

*Presentation of Bishop Denis Madden
at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute International Ecumenical Advisory Board Meeting
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I. Introduction

First of all I would like to thank you for inviting me to take part in this important discussion on the University of Notre Dame and its relationship with the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, in light of current ecumenical and interreligious affairs as well as prospects for the future.

The Second Vatican Council of the mid 1960's marked a watershed in the Catholic Church with regard to her relationship with other Christian communities throughout the world. The Council signaled the official entrance of the Catholic Church into the modern phenomenon of ecumenism, a call to the Christian community to reexamine itself in light of the prayer of Jesus Christ, "Father, let them be one as you and I are one." The Council, in fact, put ecumenism and interreligious dialogue as essential to and indivisible from the Church's life and mission in the modern world.

Immediately following the Council, the Catholic Church ventured into emerging and deepening relationships with many of the historical mainline Protestant Churches and other religious communities.

Last October we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. In the spirit of the commemoration, much has been proposed on the need to look backward and assess the journey and the fruits in the life of the Church since the Council. One can imagine that the Council Fathers, gathered 50 years ago, could hardly have envisioned the technological, scientific and political achievements, the global interconnectedness, the unparalleled access to information, nor the deep historical conflicts and supposed "clash of civilizations"¹ that characterize the world we live in today. These realities were however foreshadowed in the words of the Council documents, most poignantly *Gaudium et Spes* whose opening lines drew our attention to "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age."² It is no surprise that the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council presents an opportune moment to reflect and evaluate this ecumenical and interreligious journey and to imagine what the future might hold.

To date the reviews of the Church's ecumenical accomplishments are varied. There are those who suggest the initial ecumenical fervor of the years following the Council proved short-lived, stunted by the frustration of deeply entrenched challenges and differences

¹ Huntington, Samuel "The Clash of Civilizations" get notation

² http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

which seemed impossible to overcome. Others point to the shifting tide of preference and concern from ecumenical considerations to interreligious ones, driven by the intensifying presence of religious conflict and identity at the heart of world affairs. Still others suggest that early zeal for ecumenism and interreligious dialogue became absorbed in the emergent enthusiasm for the “New Evangelization” which marked the pontificates of Blessed John Paul II and Benedict XVI. There is some truth to all of these statements, but certainly none of them contain the whole truth.

While interest may at times appear to have waxed and waned, enormous strides forward have been made in ecumenical unity over the last 50 years. The model we have today is the best working model that the Church has engaged in for the last 500 years. Actually it is without eclipsing the imperative goal of Christian unity that interreligious relationships have taken on an increasing importance in today’s global climate. All indications show that religious and cultural divides will continue to be factors of great importance in world events in the century ahead.

And the ecumenical and interreligious work of the Church, rather than being obscured by the new evangelization, are really very much a part of the “new evangelization” and cannot be removed nor separated from it. As Cardinal Kurt Koch said on the occasion of the Year of Faith:

“Ecumenical efforts are closely connected with missionary work (of the Church) because the division of Christians is prejudicial to the holy task of preaching the Gospel and deprives many people of access to the faith ([Ad Gentes](#), n. 6). Moreover the ecumenical commitment pervades the whole of the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World.”³

Addressing representatives of ecclesial communities and different religions the day following his inaugural Mass, Pope Francis left little room for doubt that he sees the ecumenical and interreligious mission of the Church as integral to his vision for the new evangelization. The Holy Father reiterated the words of Pope John XIII from fifty years ago:

“The Catholic Church considers it her duty to work actively for the fulfillment of the great mystery of that unity for which Jesus Christ prayed so earnestly to his heavenly Father on the eve of his great sacrifice; the knowledge that she is so intimately associated with that prayer is for her an occasion of ineffable peace and joy.”⁴

The newly elected Holy Father went on to say:

³ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/weeks-prayer-doc/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20130118_reflection-koch_en.html

⁴ Pope Francis, 20 March 2013, “Audience with Representatives of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the Different Religions.”

*“For my part, I wish to assure you that, in continuity with my predecessors, it is my firm intention to pursue the path of ecumenical dialogue...The Catholic Church is conscious of the importance of promoting friendship and respect between men and women of different religious traditions....”*⁵

Just recently on May 22nd of this year, the Feast of St. Rita of Cascia, during his morning Mass at Domus Sanctae Martae, Pope Francis offered a reflection that will I believe enliven our discussions today. In his homily Pope Francis said that “doing good” is a principle that unites all of humanity, beyond the diversity of ideologies and religions, and creates the “culture of encounter” that is the foundation of peace.

