

Bridges

Building relationships between Christians and Muslims



No. 110 March 2026

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From the Editor

'In our time' there is division, polarisation, conflict, violence, and war: the Hamas terrorist attack on southern Israel on 7 October 2023; the subsequent IDF devastation of Gaza; the dramatic rise in antisemitism and Islamophobia, the former culminating in the horrific terrorist attack on Jews celebrating Hanukkah on Bondi Beach on 14 December 2025, the latter spiralling after the attackers' reported affiliation with ISIS, a terrorist organisation repudiated by Muslim authorities.

The controversial visit of the Israeli President – a solace to Jews traumatised by Bondi, a provocation to those anguished by Israel's actions in Gaza – exacerbated the already volatile situation. Police disruption of the protest and manhandling of Muslim worshippers escalated it further.

Hate speech overflowed on mainstream media. Phrases such as "religious extremists" and "Muslim terrorists", an oxymoron offensive to Muslims, made them feel blamed, profiled, targeted, and further alienated.

The comments by an attention-seeking populist politician, whose words are so utterly deplorable that they don't bear repeating, further aggravated the situation. Threats against Muslims and mosques on the eve of Ramadan provoked fear and anxiety.

How then should we look on Muslims?

'In our time', the English translation of *Nostra Aetate*, the title of Vatican II's document on relations with non-Christian religions, gave this answer 60 years ago: "The Church regards the Muslims with **esteem**" or "The church has a **high regard** for the Muslims." (NA, 3)

Esteem, high regard, respect, affection, appreciation, acknowledgement, mercy, and compassion – these are the values that should inform our relations with Muslims, and with Jews, Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and people of all faiths and worldviews.

'In our time' after Bondi, the Rabbis asked for a *Mitzvah*, a positive act of kindness, compassion, or charity, to shine a light in the darkness, to counter the hatred with love.

'In our time' of division, polarisation, conflict, violence, and war, I commend Glen Campbell's lyrics:

You've got to try a little kindness

Yes show a little kindness,

Yes shine your light for everyone to see.

And if you'll try a little kindness and you'll overlook the blindness

Of the narrow-minded people on the narrow-minded streets.

REV DR PATRICK McINERNEY

Abraham Conference “Listening Circles”

On the afternoon of 16 November 2025, more than 40 Muslims, Jews and Christians gathered at the Bishop Bede Heather Centre in Blacktown to share their feelings about the current situation in Gaza and pathways to peace.

Facilitators assisted two groups to speak from the heart with the “Listening Circles” technique. The depth of honesty was profound. The value of deep listening was acknowledged as building bonds of trust. People also made new friends and deepened relationships over refreshments. Moments such as these are sorely needed in the world today and the hours spent together continue to give us hope.



Women's Interfaith Partnership Aids Afghan Women

On 28 November 2025, the Western Sydney Women's Interfaith Initiative (WSWII) partnered with [Afghan Women on the Move](#) (AWOTM) to support Afghan women and families in need in Western Sydney. Donations of rice, lentils, and hygiene products were generously provided by parishioners of Our Lady of Lourdes, Seven Hills, Good Shepherd, Plumpton, and other donors. The gathering featured the powerful testimony of AWOTM CEO, Maryam Popal Zahid, a refugee who advocates for women facing isolation and hardship. This small but meaningful collaboration successfully built bridges of understanding, showing how faith and compassion create a tangible difference through grassroots action.

International Holocaust Remembrance Day

Kim Chong attended the 2026 International Holocaust Remembrance Day commemoration at Emanuel Synagogue in Woollahra on 27 January. This year marked 81 years after the liberation of Auschwitz. Hosted by the Sydney Jewish Museum in partnership with AAJHSD, the event, “Bridging Generations”, emphasised the transition of memory from Holocaust survivors to future generations. The evening was attended by notable figures, including survivors, Governor-General Sam Mostyn AC, and community leaders. The atmosphere was particularly solemn following the recent antisemitic terror attack at Bondi Beach in December 2025. This tragedy was directly addressed by keynote speaker Professor Sabina Kleytman, who reflected on the life of her father, Alex Kleytman, a Holocaust survivor who tragically lost his life in the Bondi attack. Her address bridged the historical atrocities of the Shoah with the urgent reality of contemporary antisemitism.



