

“Religions as builders of peace in the spirit of Assisi”

Interreligious Event

London, 17 October 2026

Address

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Prefect, Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue

Your Eminence Cardinal Vincent Nicholas,
Your Graces Richard Moth and Bernard Longley,
Your Excellency Patrick McKinney and other brother Bishops present,
Respected religious leaders, representatives, scholars, promoters of interreligious dialogue and peace-activists from diverse religious traditions, and from different Christian denominations, and dear friends,

It gives me immense joy to be present at this interreligious event, organized ahead of the 40th anniversary of the Assisi event of 1986 and in the 800th death anniversary of St. Francis of Assisi, who remains a symbol of commitment to peace and brotherhood. I wish to express, at the very outset, my own and our Dicastery’s profound gratitude to the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales for organizing this event and to all of you for your gracious presence at this gathering. Our reflection on this occasion is centered on: *Religions as builders of peace in the spirit of Assisi*. I am hopeful that our reflections will strengthen our resolve to work, more and more, for peace and harmony in the world by promoting authentic peace, social friendship, human solidarity, common good, and interreligious dialogue, and collaboration among people.

In keeping with the Second Vatican Council’s affirmations, the Catholic Church has been making a commendable effort to sustain a dialogical spirit among religions in order to foster mutual understanding, acceptance and collaboration in the everyday life situations of their adherents.

Saint Paul VI—the “Pope of dialogue”— went beyond the mere theological and philosophical research into interreligious dialogue. He aimed to make it not only a fundamental dimension of the Catholic mission but also an essential pathway to global peace. In 1968, he exhorted all people of good will to celebrate January 1 as “The Day of Peace.” He desired that *“every year, this commemoration be repeated as a hope and as a promise, at the beginning of the calendar which measures and*

outlines the path of human life in time, that Peace with its just and beneficent equilibrium may dominate the development of events to come.”¹

Saint John Paul II, the pontiff who famously coined the expression “the spirit of Assisi” highlighted that “Religions have the necessary function of helping to dispose human hearts so that true peace can be fostered and preserved.”² This “spirit of Assisi” has been slowly yet steadily growing since the historic Prayer for Peace Event in Assisi on 27 October 1986, positively influencing peaceful collaboration and friendship among religions. In his address that day at Assisi, Saint John Paul II distinctly stated: *“Peace awaits its builders. Let us stretch our hands towards our brothers and sisters, to encourage them to build peace upon the four pillars of truth, justice, love and freedom. Peace is a workshop, open to all and not just to specialists, savants and strategists. Peace is a universal responsibility: it comes about through a thousand little acts in daily life.”*³

In his message for the celebration of the 44th World Day of Peace in 2011, Pope Benedict XVI profoundly noted: *“Peace is a gift of God and at the same time a task which is never fully completed. A society reconciled with God is closer to peace, which is not the mere absence of war or the result of military or economic supremacy, much less deceptive ploys or clever manipulation. Rather, peace is the result of a process of purification and of cultural, moral and spiritual elevation involving each individual and people, a process in which human dignity is fully respected.”*⁴ While peace remains a gift and a task, it also entails purification and conversion of hearts, minds and actions.

Pope Francis often spoke of “a principle indispensable to building of friendship in society: namely, that unity is greater than conflict.”⁵ He strongly believed that religions must urge their followers to avoid weaponizing faith in conflicts. Not only through his words but also through his personal gestures and friendships with people of other faiths, he showed his great love for peaceful relationships and genuine proximity. He prayed to God, “to prepare our hearts to encounter our brothers and sisters, so that we may overcome our differences rooted in political thinking,

¹ Pope Paul VI, Message for the observance of a Day of Peace (1 January 1968), in https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_p-vi_mes_19671208_i-world-day-for-peace.html, accessed on 12 October 2026.

² Pope John Paul II, Address to the leaders of world religions, Assisi (29 October 1986), in https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1986/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19861029_religioni-non-cristiane.html, accessed on 12 October 2026.

³ Pope John Paul II, Address to the Representatives of Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the World Religions, Assisi (27 October 1986), <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/atti-commemorativi/pope-john-paul-ii/1986-address-to-christian-churches-and-world-religions.html>, accessed on 12 October 2026.

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace (1 January 2011), in https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20101208_xliv-world-day-peace.html, accessed on 12 October 2026.

⁵ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* on Fraternity and Social Friendship (3 October 2020), n.245, in https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html, accessed on 12 October 2026.

language, culture and religion.”⁶ He also appealed to us to pray by saying, “Let us ask him (God) to anoint our whole being with the balm of his mercy, which heals the injuries caused by mistakes, misunderstandings and disputes. And let us ask him for the grace to send us forth, in humility and meekness, along the demanding but enriching path of seeking peace.”⁷

Pope Leo XIV, as we are familiar by now, encourages everyone to walk towards an unarmed and disarming peace. Beginning his message for the 59th World Day of Peace in 2026 with the characteristic greeting of the Risen Lord Jesus: “*Peace be with you*,”⁸ he reminds religions that “An essential service that religions must render to a suffering humanity is to guard against the growing temptation to weaponize even thoughts and words.”⁹ He exhorts that “alongside action, it is more necessary than ever to cultivate prayer, spirituality, and ecumenical and interreligious dialogue as paths of peace and as languages of encounter within traditions and cultures.”¹⁰ He hopes that “every community become a ‘house of peace,’ where one learns how to defuse hostility through dialogue, where justice is practiced and forgiveness is cherished.”¹¹

Among the various etymologies of the word “religion,” the one perhaps closest to us is *religare* – “to bind.” Every religion, in its most literal and central sense, is bound to the Divine or to a Transcendental reality. Consequently, it is bound to the characteristics of peace, love, and justice. These form the core virtues of every religion and the very foundations of our faiths. It is, therefore, to be hoped, throughout the world, that serving as instruments of peace, harmony and common good, religions give a higher visibility to peacemaking activities and peacebuilding initiatives in the spirit of Assisi. It is in this way that the fundamental desire for the Good inherent in all religions will be fulfilled.

May the unity among us that was manifested at Assisi grow evermore and become a beacon of hope for the world.

I would like to conclude my address with the words pronounced by St. John Paul II 40 years ago in Assisi: “Let us continue to spread the message of peace. Let us continue to live the spirit of Assisi.”¹²

Thank you!

⁶ Ibid, n.254.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Pope Leo XIV, Message for the 59th World Day of Peace (1 January 2026), in <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/messages/peace/documents/20251208-messaggio-pace.html>, accessed on 12 October 2026.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Pope John Paul II, Address to the leaders of world religions, Assisi (29 October 1986), in https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1986/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19861029_religioni-non-cristiane.html, accessed on 12 October 2026.