Let me quote just a portion of this in some ways provocative homily.

“The Lord created us in His image and likeness, and we are the image of the Lord, and He does good and all of us have this commandment at heart: do good and do not do evil. All of us. ‘But, Father, this[one] is not Catholic! He cannot do good.’ Yes, he can. He must. Not can: must! Because he has this commandment within him. Instead, this ‘closing off’ that imagines that those outside, everyone, cannot do good is a wall that leads to war and also to what some people throughout history have conceived of: killing in the name of God.”

*The Holy Father went on to say, “The Lord has redeemed all of us, all of us, with the Blood of Christ: all of us, not just Catholics. Everyone! ‘Father, the atheists?’ Even the atheists. Everyone! And this Blood makes us children of God of the first class! We are created children in the likeness of God and the Blood of Christ has redeemed us all! And we all have a duty to do good. And this commandment for everyone to do good, I think, is a beautiful path towards peace. If we, each doing our own part, if we do good to others, if we meet there, doing good, and we go slowly, gently, little by little, we will make that culture of encounter that we need so much. We must meet one another doing good. ‘But I don’t believe, Father, I am an atheist!’ But do good, we will meet one another there.”*⁶

Not surprisingly this brief homily created a bit of a stir. Did the Pope say that all atheists are going to heaven? As David Perry comments in a subsequent article in the *Atlantic*:

“Perhaps the focus on atheism, as breathtaking as this issue has proven to be for the media and blogosphere, misses the more powerful concept at the core of Francis’ homily: the culture of encounter. In the documents from the Second Vatican Council, as well as much older texts, one finds numerous explicit statements about our shared humanity, universal rights, and the necessity to find common ground. This idea of encounter lays out a pathway for us to locate and recognize those commonalities.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/05/22/pope_at_mass:_culture_of_encounter_is_the_foundation_of_peace/en1-694445

“In his homily, Pope Francis is laying out his roadmap for just how this might happen. The question now is whether this was just one of many thoughts expressed in a daily homily, or whether encounter will emerge as a new idea around which to shape the church in our complex, pluralistic, 21st century world.”⁷

Moving beyond “the diversity of ideologies and religions” and creating a “culture of encounter” which can serve as “the foundation of peace” may well lay out the future vision for the University of Notre Dame in its relation to Tantor.

How quickly Pope Francis brings us back to the essentials of the spirit of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue: to recognize the dignity of the other, to learn from them in their pursuit of all that is true and good, and to meet one another in doing good that we might build a culture of goodness, peace, and fraternal unity.

As we reflect upon the journey of the last fifty years of ecumenical and interreligious efforts in the life of the Church we ask ourselves, how far have we come and how successful have we been in creating a “culture of encounter”? Are we today more apt to meet one another along the journey “doing good” than we were fifty years ago? What new challenges have arisen, what still needs to be accomplished, and where do we go from here?

II. Signs of Hope and Opportunity on the Ecumenical and Interreligious Horizon.

In our work in the United States Bishop’s Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs my brother bishops and I are afforded a privileged vantage point from which to shed some light on these questions. Our committee, comprised of 23 bishop members and even more consultants, directs the official ecumenical and interreligious work of the Church on a national level. We have the honor of experiencing firsthand the many signs of hope and opportunity that are flourishing in our relationship with other Christian churches, communities and people of belief throughout the country and abroad. While anything but exhaustive, and respecting our constraints of time, I would like to share with you just a few of those signs of hope and opportunity that stand out when surveying the ecumenical and interreligious horizons of the Church in the United States.

A. Ecumenical

The North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation which began in 1965 has produced a number of important agreed statements including a major study of the *filioque* problem, the date of Easter and mutual recognition of Baptism.

⁷ <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/05/no-the-pope-didnt-just-say-all-atheists-go-to-heaven/276214/>

The most important recent statement, published on October 2, 2010, is called the “Vision Statement.” The full title is: “Steps Towards a Reunited Church: A Sketch of an Orthodox-Catholic Vision for the Future”. As far as we know, this is the first time a Catholic-Orthodox dialogue group proposed elements of what a reunited Catholic and Orthodox Church might look like, including the role the Bishop of Rome would play. The document will be the topic of this year’s Orientale Lumen Conference in Washington, DC.

The Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue in the USA also began in 1965 and since that time has issued 15 agreed statements on various topics. In most recent years, the crisis in the Anglican Communion surrounding the Church’s teaching on authority and moral issues, especially regarding human sexuality, has introduced new issues between our Churches. The current round of this dialogue is taking the bull by the horns and looks carefully at these questions and how our churches have come to different conclusions on some specific issues. It will quite possibly issue an agreed statement on this topic in October.

As you can see 1965 was a big year for us with regard to ecumenical dialogue. In the same year four denominations of the Reformed family of churches and representatives of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops launched an official conversation. The United Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Presbyterian Church (U.S.), the Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ appointed a team of pastors, theologians and lay members to initiate an ongoing consultation. At several points, other members of the Reformed family, such as the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the Christian Reformed Church and the Hungarian Reformed Church, joined in the process.

The first round in the series of meetings discussed the topics of revelation, the scriptures, and tradition. This work was foundational to the collaboration on other topics that followed. Over its lifetime this consultation has produced eight important publications, which continue to inform both Reformed and Catholic traditions, as well as others, of the ecumenical relationships at work in this dialogue.

In 2011, leaders of four churches of the Reformed tradition and Cardinal Francis George on behalf of the United States Catholic Bishops signed the significant “Common Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Baptism.” The agreement requires that flowing water and the Trinitarian formula be used for baptisms to be valid. In January 2013, leaders from these five denominations stood before the entire body of Christian Churches Together (CCT), with its more than 35 member churches, to publicly celebrate the agreement during an ecumenical prayer service. Members of the many churches present felt moved, calling it a healing moment and a step forward in ecumenism.

The Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue in the United States first met in 1965 and over the years has discussed issues ranging from the Nicene Creed, the sacraments, papal primacy, the Eucharist, teaching authority and infallibility in the Church, the saints and Mary, scripture and tradition. The landmark 1983 dialogue document “Justification by Faith” is

commonly recognized as a prelude to and a key preparatory document for the subsequent “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” by the Lutheran World Federation and the Holy See.⁸

The Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue completed its most recent common statement entitled "The Hope of Eternal Life" in 2010, which explores in depth the common belief of Catholics and Lutherans in Jesus Christ's promise of eternal life.

The United Methodist-Catholic Dialogue was established in 1966 and over the years has discussed a wide range of issues from education, ordained ministry, the universality of the Church, to the Eucharist. The recently-concluded round of the dialogue, co-chaired by United Methodist Bishop Timothy Whitaker and Catholic Bishop William Skylstad, examined concern for the environment from a Eucharistic perspective and published: “Heaven and Earth are Full of Your Glory.” This document has been particularly well received by both communities. Its publication was covered by L’Observatore Romano and has been cited in a number of scholarly publications since publication.

Christian Churches Together in the USA, an ecumenical forum that began with a meeting hosted by Cardinal Keeler in Baltimore in September 2001, has become what some have called the model for ecumenism in the 21st century. Its broad-based structure incorporates five families of churches: historic Protestant, Catholic, African American, Orthodox and Evangelical/Pentecostals, making CCT the most inclusive ecumenical structure in the country.

Earlier this year, CCT brought together Christian leaders for the 50th anniversary of the publication of Martin Luther King’s famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” jointly publishing, at long last, a public response on behalf of all the Christian communities represented. Their formal response was signed and presented to Dr. King’s daughter, Dr. Bernice King. USCCB Vice President Archbishop Joseph Kurtz delivered remarks at the event which received wide-spread attention in Christian and secular news media.

While dialogue between the American Catholic community and the American Evangelical community seemed far off not so many years ago, today there appear to be new openings between our two communities.

Just this last April an international conference was held in Rome sponsored by the German Bishops’ Conference on: *Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Charismatics: New Religious Movements as a Challenge for the Catholic Church*. Members of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, including its President, Cardinal Kurt Koch, participated in this meeting of close to 100 scholars, bishops, and pastors from around the world. Areas of concern included how does the Catholic Church perceive these new movements; is the Spirit speaking to us through these movements; what are the potential areas of conflict between the Catholic Church and these new movements; what makes

⁸http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_3110199_9_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html

these movements so attractive; and how can the Catholic Church relate to these movements in a constructive way.

