers are held in a church, a temple or a mosque and are organised to give each faith group a short specified time to present prayer, chanting or scripture reading according to their tradition. For some people, especially some Christians, praying with others presents difficulties. Interfaith Search Fiji respects this and encourages such people to listen prayerfully if they prefer not to pray.

Respect and understanding of our neighbour's faith, his or her beliefs and practices, is an ever present need in our Fiji multi-faith society. There is always room for discussion in a formally organised meeting or just a conversation between friends and neighbours.



An inter-religious meeting in Labasa



An Interfaith Search Fiji workshop in Labasa



A Sikh priest recites the Guru Granth Sahib

Finding things in common

**Bhai Preetam Singh Shokar,
Head Priest of Sikh Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee**

Sikhism, seeks to achieve peace and co-existence. Sikhism significantly thrives on the pillars of universalism by communicating and incorporating various faiths under one umbrella. The notion of 'Ik Onkar' meaning 'One Universal God' shows inclusiveness of the scriptures of Sikh Gurus along with Hindu and Muslim Saints and Prophets into the holy book of 'Guru Granth Sahib Ji Maharaj'.

The Sikh Holy Scriptures bestows the utmost respect and appreciation of all faiths meditating on the name of the one True Lord by the name of Waheguru, Allah, Ram, Christ and so forth. The Sikh Headquarters of Cardinals, The Golden Temple in Amritsar is exemplary of the acceptance of people of all faiths and social stature through the free kitchen and dining hall where approximately 250,000 people are fed every day.

Added to that, Sikhism is one of the very first faiths to empower women and encourage freedom of rights and independence of all races.

Inter-Religious Dialogue acts as a core instrument of initiating an understanding of the basic principles of each faith group. It gets people to ask questions about the characteristics of God,

creation of God, the means of worship, responsibilities of humans, deeds and misdeeds, ethics and consequences of our actions.

Such questions enable us to find things in common and bring a sense of belonging to multi-religious and multicultural societies that we live in today.

Conflicts arise in societies due to differences of opinions and a stereotype approach comes when prejudice makes people group individuals to a religion and then blames them for the cause of conflict. Inter-Religious Dialogue acts as a catalyst to avoid misjudging the cause of societal

conflicts to a stereotyped religion.

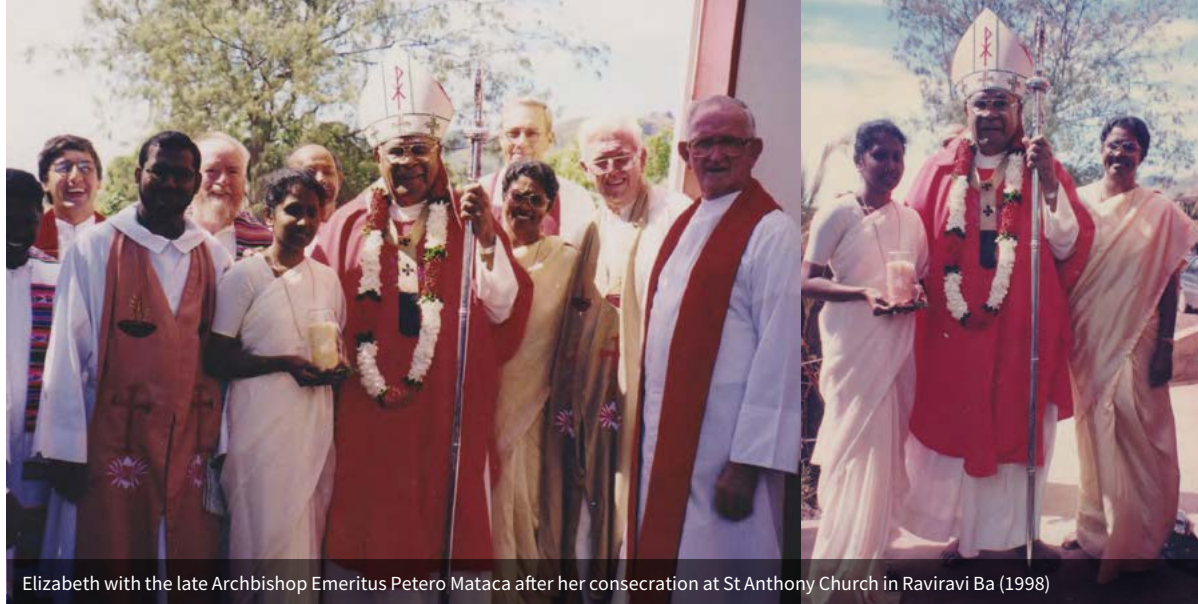
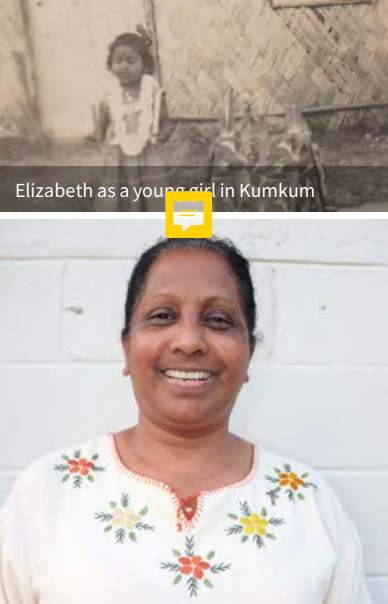
However, there are challenges to achieving Inter-Religious Dialogue. It requires participants to have qualities of patience and neutrality before dialogue. To find tranquility in such dialogue requires a spirit of understanding and patience to listen without negating the other.