Shared Practices for Lent and Ramadan

This year the holy seasons of Lent and Ramadan will unfold side by side, two distinct traditions with similar practices of prayer, fasting, reflection, almsgiving and mercy. As **Fr Brian Vale** attends Iftars while also observing the season of Lent, he reflects on both Islam and Christianity as emphasising the human practices of fasting and good works. Their goal is to encourage emotional and spiritual cleansing, slowing down, and restraint in daily habits so that we can come closer to God/Allah.

Christians also have in mind that they are preparing for Holy Week and the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Both traditions encourage the inner journey, more introspection. Fr Brian says it may be helpful to focus less on our human habits and more on the compassionate God who is inviting us on this inner journey. Our God invites us also to be compassionate and generous. In these testing times our God respects our cultural and religious traditions and invites us to share that grace with others.



Pacific Talks on Interreligious Dialogue

Prof Leo Lefebure from Georgetown University, whom the Centre hosted in Sydney in June last year, visited Fiji in February. **Fr Patrick McInerney** put him in touch with **Pescila Magdalin**, the Columban IRD Coordinator in Fiji. She arranged a series of talks and workshops for faith leaders, Columbans, trainee teachers, trainee catechists, seminarians, and diocesan personnel.

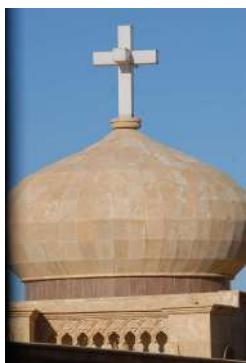
Fr Leo spoke on “Building Bridges of Understanding, Respect, and Collaboration among Faiths”. He shared practical ways of implementing interreligious dialogue in arts, academia, spirituality, work for the common good, and friendship. It was a great promotion of interreligious dialogue for the Archdiocese of Suva. For details see bit.ly/4tQTcXN.

Responding to Terror

The antisemitic terrorist attack on Jews celebrating Hanukkah at Bondi on 14 December 2025 was horrific. It traumatised the Jewish community. At the Centre, we responded immediately. We emailed messages of sympathy and solidarity to Jewish rabbis, friends, and other contacts. We phoned personal friends. We shared their tears and grief. We published a statement on our FB page: bit.ly/4swSPRh. We re-posted statements from Muslim, faith, interfaith, and community leaders and organisations, to ensure that the Jews were enfolded by these expressions of support and sympathy from around Australia and the world.

I attended the multifaith vigil held at St Mary’s Cathedral. Members of the Abraham Conference attended the memorial service at Bondi. We acknowledge the many good things in the midst of horror – the people who gave their lives trying to stop the terrorists, those who risked their lives to disarm the shooters, those who protected others in the danger zone, the first responders who entered it to tend to the wounded, and the kindness, sympathy, and solidarity shown by so many people. These are the enduring memories, shining a light in the darkness, overcoming hatred with love.





Christian Communities Struggle Across Middle East

The future of Christianity in its historic heartland is under severe pressure as communities in the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria face displacement, economic collapse, and the aftermath of war. In the West Bank, residents of Beit Sahour warn that new illegal Israeli settlement outposts are encroaching on land intended for essential infrastructure, including a children's hospital. Combined with movement restrictions and land confiscations, these expansions threaten to end centuries of Christian presence in the Bethlehem area. Meanwhile, in Lebanon and Syria, the Church remains a vital social pillar despite dire conditions. In Syria, Christian-run hospitals and schools serve over two million people regardless of faith, yet the population has plummeted; Aleppo has lost five-sixths of its pre-war Christian community. In Lebanon, organisations like Aid to the Church in Need are providing emergency aid to families caught in the crossfire of regional conflict. Across all three regions, local leaders are calling for global recognition of their plight to ensure these ancient communities do not disappear. *Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/4kroD6B, bit.ly/4qtHjUH and bit.ly/4ra1x77.*