Despite the difficulties and mistrust built atop strongly held doctrinal differences between Evangelicals and Catholics these two communities have and continue to work together on a number of moral issues confronting our nation. Rooted in strong convictions about the sanctity of human life, sexual morality, and the role of the family in educating children, Catholics and Evangelicals find themselves heavily engaged in related social issues, and partners with the same political and social will. A rising cooperation between Catholics and Evangelicals in the public square over values both hold dear has become the new norm for the last fifty years.

The 1994 document “Evangelicals and Catholics Together”⁹ and its 1998 counterpart, while not official documents representing the United States Bishops but rather the work of independent Catholic theologians and Evangelical colleagues, were landmark documents spelling out the need for Protestants and Catholics to deliver a common witness to the modern world on the eve of the third millennium. Though received with strong diversity of opinion and polemics in some corners, the fact that such conversations were taking place was itself a testimony to a growing relationship between our two communities.

Most recently San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone found some of his strongest allies in California Evangelical Pastors in battling California’s “Proposition 8.” Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori, Chair of the Bishops’ Subcommittee on Religious Freedom has also found allies among evangelicals, including the Southern Baptist Convention and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.

The Rev. Robert Schuler of Crystal Cathedral fame in Orange, California developed a very good relationship with Catholic Bishop Emeritus of Orange, Tod Brown through the years. While developers and a neighboring college sought to purchase the Crystal Cathedral, the tower of prayer, elementary and high school, cemetery and shrines on the 35 acre property, the Rev. Schuler wanted the Catholic diocese of Orange to have this prestigious property because he wanted it to be used as a place of worship, learning, and evangelization and he thought the Catholic Church could best make this happen.

A phrase coined with increasing frequency in young Catholic circles is: “Evangelical Catholicism.” Appearing in pastoral programs of dioceses and youth or university student movements around the country, the term is meant to describe this fusion between a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and an enthusiastic commitment to the spreading of the Gospel, both characteristic of Evangelical Christianity.

⁹ <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/01/evangelicals--catholics-together-the-christian-mission-in-the-third-millennium-2>

And just this year, George Weigel in his most recent book “Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st Century Church”¹⁰, describes the future of an era of Catholicism with a vision that resembles the same spirit as the Evangelicals. The “New Evangelization” to which John Paul II called the Church throughout his Pontificate envisioned many of these same characteristics.

Last year in Rome, Dr. Lamar Vest, President of the American Bible Society, became the first Pentecostal to address the Synod of Catholic Bishops on the New Evangelization, the 25th session since Pope Paul VI established the synod in 1967.¹¹ Dr. Vest spoke on the animating role of the word of God for renewed mission in the world. Also addressing the synod was an American representing the Baptist World Alliance, Dr. Timothy George, Dean of the Beeson Divinity School of Samford University. He made three points, one of which was the biblical imperative for Christian unity, which is never an end in itself but is always in the service of evangelization, echoing what was said by Cardinal Kurt Koch.¹²

It was with a touch of hyperbole that the well-known Evangelical writer Ian Hunter suggested that “the first place every serious Protestant turns to today for guidance on Christian social doctrine is the Catechism of the Catholic Church and failing that, the encyclicals of Pope John Paul II.”¹³ Of course great differences of opinion on matters of serious import still exist. But Ian Hunter’s comment suggest a subtle truth: in the battle ground of the so called “culture wars,” like minded Christians are learning to glean from one another’s teaching with less and less of a sense of threat and territorial boundary, and with a greater sense of a shared tradition.

These accomplishments represent the signs of the times in a rising tide of Catholic-Evangelical relations in the United States.

B. Interreligious

The USCCB’s dialogue with the American Muslim community has been on-going since the early 1990’s and has proven to be very fruitful, creating strong bonds of friendship and mutual respect and collaboration with major organizations representing the American

¹⁰ Weigel, George. “Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st Century Church” Basic Books, 2013.