For instance, a particular practice in one religion may or may not be accepted by another religion, but the participant must be sensitive enough to capture the logic provided, query it if needed but avoid hurting the sentiments of the presenter. The key aspect of Inter-Religious Dialogue focuses on mutual respect between participants and opens up a safe space to converse.

The greatest obstacle is the capacity to involve youths. Growing social and technological life continues to impede youths from taking interest in religious dialogue and has played a key role in determining the number of participants in such inter-religious forums.

As Associate Chairperson of Interfaith Search Fiji, I observe Inter-Religious Dialogue on a monthly basis and my experience with such dialogue has enriched my life personally and spiritually. Sharing my faith's scriptures and ideologies has become a self-learning process and urged me to learn more about Sikhism and other religions too.

The main reason behind this is the beauty of quotations from holy scriptures that support the ideologies discussed by faith groups. Holy Scriptures enlighten our ability to think progressively and seek wisdom. Thus, I confer that Inter-Religious Dialogue is a pivotal mechanism of achieving peaceful co-existence in the 21st century.



Elizabeth Krishna: A lifetime of Inter-Religious Dialogue

Adi Mariana Waqa

Elizabeth Krishna grew up on the interior hills of Ba in a settlement named Kumkum. A spiritual girl devoted to her prayers, Elizabeth grew up in a family with a Catholic mother and Hindu father. Mr Krishna allowed Elizabeth and her siblings to be baptised as Catholics. He also welcomed priests such as Father Garlick, Father Keogh, and Father Batchelor into their family home, so Elizabeth grew up with a strong sense of her Catholic identity.

All the families in Kumkum were Hindu or Muslims, with Elizabeth's Catholic family being the only exception. Yet they lived peacefully with one another as Elizabeth explained.

"The adults in Kumkum were simple people and not highly educated. My own parents were educated only until class three.

Education is important but it sometimes hinders us when we can no longer connect to others.

Food was shared whenever religious celebrations took place, there were Ramayan prayers (Hindu), Eid (Islam), and Christmas

(Catholic) gatherings. Life in rural Kumkum was tough but we shared our struggles and respected one another."

Elizabeth completed her secretarial studies and was working in Ba when the 87 coup happened in Suva.

"People didn't know what a 'coup' was but were sent home that day. Our communities out west didn't feel the impact until Fiji was declared a Christian state. Many Indians were arrested for washing clothes or farming on Sundays and that's when fear crept in amongst our communities."

