

Christians and Muslims: Protecting Together the Places of Worship

MESSAGE FOR THE MONTH OF RAMADAN AND 'ID AL-FITR 1441 H. / 2020 A.D.

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Vatican City



Dear Muslim brothers and sisters,

The month of Ramadan is so central in your religion and therefore dear to you at personal, familial and social levels. It is a time for spiritual healing and growth, of sharing with the poor, of strengthening bonds with relatives and friends.

For us, your Christian friends, it is a propitious time to further strengthen our relationships with you, by greeting you, meeting you on this occasion and, where possible, by sharing in an *iftar* with you. Ramadan and *'Id al-Fitr* thus are special occasions to foster fraternity between Christians and Muslims. It is in this spirit that the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue offers its prayerful best wishes and hearty congratulations to you all.

The thoughts we like to share with you this year following our cherished tradition are about the protection of the places of worship.

As we all know, the places of worship occupy an important place in Christianity and Islam, and in other religions as well. For both Christians and Muslims, churches and mosques are spaces reserved for prayer, personal and communitarian alike. They are constructed and furnished in a way that favours silence, reflection and meditation. They are spaces where one can go deep in himself/herself, so favouring for God-experience in silence. A place of worship of any religion therefore is "a house of prayer" (*Isaiah 56:7*).

Places of worship are also spaces for *spiritual hospitality*, where believers of other religions also join for some special ceremonies like weddings, funerals, feasts of the community etc. While they participate in the events in silence and with due respect to the religious observances of the believers of that particular religion, they also savour the hospitality accorded to them. Such practice is a privileged witness to what unites believers, without diminishing or denying what distinguishes them.

In this regard, it is worthwhile to recall what Pope Francis said when he made a visit to the *Heydar Aliyev Mosque*, in Baku (Azerbaijan) on Sunday, 2 October 2016: "Meeting one another in fraternal friendship in this place of prayer is a powerful sign, one that shows the harmony which religions can build together, based on personal relations and on the good will of those responsible".

In the context of recent attacks on churches, mosques and synagogues by wicked persons who seem to perceive the places of worship as a privileged target for their blind and senseless violence, it is worth noting what the Document on "*Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*", signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Dr Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, in Abu Dhabi, on 4 February 2019, said: "The protection of places of worship – synagogues, churches and mosques – is a duty guaranteed by religions, human values, laws and international agreements. Every attempt to attack places of worship or threaten them by violent assaults, bombings or destruction, is a deviation from the teachings of religions as well as a clear violation of international law".

While appreciating the efforts done by the international community at different levels for the protection of the places of worship worldwide, it is our hope that our mutual esteem, respect and cooperation will help strengthen the bonds of sincere friendship, and enable our communities to safeguard the places of worship to assure for coming generations the fundamental freedom to profess one's own beliefs.

With renewed esteem and fraternal greetings, in the name of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, we convey friendly wishes for a fruitful month of Ramadan and a joyous *'Id al-Fitr*.

From the Vatican, 17 April 2020

Miguel Angel Cardinal Ayuso Guixot, MCCI
President

Rev Msgr Indunil Kodithuwakku Janakarathne Kankanamalage
Secretary

Explicative Note

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue sends, every year, a message to the Islamic community on the occasion of the month of Ramadan and *'Id al-Fitr*, the feast that concludes it.

This year's message, which was prepared before the spread of the COVID 19 pandemic, reflects on the theme of respect to and protection of places of worship.

As the President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, I wish and pray that Christians and Muslims, united in a spirit of fraternity, demonstrate solidarity with the Coronavirus-affected humanity, invoking the Almighty and Merciful God for the protection of every human being, most specially, for the healing of the afflicted and for the grace to all to overcome these difficult moments.