¹¹ <http://www.news.va/en/news/presentation-of-the-synod-on-the-new-evangelisation>

¹² See the paper by Bro. Jeffrey Gros, “The New Evangelization: Unity in Proclamation and the Proclamation of Unity,” soon to be published. Vest’s intervention can be found here: [http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02_inglese/b07_02.html#INTERVENTION_OF_THE_SPECIAL_GUEST_DR._LAMAR_VEST,_PRESIDENT_OF_THE_AMERICAN_BIBLE_SOCIETY_\(UNITED_STATES_OF_AMERICA\)](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02_inglese/b07_02.html#INTERVENTION_OF_THE_SPECIAL_GUEST_DR._LAMAR_VEST,_PRESIDENT_OF_THE_AMERICAN_BIBLE_SOCIETY_(UNITED_STATES_OF_AMERICA)). George’s intervention can be found here: [http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02_inglese/b19_02.html#_Rev._Dr._Timothy_GEORGE,_Dean_of_the_Beeson_Divinity_School_of_Samford_University_\(UNITED_STATES_OF_AMERICA\)](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02_inglese/b19_02.html#_Rev._Dr._Timothy_GEORGE,_Dean_of_the_Beeson_Divinity_School_of_Samford_University_(UNITED_STATES_OF_AMERICA))

¹³ Douthat, Ross. “Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics”, Free Press, 2012. Pg. 129.

Muslim community. Begun as a singular national dialogue, by the late 1990's the national Catholic-Muslim dialogue had grown into three distinct regional dialogues operating independently of one another.

Our creative engagement with Muslim leaders from the Midwest Dialogue has engaged the critically important questions of Catholic-Muslim marriage and the topic of religion in the public square, all of the presentations of the multiple year round, being featured in a special issue of *Chicago Studies*.

Our Midwest Muslim-Catholic dialogue has decided to address over the next several years the salient themes and current status of *Nostra Aetate*, which will culminate in a national Muslim-Catholic plenary dialogue in 2015 centered on the 50th anniversary celebration of *Nostra Aetate*.

The Mid-Atlantic Muslim-Catholic dialogue is currently in the process of publishing two educational resources for school curriculums, the fruit of a five year round of dialogue meetings. The documents contain principles and guidelines to assist Catholic and Muslim religious educators who are charged with teaching the rudiments of one another's faith tradition: in other words, Catholic educators teaching the tenets of Islam to Catholic students, and Muslim teachers presenting the tenets of Catholicism to Muslim. The documents were produced by a team of scholars from each side and then shared for review, revision, and critic by the dialogue partners. The documents will be available later this year and should prove to be a valuable resource for educators in both communities.

Additionally, building on the success of the three regional dialogues, the US bishops have recently approved the plan to launch a national scholarly dialogue in collaboration with the Catholic University of America, comprised of 8 to 10 of the nation's leading academics from each community, lending an even more enhanced seriousness to our work with Muslims in the U.S.

Since 2006 the USCCB Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs has been engaged in an exchange of ideas and mutual understanding with the Sikh community in the United States. Through its relationship with the World Sikh Council- America Region (WSC-AR), the USCCB has co-hosted several bilateral retreats with leadership and young adult representatives of both communities. Retreat topics have included secularism and the difficulties faced by immigrant communities, the nature of God, the spiritual teachings and practices of the two communities, saints and holiness, and the nature and dynamics of interreligious dialogue.

In addition, in 2006 the two communities met for a landmark all-day Catholic-Sikh bilateral national interreligious consultation at the Church Center of the United Nations. Archbishop Felix Machado, the then Under Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, attended the meeting as special guest and advisor.

The most recent retreat took place in May 2012, in Washington D.C. and was well attended by both religious leaders and youth representatives of the two communities. The biannual dialogue has been so successful both parties have expressed the desire and commitment to make it an annual encounter.

Similarly, over the last 17 years the USCCB has convened a scholarly group with Vaishnava Hindus, facilitating a greater understanding of each other's religious communities. The fruits of the latter are represented in the special edition of Vaishnava Studies of April 2012, which presented all the papers given at the Christian-Vaishnava consultation since the first meeting.

C. Jewish

As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the promulgation of the Second Vatican Council's key document on interreligious affairs, *Nostra Aetate*, we have an opportunity to reflect on what has been accomplished and what is still to be done in our relationship with the Jewish community. In the spirit of the Council, the Catholic Church has been led by three great popes intent on implementing the teachings of *Nostra Aetate* in new and sometimes dramatic fashion. For example, under Pope Paul VI not only was the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church swept clean of anti-Judaism, such as was in the prayer for the Jews on Good Friday, but a renewed theology of Jews and Judaism replaced that ancient prejudice--a theology grown from the simple fact that Jesus was Jewish and in his mission brought forth all that God had accomplished in his chosen people. This new theology acknowledged Jews in their special role as "those first to hear the word of God" and acknowledged them as friends, not as forsaken.