Elizabeth became ashamed of her Christian faith because some churches supported the coup. Sacred places of worship like temples, mosques, and churches

were desecrated during this time, and Elizabeth questioned her Christian beliefs. Yet the strong Catholic upbringing provided by her mother and Columban priests helped Elizabeth keep the faith. In 1988 she began her work in Suva with Interfaith Search Fiji (ISF).

At first, Elizabeth was uncomfortable with Inter-Religious Dialogue (IRD) because she feared losing her Catholic identity. Growing up Elizabeth thought her father's religion to be inferior to Catholicism, but through her ISF work and experiences, Elizabeth developed a respect for the different faith traditions, including Hinduism.

"ISF helped me come to terms with my father's belief system. I experienced this during the traumatic loss of my niece. My mother turned to her rosary for comfort but I wondered how my father was doing? He wasn't an active Hindu but I bought him some religious books in Hindi hoping they would help him cope.



Standing with visiting priests and family after her



Elizabeth's first renewal of vows at Nazareth Prayer Centre



Elizabeth with her proud parents after her consecration Mass



Looking back, it was a way of reconciling with my father's faith and it happened because my work with ISF helped me understand and respect Hinduism and other religions."

Elizabeth continued her work with Interfaith Search Fiji and experienced two more coup d'état's while working for the Prime Minister's office in 2000 and 2006.

There was a lot of racial tension in workplaces, Indo-Fijians and Fijians did not trust one another. Suva was not a safe place and there were sleepless nights when Elizabeth could hear distant gunshots at night.

Nevertheless, the religious tolerance she learned from her childhood in Kumkum as well as her ISF work in Suva helped Elizabeth to maintain cultural, racial and religious tolerance during times of national turmoil.

"Inter-Religious Dialogue and my work with ISF helped me understand and have respect for iTaukei culture, history, and values. It also helped me deepen my identity as an Indo-Fijian and the history I proudly came from."

Looking to the future, Elizabeth believes the key to strengthening religious tolerance is openness to dialogue and understanding of one another's faith practices and beliefs.

Furthermore, Elizabeth calls on the need for young people to partake in ISF work so that religious peace, tolerance, and respect can be passed to the next generation.

Elizabeth's 30-years of work with Interfaith Search Fiji and her commitment as a Lay Consecrated Virgin has helped strengthen her Catholic identity and inter-religious work, but Elizabeth concludes that there is still a lot of IRD awareness left to be done.

"Vatican II opened the window to communicating with other faiths, however, our people still need a lot more awareness to understand that Inter-Religious Dialogue is not something that threatens their Catholic identity but actually has the power to enrich it."



A young Elizabeth (far right) with school peers



Elizabeth with members of her community and a visiting Irish priest in Kumkum



Elizabeth with friends at Xavier College

A holy pilgrimage

Priscilla Magdalin

On Saturday 1st June I organised a pilgrimage walk for priests, seminarians, lay missionaries, members of Catholic Religious Societies, and parishioners from Raiwaqa to visit six temples in Suva. We began the day with a prayer by Father Frank before visiting the Sai Temple, the Hare Krishna Temple, the Sangam Temple, Brahma Kumaris, Shri Sanatan Dharm Temple, and the Sikh Gurudwara Temple.

It was a hot and sunny day but there were no complaints of anyone being thirsty or dizzy as the pilgrims visited around Samabula and Toorak. For many of us, it was the first time to enter into places of worship. We learned of their history, their rituals, and their religious devotions. Some of the temples shared the value of, "Service to mankind is service to God," reminding me of my Christian duty to serve others.

At the Hare Krishna temple, they chanted mantras 280 times a day and it helped me appreciate that as a Catholic I can say my rosary once or twice a day and that would be enough. At the Sai temple pilgrims were surprised to find a statue of Mother Mary which was used as an example for children to respect their mothers.