Bendigo's Open Mosque and Community Centre

After a decade of perseverance, the Bendigo Islamic Community Centre is nearing completion, standing as a testament to the power of interfaith resilience. Following intense opposition and far-right protests in 2015, the local Muslim community chose visibility over withdrawal. By partnering with the grassroots Believe in Bendigo campaign and forming the Bendigo Interfaith Council, they replaced division with dialogue. The new centre features an open mosque design with no fences, specifically intended to welcome the wider public. Spokesperson Aisha Neelam notes that the struggle actually strengthened social cohesion, building lasting connections across faith lines. Funded largely by donations, the multipurpose site will soon host prayers, school groups, and workshops. This milestone proves that when communities choose respect and openness, even the deepest fractures can be mended through shared mission and mutual understanding. *Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/4bJl4Fv.*

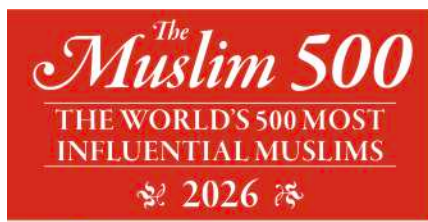


The Zayed Award: Human Fraternity in a Divided World

The 2026 Zayed Award for Human Fraternity has named its latest honourees, highlighting those who bridge deep divides through concrete action. This year's recipients include the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia for their peace efforts, Afghan education advocate Zarqa Yaftali, and the Palestinian development organisation Taawon. Meeting with the award's judging committee, Pope Leo XIV emphasised that human fraternity is not a

"distant ideal" but an "urgent necessity". He cautioned that "words are not enough", noting that without frequent acts of charity, even our highest aspirations fade. The Pope praised the awardees as "sowers of hope" who choose the demanding path of solidarity over the easy path of indifference. From protecting vulnerable children to fostering national reconciliation, these examples prove that the light of fraternity can prevail over the darkness of conflict. We are all challenged to ensure our neighbours are no longer seen as threats, but as brothers and sisters. *Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/45Yyqeo and bit.ly/4rc5Wqf.*

For a resource on dignity and dialogue, see bit.ly/3ZYEkJO. For Pope Leo's message, see bit.ly/40285bT.

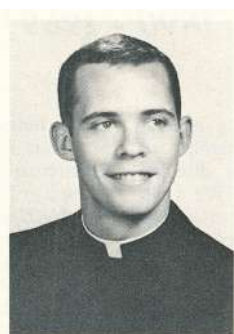


Gaza's People Named Collective 'Person of the Year' in The Muslim 500's Edition

The 2026 edition of *The Muslim 500* has broken tradition by naming the people of Gaza collectively as “Person of the Year”. Published annually by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre in Jordan, the list ranks the 500 most influential Muslims based on their capacity to impact the Muslim world, whether through political, cultural, or religious leadership. Typically, the list selects a single man and woman for person of the year. However, this year, editors chose to honour the collective resilience and moral courage of Gaza’s citizens amid profound humanitarian suffering. The publication described their endurance as a “testament to the strength of the

human spirit”, citing the dignity of those who bury their loved ones, share meagre resources, and continue to document the truth under fire. Notable entries include Dr Ingrid Mattson, prominent Canadian scholar and former president of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), who continues to be a leading voice in interfaith dialogue and women’s leadership. Also Aisha Bewley, one of the world’s most prolific translators of classical Islamic texts into English. And Aref Ali Nayed from Libya, a leading scholar in Christian-Muslim relations and a former ambassador. He is highly regarded for his deep expertise in Interfaith Hermeneutics, having studied at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome. He remains a key figure in high-level theological dialogue with the Vatican. *Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/4re6jAu.*

Vale, Guardian's of Peace



Fr Tom Michel, SJ (1941–2025)

Fr Tom Michel, SJ, a towering figure in Christian-Muslim relations, died in November 2025 in Thailand. Inspired by Vatican II’s *Nostra Aetate*, Fr Tom dedicated more than 50 years to the “dialogue of life”. After earning a PhD in Islamic Thought, he led the Vatican Office for Muslim Relations (1981–1994) and taught at universities across Turkey, Qatar, and Indonesia. Known for his gentle scholarship and deep hospitality, he spent his final years serving tribal communities in Thailand. A bridge-builder who transformed “strangers” into brothers, Fr Tom leaves a lasting global legacy of interreligious harmony. His legacy remains a testament to the power of scholarly rigour paired with a humble, open heart. May he rest in peace.



