

**The Power of Interfaith Collaboration
Archbishop Dennis M. Schnurr
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Xavier University**

Opening Remarks

Good evening. It is a joy for me to be with you this evening as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate: The Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions*. My sincere thanks to Fr. Mike Graham, the Xavier University community, and everyone who contributed towards this special gathering.

When I reflect upon the call of this declaration of the Second Vatican Council, two major approaches come to mind of how we have tried to respond: one is through intentional dialogue and new friendships; and the other is through action for the common good of all.

The call to interfaith dialogue demands the courage to share what each of us believes about the most important questions of our existence: the nature of God, God's plan for us and all of creation; how we should treat each other; and the point of life itself. We all turn to faith as we each struggle with "the unsolved riddles of the human condition," as *Nostra Aetate* put it (no.1). We should approach dialogue with time-honored doctrines and our convictions about the Truth. If we humbly walk the journey of faith together, cognizant that we share the same human condition, then we can learn from what is "true and holy" in each other's answers to life's deepest questions (no.2). The engagement should always be about mutual growth, because God's light is already shining within each of us, becoming all the more radiant in the friendships we foster with each other.

In the Archdiocese, in our parishes and schools, and at other proactive institutions like Xavier University, I'm happy to say that a number of interfaith dialogues and friendships have emerged over the years with our brothers and sisters in the Jewish, Muslim and other religious communities. These moments have enriched the faith journeys of local Catholics, including myself. I hope that this event tonight will inspire all of us to many more such dialogues.

Action for the common good, in my judgement, is one of the most fruitful ways we have responded to the call of *Nostra Aetate*. As the title of this workshop suggests, the world is sorrowfully overwhelmed by conflict. Furthermore, an increasingly consumeristic and secular culture can be apathetic towards what our faith communities have to offer. Sometimes, when our ideals appear counter-cultural, we are even unwanted voices in the public square. But, together, we have much to say and much to do through prophetic witness, service and acts of social justice. Together, we are more powerful and effective in bringing responsibility and hope to a world in conflict. As Pope Francis has said:

We must be peacemakers, and our communities must be schools of respect and dialogue with those of other ethnic or religious groups, places where we learn to overcome tensions, foster just and peaceful relations between peoples and social groups, and build a better future for coming generations. (Message at International Peace Meeting, August 26, 2014)

Locally, we still have a ways to go, but I believe our faith communities have all worked hard to put such words into action. A number of our institutions have organized meaningful service efforts to help the poor and vulnerable. Over the years, we have collaborated towards comprehensive immigration reform, the resettlement of refugees of all faith backgrounds, and several international peace efforts. We are also blessed to have the Metropolitan Area Religious Coalition of Cincinnati, which formally brings together 16 Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Protestant, and Unitarian judicatories around common local concerns, such as decent and affordable housing, racial justice, police and community relations, and human services.

I see many more possibilities we could also consider, such as addressing environmental injustice. Pope Francis in his recently released encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, called forth the spiritual gifts of many religious traditions to improve our stewardship of the Earth. I'm also reminded of Pope Benedict XVI's insistence that all our faith communities share a virtue of temperance which can empower us to care for creation. He declared, "It is incumbent upon religious people to demonstrate that it is possible to find joy in living simply and modestly, generously sharing one's surplus with those suffering from want" (Meeting with Representatives of Other Religions, 2008).

And, so, as long as our world struggles with injustice and violence, we people of faith will be called to bring together the best of our traditions in order to disseminate the love of our Creator. I look forward to hearing the insights of the speakers this evening on the accomplishments and challenges since *Nostra Aetate*, and what more we might all do together to realize more fully its healing vision.

I would like to conclude my remarks by recalling the beautiful, interfaith prayer service we witnessed just a few weeks ago in which Pope Francis joined with other religious leaders at Ground Zero. It illustrated how the brilliance of individual faith traditions can assemble to bring a brighter light to our darkest moments. In his prayer, the Holy Father asked our Creator to:

*Comfort and console us, strengthen us in hope,
and give us the wisdom and courage
to work tirelessly for a world
where true peace and love reign
among nations and in the hearts of all.*

Let this be our prayer as well. With continued dialogue and action, may we be light for each other and light for the world. Thank you, and may God bless us all.