During lunch the pilgrims and I stopped at my home where we shared sandwiches, biscuits, and juice while reflecting on the first

part of the day. Everyone was in high spirits with the excitement of learning and experiencing other faith traditions, but for me, I looked especially forward to visiting the Sikh Gurudwara Temple that afternoon.

I was born to a Sikh father and a Catholic mother. My father allowed my siblings and I to be baptised into the faith when we were babies and we received all seven sacraments to practise Catholicism throughout our lives.

My father has now passed on, but I only wish I could thank him for allowing me to be Catholic because it has enriched my life and spirituality.

That afternoon pilgrimage to the Sikh Temple, Bhai Preetam (Head Priest) spoke about their worship of one God and that the temple is open to every race of people,



culture, and faith. Bhai Preetam allowed our group to conclude our holy pilgrimage with a prayer and spiritual hymn. It was a very special moment because we felt God's Holy Spirit sweep quietly through the temple as we sang, "Jesus we adore you. Lay our lives before you. How we love you."

The holy pilgrimage helped me to build bridges and connect with other faiths that day. Upon hearing the diverse teachings and belief systems I realised that despite our differences, there are many things that also connect us as believers.

The holy pilgrimage on June 1st helped me develop a deeper connection to my faith. After hearing the different teachings from other religions I appreciated more deeply the gifts of forgiveness, love, and joy that is available through Catholicism. Inter-Religious Dialogue helps us to respect and value people of other faith groups, but it also helps us to grow closer to Christ.





Emptying myself

Dan Burese

I was not really prepared for the IRD pilgrimage and the experience that came with it. Celine, Margaret, Emosi and Lavenia, our parish class 6 post-confirmation students, accompanied Master Amani and I on the pilgrimage. We joined a consortium of Columbans and a group of Cluny Sisters for the experience. To make sense of this pilgrimage I forced myself to empty all the preconceived ideas I had about religions outside my own. This was essential in order to appreciate the differences, or if any, the similarities.

Starting from the Sri Satya Sai Shridi Temple on Toorak Road, our pilgrimage ended on the hilltop in Samabula at the Sikh Gurdwara temple. In between, the scorching midday sun spurred us on to another three temples and a meditation centre: Hare Krishna, Sangam Temple, Brahma Kumaris, and Sanatan Dharm Temple. There were six places of worship in all, each having their own peculiarities, teachings, founders and foundresses, rituals and ways of worship. It was an interesting combination of teachings.

The Sangam and the Sanatan religious practices are laden with rituals and deifying of symbols and statues. They derive their spirituality from deifying these ceramic or porcelain figurines. Incensing these idols elevates their prominence to the spiritual realm. They chant their prayers and mantra. Sai and Hare Krishna, believe to a large extent

in the universality of God and the brotherhood of mankind. They have their prayer rituals they follow as well. Figurines and statues feature prominently too in their places of worship, though to a much lesser degree than the Sangam and the Sanatan. Interesting to note their founders once walked the Earth and even stopped over in Fiji during their life time. The Brahma Kumaris focused on meditation as their founder experienced enlightenment through the practise. I tried relating my experience there with our morning meditation back at school. For them you had to be up very early to get the most out of the meditation and the mantra. The Sikh temple, our last stop, offered a lot of interesting stories of their history in Fiji and how they came to be a beacon of hope on the hill top at Samabula. Amazingly, all Sikhs have the Singh surname. They place a lot of emphasis on their holy

book which they elevate to godly status. They pride themselves in the practice of good hygiene and musical accompaniments in their prayer and worship.

After the experience, I appreciated the diverse ways of worship of the different religions in Fiji. It never ceased to amaze me how important religion is for them and how prayers and rituals brings the presence of their gods much closer to the way they live their lives and their relationship with one another.