Under Pope John Paul II, a stunning new relationship was forged with Jews internationally, with repentance for Catholic complicity in the Shoah as its foundation, allowing for a dialogue of exchange and understanding unparalleled in the history of our two communities.

With Pope Benedict XVI, a rebuilding of the inner life of the Church relative to her relationship with Jews was possible. Pope Benedict's decision to repeat the visit of his predecessor to the Western Wall and declare such acts as expressions of the way in which every successor of Peter should imagine his relationship to the most sacred of all Jewish sites is stunning. Or again, his firm stand against the anti-Judaism of some break-away groups reaffirmed that the teaching of *Nostra Aetate* has today become descriptive of Catholic identity itself.

Now, Pope Francis shows us by his long-standing friendship with Jews in Argentina that he has already internalized the wonderful lessons of *Nostra Aetate*, along with an immense respect for the Holocaust, thereby opening a door to an even more profound friendship with our Jewish brothers and sisters.

Looking toward the future, the Catholic Church earnestly desires dialogue that is multi-faceted with the Jewish community. First, we hope for an exchange that leaves

behind the negativity of a “dialogue of grievances” which seeks only to find fault, blame or correct the dialogue partner. Instead, we look to build a “dialogue of mutuality” that seeks an understanding of the religious other and an appreciation of the way in which both of our communities share a common spiritual heritage. Second, we hope for dialogue that is unafraid to approach religious topics, never looking to proselytize, but rather to understand the other on his or her own religious terms. Third, we hope for a dialogue which is both theological and pastoral, integrating the way in which our religions inform our actions – whether in policies on end-of-life care; freedom of religious practice relative to school choice, or protection from government intrusion into religious beliefs over health care policies. Our future will be doubly bright if the light of our two faiths can be brought to bear on building a friendship based on God’s providence and the repair of his creation.

Over the last twenty-five years, the USCCB Bishops has engaged in two official dialogues with the American Jewish community: one with the National Council of Synagogues and the other with the Orthodox Union and the Rabbinical Council of America. The dialogues meet once or twice a year and have addressed such topics as moral education in public schools, pornography, holocaust revisionism, the death penalty, religious hatred, children and the environment, the tragic events of September 11, 2001, and domestic religious freedom. A slow but steady strengthening of our relationship and a deepening of trust and mutual understanding has emerged from the years of meeting together. The relationships remain very energetic today and continue to grow in fraternal bonds.

I have offered for you here a brief overview of some of the ongoing developments our office is witness to everyday on the interreligious and ecumenical landscape of the Church. More information on these and other dialogues, and related resource materials, can be found on the USCCB website under “ecumenical and interreligious affairs”.

III. A New Springtime and the Need for Continued Formation

In his book titled “That They Might Be One” Cardinal William Kasper, president emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, referred to the current ecumenical and interreligious moment of the Church as a phase of hibernation.¹⁴ Having rallied from the Second Vatican Council in the 60’s and 70’s with a sense of springtime in full bloom, the past two decades have brought a seeming slumber with the energy of the Church being focused on refortifying its own identity rather than seeking to build bridges with communities outside itself.

Yet a period of hibernation is by its very nature not an end but a period awaiting a new beginning. A winter rests between two spring times. If the last decades have proven a moment of hibernation for the ecumenical and interreligious movements within the Church, we have every reason to believe that a new springtime is shortly upon us. Just this week the preeminent journal *Foreign Affairs* published an article by Victor Gaetan

¹⁴ Kasper, Cardinal Walter *That They Might Be One: The Call to Unity Today*. New York, Continuum, 2004.

which, reviewing the pontificate of Benedict XVI and surmising the ecumenical projection of Pope Francis, stressed the hypothesis that after centuries of long-standing ruptures, “Today, global Christianity is poised to heal (past) rifts and emerge stronger than ever.” “Ecumenism,” Gaetan says, “is on the rise.”¹⁵

What are we called to do as a Church to cultivate and prepare for this new springtime? Earlier this year Bishop Brian Farrell, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, reasserted that ecumenical formation is a key aspect of the search for full unity among Christians when he said: “*Formation is a kind of condition sine qua non for ecumenical awareness effectively to take hold,*”¹⁶. Bishop Farrell went on to insist the ecumenical formation must be programmed and adapted to the variety of vocations, charisms, and ministries in the Church. Ecumenical formation is not just an exercise in pragmatic thinking to network individuals and institutions at the service of unity, but a profound requirement of the doctrine of our Church.