Imam Abubakar Abdullahi (1936–2026)

Imam Abubakar Abdullahi, the courageous Nigerian cleric who famously saved 262 Christians during a 2018 massacre, has died aged 90. When armed attackers descended on central Nigeria’s Plateau State, the Imam risked his own life by sheltering fleeing families within his home and mosque, stood his ground, and refused to surrender them to the gunmen. His unwavering commitment to interfaith dialogue earned him the US International Religious Freedom Award and Nigeria’s highest national honours. Governor Caleb Mutfwang described his death as a “monumental loss”, celebrating a life distinguished by the protection of the vulnerable. Imam Abdullahi’s bravery remains a powerful counter-narrative to religious violence, proving that compassion can bridge even the most tragic divides.

Pope Leo's Historic Pilgrimage to Middle East

Holy Father promotes unity during visits to Türkiye and Lebanon

In a world increasingly fractured by nationalism and conflict, Pope Leo XIV's first apostolic journey, a six-day pilgrimage through Türkiye and Lebanon, offered a counter-narrative of unity. Spanning from 27 November to 2 December 2025, the visit was more than a diplomatic mission; it was a deeply symbolic culture of encounter designed to mend historical divisions and bolster the region's ancient, yet vulnerable, Christian communities.

Commemorating Nicaea: Heart of Unity

The primary motive for the journey to Türkiye was the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea (325 AD). In the ruins of the ancient city, modern-day İznik, Pope Leo joined Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I for a historic ecumenical prayer service. Standing before the partially submerged remains of the Basilica of St Neophytos, the leaders recited the *Nicene Creed* together in its original 4th-century form. By omitting the *Filioque* ("and the Son"), the Pope made a significant ecumenical gesture, acknowledging the version of the *Creed* shared by both the East and West before the Great Schism of 1054.

The Pope noted that while Nicaea lies in ruins, the faith defined there remains the "enduring foundation" of Christianity. He used the occasion to reject the use of religion to justify violence, stating that "the desire for full communion is always accompanied by the search for fraternity among all human beings".

Türkiye: Crossroads of Faith & Nationalism

In Türkiye, a nation of 87 million where Christians comprise less than 1% of the population, the Pope navigated a complex landscape. Fr Jean-Marc Balhan, SJ, a Jesuit based in Ankara, noted that the greatest challenge for local Christians is often not Islam, but a pervasive nationalism that equates being Turkish with being Muslim.

During his meeting with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Pope rejected the "might is right" mentality and praised Türkiye's role as a bridge between Asia and Europe. He visited the *Diyanet* (Presidency of Religious Affairs) and Istanbul's Blue Mosque, emphasising that plurality is a strength rather than an impoverishment. The visit also highlighted the plight of the Palestinians, a topic of significant mutual concern for both the Vatican and the Turkish authorities.



Pope Leo XIV waves to the faithful as he concluded Mass at the Beirut Waterfront on 2 December 2025.

Lebanon: A Message of Co-existence

The second leg of the trip took the Pontiff to Lebanon, a country St John Paul II once called "a message of freedom". Lebanon officially recognises 18 religious confessions, but the community is currently reeling from a severe economic crisis, the 2020 Beirut port explosion, and regional tensions.

In Beirut's Martyr's Square, a raucous, flower-throwing welcome greeted history's first American Pope. Under a shared tent, Leo sat alongside Sunni, Shiite, Druze, and Christian leaders. After hearing readings from both the Bible and the Qur'an, he hailed Lebanon as a "beacon of hope" for the Arab world. Despite the scars of the 1975-1990 civil war and current political deadlock, the Pope urged the Lebanese people to remain steadfast, reminding them that "fear, distrust, and prejudice do not have the final word".

A Voice for the Future

Throughout the journey, Pope Leo acted as a "voice of peace" in a region he described as suffering under a "third world war fought piecemeal". From lighting candles for unity in İznik to planting olive saplings in Beirut, the pilgrimage served as a tangible reminder that dialogue and cooperation are the only foundations for a common future. As he returned to Rome, the message was clear: the path to peace is found not in uniformity, but in a fraternity that recognises and celebrates the "other".