Priscilla with Brahma Kumaris members



Mr Visvanath Das introducing pilgrims to the Hare Krishna temple



Shri Sanatan Dharm temple



Pilgrims inside the Sangam temple



Fr Frank converses with a Hindu priest



Young pilgrims from Raiwaqa Parish



Fr Frank and a member of the Brahma Kumaris



Pilgrims included lay missionaries and nuns



Warm hospitality at the Sai temple



Fr Carlo and seminarians seated in the Sai temple



A worshiper pays tribute inside the Sai temple. Interestingly there was a statue of Mary and Jesus

God is found where people love one another

Elia Poasa

This was my first experience of visiting different temples. Previously I had attended some Hindu ceremonies near home – puja, weddings and funerals. This was different because here they explained their faith. It was like watching the famous Hindi movie P K where Amar Khan, searching for the truth, visits a temple, a mosque and a church to find which one has the true God.

He found that the one true God is within – God is found where people love one another.

Hindus have many ways of reminding themselves to respect their holy place. We took off our shoes at the entrance to the temples whereas we wear shoes going into our churches. Only the pujari (priest) is allowed to approach the statue of the main goddess in the Sangam temple. Only special devotees are allowed inside the rails in the Hari Rama temple. It highlights that we are sinners and must be humble and aware of the Lord's presence. Only the anointed ones with a special role are allowed in the holiest places.

I found it interesting that people who have eaten meat are not allowed to enter the temple. We were told by our pilgrimage organizers not to eat meat that day. Everyone, before entering the temple, has to walk clockwise around the temple i.e. keeping the sacred place on their right hand side. This was something new and unusual for me – no short cuts were allowed. Rituals are clearly very important in Hinduism.

Hindus give great importance to rituals but it struck me that Sikhs put the stress on the Word – their Guru Granth Sahib. This can speak to us Christians. Everything is contained in the Word of God. I really liked how the Sikh priest explained the importance of its teaching to them.

I was impressed too by the way the Sikhs respect the Word of God. They always wrap their sacred scriptures in a special cloth and put it in a clean and special place. While reading it they fan it reverently with a fly whisk. I was struck by this reverence because we Christians mark our bibles without thinking. The Sikh priest shared how shocked he was that a

Christian acquaintance who wanted to contact him wrote the priest's phone number on his bible.

This pilgrimage changed the way I look at my Hindu brothers and sisters. I used to hear Christians say that Hindus pray to idols and worship idols, not the true God. But I see now that Hindus believe not in statues but in what is represented by the statues.

Our Sai Baba hosts explained that a stone could be put there instead of a statue because the meaning is not in the thing itself but lies in who it represents – God.

They are not praying to the idol but to the invisible God it represents. They believe in only one God – though there are many manifestations and representations of that God.

I discovered during the holy pilgrimage that we are not so different after all and that we share some similarities that can connect us rather than divide.

Common IRD questions

with Father Patrick McInerney

Father Patrick McInerney is the Vice-Director and Inter-Religious Dialogue Coordinator of the St Columban Mission Society in Australia and New Zealand



Will it affect my Catholic identity?

Yes, Inter-Religious Dialogue will affect your 'Catholic' identity. It will stretch it and make it 'catholic,' which means 'universal,' a reaching out to embrace all others. It is following the Gospel law, to be like your heavenly Father, who "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Mt 5:45). Inter-Religious Dialogue will not weaken or dilute your faith. It will deepen and widen it to make it stronger.

Why is it important to listen to what other religions are saying?

When we listen to what other religions are saying, we learn about God's presence and activity in their lives and our idea of God is expanded and deepened. Also, learning about other religions helps us appreciate more what is particular to our own faith. For Catholics and Christians, it is God's identification with us and our world through the incarnation of Jesus, and the invitation to participate in the inner life of the Blessed Trinity.

What if they aren't interested in learning about my Catholic faith?

Christianity is not a religion of quid pro quo, of reciprocity, of "scratch my back and I'll scratch yours". It is a religion of gratuitousness, of gift, of grace. In other words, God took the initiative. God loved us first, even when we didn't deserve it. We must do the same. We must show the same gift of grace that God showed us. Having been transformed by God's love, we must take the step of reaching out to others, even when they are not interested and don't respond! In fact, that is precisely when we most truly witness to the Gospel.

For further information



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