This is where an institution like Tantur is of paramount importance for the future of the Church. Without institutions that can provide top rate formation in ecumenical and interreligious scholarship, training, and programming, capable of being both regional and international while adapting to the shifting sands of time and place, there are no instruments to continue generating the ecumenical and interreligious future of the Church. Tantur describes itself as “a place where people who share a common commitment to the gospel can also share a common life dedicated to the academic pursuits within an ecumenical (and interreligious) context.”¹⁷ This is to say Tantur is a place where ecumenism and interreligious dialogue is not only studied on the highest of levels, but is also lived within the day to day experiences of the institute, gathering a wide variety of people and creeds under its roof, living and sharing in one another’s company. Tantur is precisely the kind of institution that promotes the “culture of encounter” of which Pope Francis said in his homily on the Feast of St. Rita.

And Tantur could not exist without Notre Dame. It is only through the partnership and commitment with an institution such as Notre Dame, lending the highest level of scholarship, an international profile, academic networks, and diverse practical resources that an initiative such as Tantur finds a platform on which it is able to thrive.

IV. The Open Horizon of Collaboration

From the point of view of the USCCB’s Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, there exists a vast and wide open horizon of possibilities for collaboration with Tantur and Notre Dame in our mutual ecumenical and interreligious endeavors, interests, and programming. The Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs is in a unique position to provide expertise, endorsement, consultation, and scholarship that

¹⁵ Gaetan, Victor; “The Church Undivided” Foreign Affairs, May/June 2013.
<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/136516>

¹⁶ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/weeks-prayer-doc/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20130118_reflection-farrell_en.html

¹⁷ Tantur Ecumenical Institute Mission Statement and Goals (Spring 2013)

could prove helpful to your endeavors. Tantar is a natural setting for research colloquiums on ecumenical or interreligious topic of high relevance, projects which could engender strong support among the US bishops.

The many dialogues and consultations which are run on an ongoing basis through our office are an easy resource of faculty and experts for initiatives at Tantar. Some of these dialogues could celebrate landmark meetings by hosting them in Tantar on a special occasion. National training programs for expert or up-and-coming ecumenical and interreligious leaders could be designed, drawing from the diocesan and university networks already have established.

CADEIO, the Catholic Association of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers, hosts week-long leadership training seminars every summer. While generally in the US, a special component of training could take place in Tantar, providing a rare opportunity to broaden the horizons, formation, and commitment of the ecumenical and interreligious officers who labor throughout the diocese of the United States.

Similarly, in the spirit of the Assisi World Day of Prayer for Peace, international interreligious gatherings between youth or seminarians of different religious traditions could be conceived. We have a model for this type of program developed in our office called Generations of Faith, which brings together young adults of different religious backgrounds to engage in interreligious dialogue with their peers and with religious leaders of the diverse communities. Similar programming could be launched on an international level, pulling from Notre Dame's rich student body.

And the USCCB's Washington office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs is a potential venue for Notre Dame to channel the ecumenical or interreligious energies of young students—a likely context for student internships or student involvement in national or regional dialogue work hosted by the bishops.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, I cannot help but reiterate the importance of taking up the invitation of Pope Francis to build a genuine “culture of encounter” within the Church and around the Church, beginning with a renewed commitment to a broad spectrum of ecumenical and interreligious dialogues and relationships. As we pass the benchmark of 50 years since the Second Vatican Council we have every reason to believe that a new springtime of ecumenical and interreligious relationships is on the horizon, if not already upon us. As we have seen, the landscape is already brimming with both past achievements and rich possibilities for the near and long-term future. And as noted by Victor Gaetan, “The pursuit of Christian unity will continue under Francis, not only because the new pope already has a good ecumenical track record, but also because the threats of materialism, intolerance, and oppression show no signs of abating... Francis is personally committed to Christian unity.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Gaetan, Victor; “The Church Undivided” Foreign Affairs, May/June 2013.
<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/136516>

A redoubling of our commitment to well-prepared institutions equipped to impart the highest level of theological and pastoral formation and programming is paramount to the success of this movement. Tantur, through the help of Notre Dame and perhaps in collaboration with resources from USCCB's Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, is an institution uniquely poised to make a lasting global impact as a dynamic international center engaging and creating a "culture of encounter" among people of diverse faiths, religious traditions and cultural backgrounds. In doing so you in turn help lay the foundation for a lasting culture of peace.

Thank you very much.