

October 26, 2008

You may recall that during his April visit to Washington and New York, Pope Benedict XVI met separately with leaders of other Christian churches, with the Jews, and with leaders of other religions. He also meets with such religious leaders regularly at the Vatican.

The pope's meetings with leaders of other churches have as their purpose the restoration of the unity for which Christ willed and prayed at the Last Supper. In his meetings with Jewish leaders and leaders of other religions, the pope seeks to promote moral perspectives on issues of justice and peace, support for family life, respect for minority communities, and cooperation in addressing urgent questions of our time such as religious freedom and poverty.

The bishops in various countries also pursue similar dialogues. In the United States, we have had formal dialogues with leaders of other Christian churches such as the Orthodox (I have been a participant in this dialogue for nearly 25 years), the Episcopalians, Methodists, Disciples of Christ, Lutherans, the Jews, and various other non-Christian religions. The U.S. bishops have formal dialogues with the Muslims on the East coast, West coast, and in the Midwest.

This Sunday through Tuesday, our own Calumet College of St. Joseph, the Northwest Indiana Islamic Center, and our diocese will host the Midwest Muslim – Catholic Dialogue. The major theme of the dialogue this year is: “In the Public Square: Catholics and Muslims on Religious Freedom.”

Muslims and Christians together constitute 55 percent of the world's population. The dialogue here next week takes on additional significance in light of the letter which 128 Muslim leaders sent to Pope Benedict, the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople, and many other leaders of Christian denominations

at the end of this past year's Ramadan fast. The authors of the letter represented many currents of Islamic thought, including both Sunni and Shiite. They proposed a dialogue on the two-fold law of love as a basis for peace and conflict resolution in the world today. Pope Benedict XVI has invited a representative group of Muslim scholars to the Vatican to plan the next step for a dialogue.

There are clear substantial differences between Catholic and Muslim beliefs. While Muslims revere Jesus as a prophet and future judge of the living and the dead, they do not consider Jesus to be divine. They reject the doctrine of God becoming incarnate. They also reject the doctrine of the Trinity. We believe that the Bible is God's final revelation to us. Muslims believe that the Qur'an is God's final revelation.

However, we do have some common religious beliefs. We both worship one merciful and Almighty God who is creator of heaven and earth. We both believe in the Day of Judgment and in the resurrection of the dead. Catholics and Muslims strive to live morally upright lives and both Muslims and Catholics pray, give alms, and fast.

In our dialogues, we strive to overcome misunderstandings about one another. Our respect for one another's religion can be a basis for a friendship that overcomes fear and adversity. As descendents of a common spiritual father, Abraham, we can witness to the one God who calls all women and men to build a civilization of love. Through dialogue, we seek to promote peace based on the dignity of every human person. We promote efforts to cooperate together in protecting the environment, promoting the dignity of family life, and addressing such challenges as poverty and diseases.

I invite your prayers for a truly fruitful dialogue here in Northwest Indiana from Sunday through Tuesday.