To read Pope Leo and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew's joint declaration, see bit.ly/4rCmx6a. To read Pope Leo's address at the ecumenical prayer service in İznik, see bit.ly/4a1lb49. To read Pope Leo's address at the ecumenical and interreligious meeting in Beirut, see bit.ly/4qt4Ncw. Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/45Uxury, bit.ly/4tz9DYA and bit.ly/4rNX89Y.

Reflecting on Interfaith Encounter in New Delhi

Missionary of Charity Sister France Marie takes a journey of the heart

As part of my one-year Theology program at Vidyajoti College of Religious Studies, I enrolled in an introductory course on Islam. Before this academic engagement, my understanding of Islam had been shaped largely by second-hand narratives, particularly those conveyed through the media, which often presented distorted or incomplete representations.

Initially, I questioned the relevance of studying other religions within a Christian theological program. However, as the course progressed, I came to appreciate the pedagogical and ecclesial importance of such study. Knowledge, I realised, facilitates understanding, and understanding opens the path to genuine love and respect.

This learning process enabled me to align my outlook with the teaching of the Church, which “rejects nothing of what is true and holy in other religions” and invites Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, to acknowledge, preserve, and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, as well as their social life and culture (NA 2).

A significant component of the course was a visit to a *dargah*, organised by Jesuit Father Joseph Victor Edwin, the tutor of the course, whom some of us call ‘Muslim Father’. As I entered the *dargah*, the words of Vatican II resonated deeply: “together with us they adore the one merciful God”. This prompted a sincere desire to understand how this shared orientation toward the Divine is lived out in the Islamic tradition. At the *dargah*, we engaged in dialogue with a Sufi teacher who received us with notable hospitality and openness.

I was particularly struck by the profound sense of submission to the one God – *tawhid* and *taslim* – that permeates the life of devout Muslims. This submission is expressed not only in prayer and ritual but also in ethical practice, fasting, charity, and simplicity of life. I was surprised by the numerous convergences between Islamic and Christian belief and practice. Muslims, like Christians, affirm the Resurrection, the final Judgment, and the necessity of prayer and vigilance. Their emphasis during Ramadan on being spiritually prepared for the Day of Judgment closely parallels the Christian exhortations to “watch and pray” (Mt 25:13; Mk 13:33).



Additional similarities, resembling, in some respects, the practices of the Missionaries of Charity, include a structured rhythm of daily prayer, a deep reliance on Divine Providence, a commitment to humility among those in leadership, and sustained acts of charity, particularly toward the vulnerable. Their culture of hospitality was especially evident during our visit.

Toward the end of the encounter, I asked the younger Sufi about the challenges Muslims face in the current socio-political context of India, including experiences of persecution. His response reflected remarkable serenity and trust in God. His confidence was reminiscent of the Pauline assurance: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31).

As we walked around the place, I tried to take in every detail – the attitude of those praying and singing, their reactions toward us, and the atmosphere as a whole. My identity as a Missionary of Charity influenced the encounter. The curiosity and respect shown by our hosts highlighted the importance of simple presence in interreligious dialogue.

This encounter significantly transformed my understanding of Islam and encouraged me to deepen my own Christian discipleship. A Sufi teaching states that anyone who meets a Sufi should leave as a better person. Mother Teresa expressed a similar conviction regarding Christians; she used to say that they need not change their religion, but they must walk away better persons. So, I pray that everyone who meets a Christian may walk away a better person, even if they don’t belong to our faith – may they feel welcomed, understood, and above all, loved and accepted.

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/49zl8aM.

Message for the Month of Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr

By the Dicastery of Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican City, 1447 H. / 2026 A.D.

Dear Muslim brothers and sisters,

It is with great joy that I address you on the occasion of the month of Ramadan, which culminates in the Feast of the Breaking of the Fast, *Eid Al-Fitr*. This important annual observance offers me a welcome opportunity to express my closeness, solidarity and respect for you, believers in God, “who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to humanity” (Second Vatican Council, Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, 28 October 1965, 3).

This year, through a providential convergence of calendars, Christians observe this period of fasting and devotion alongside you during the holy season of Lent, which leads the Church toward the celebration of Easter. During this spiritually intense period, we seek to follow God’s will more faithfully. This shared journey allows us to acknowledge our inherent fragility and to confront the trials that weigh upon our hearts.

