



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

The Western USA Lieutenancy and its commitment to interfaith encounters



As a member of our Order and the Ecumenical and Interreligious Officer of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the Year of Mercy provided me with a unique opportunity. In inaugurating the Jubilee Year, **Pope Francis expressed his hope to open a year of “fervent dialogue” among Christians, Muslims and Jews**, so that all who professed faith in a merciful God may be stronger in demonstrating mercy toward each other and that the year “open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better; may it eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination.” This resonated well with what the Lieutenant Michael Scott Feeley and the Council of the Western USA Lieutenancy have been asking me: provide us with opportunities to interact with Jews and Muslims.

I suggested that in each of our regions we approach this opportunity presented to us by His Holiness in two ways: one **educational** – presentations on what does “mercy” mean in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; one **service oriented** - with members of all three Faiths participating in some form of social justice endeavor together.

I was quite gratified to see that our regions accepted my suggestion and implemented it in various ways. For example, in **Phoenix**, we organized a showing of the film “Open Bethlehem” with the filmmakers for 200 Christians, Jews and Muslims, followed by an interfaith panel discussion; in **Salt Lake City**, the Lieutenancy sponsored an interfaith panel on mercy at the Diocesan Pastoral Congress; and in **San Diego**, the Order arranged an interfaith session on mercy and then the interfaith attendees cooked and served dinner at Fr. Joe’s Village to homeless families together.

In **Los Angeles**, we took advantage of the presence of three visiting eminent scholars - one Catholic, one Jewish, one Muslim – and engaged them to speak to us on mercy from their three religious perspectives. We also invited members of the Jewish and Muslim communities to join us for these presentations in order to begin cultivating relationships with them which – ideally - would then **lead to**

members of all three faiths engaging in a social justice endeavor together. One area of dialogue is simply what Pope Francis terms the “**dialogue of encounter**” where men and women of different Faiths encounter each other, get to know each other, learn about and from each other, eliminating the stereotypical images with have of each other. This I believe we achieved. For example, I recall several of the Catholics who attended our educational event in Los Angeles telling me they had never even spoken to a Muslim before!

I am very grateful that Pope Francis offered us the Year of Mercy and look forward to providing continued opportunities for us to know and understand our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters better.

Rt. Rev. Alexei Smith

KCHS

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