When we suffer trials – whether personal, familial or institutional – we often believe that understanding their causes will reveal a clear path forward. Yet we frequently discover that the complexity of these situations exceeds our strength. In an age marked by an overload of information, narratives and competing viewpoints, our discernment can become clouded, and our suffering even more acute. At such moments, a question naturally arises: how can we find a way forward? From a purely human perspective, the answer may appear elusive, leaving us with a sense of helplessness.

It is precisely then that the temptation can emerge to yield to despair or to violence. Despair can seem like an honest response to a broken world, while violence may present itself as a shortcut to justice that bypasses the patience required by faith. Yet neither can ever be an acceptable path for believers. A true believer keeps his or her gaze fixed upon invisible Light who is God – the Almighty, the Most Merciful, the only Just One – who “rules the peoples with fairness” (Ps 96:10). Such a believer strives, with every ounce of strength, to live according to God’s commandments, for in him alone are found both the hope of the world to come and the peace so deeply desired by every human heart.

Indeed, we – Christians and Muslims, together with all people of good will – are called to imagine and to open new paths by which life may be renewed. This renewal is made possible through a creativity nourished by prayer, the discipline of fasting that clears our inner vision, and concrete acts of charity. “Do not be overcome by evil,” the Apostle Paul exhorts us, “but overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21).

Dear Muslim brothers and sisters, especially those among you who struggle or suffer in body or spirit because of your thirst for justice, equality, dignity and freedom: please be assured of my spiritual closeness, and know that the Catholic Church stands in solidarity with you. We are united not only by our shared experience of trial, but also by the sacred task of restoring peace to our broken world. We are truly “all in the same boat” (Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 3 October 2020, 30).

Peace – this is my fervent wish for each of you, for your families, and for the nations in which you live. It is not of an illusory or utopian peace, but as Pope Leo XIV emphasized, of one born from the “disarmament of heart, mind and life” (Message for the 59th World Day of Peace, 1 January 2026). Such peace is a gift received from God and nurtured by defusing hostility through dialogue, practicing justice, and cherishing forgiveness. Through this shared season of Ramadan and Lent, may our inner transformation become a catalyst for a renewed world, where the weapons of war give way to the courage of peace.

With these sentiments, I pray that the Almighty may fill each of you with his merciful love and divine consolation.

From the Vatican, 17 February 2026

Cardinal George Jacob Koovakad
Prefect

Msgr Indunil J.K. Kodithuwakku
Secretary

Islam, Feminism, and Family Laws

A global movement led by Muslim women challenges patriarchal norms

In many Muslim-majority societies, family laws grounded in specific religious interpretations continue to shape women's lives, at times reinforcing inequality and limiting access to justice. *Musawah*, a global movement led by Muslim women, challenges these norms by advocating for reform. By bridging feminist ethics with Islamic scholarship, *Musawah* seeks to reshape the discourse on Islam and gender toward transformative legal and social change.

In this Q&A, the Arab Reform Initiative explores the origins, strategies, and impact of *Musawah*.

What is *Musawah*, and what inspired its creation?

"*Musawah*" means "equality" in Arabic. Launched in 2009, it is a global movement advocating for justice and compassion in laws and social practices. It was born from the realisation that *shari'ah* is often systematically invoked as a barrier to gender equality.

The seeds were planted by Sisters in Islam (SIS) in Malaysia, who noticed that patriarchal discourses in countries as diverse as Morocco, Nigeria, and Pakistan followed strikingly similar patterns. To challenge the monopoly held by conservative authorities over religious interpretation, *Musawah* now connects activists and scholars from more than 47 countries to argue that equality must begin within the family unit.

How does the organisation bridge the gap between feminism and Islam?

Musawah contends that sustainable change requires advocates to break the bond between patriarchy and authoritarian politics. Rather than viewing feminism and Islam as irreconcilable, *Musawah* uses a rights-based perspective grounded in women's lived realities. By reclaiming the right to produce religious knowledge, they empower women to see themselves as legitimate experts. This framework offers a constructive vision of Islamic teachings that centers justice and the inherent dignity of all family members.

What are the primary tools *Musawah* uses for change?

The organisation employs a multi-layered "toolkit" to shift both public discourse and legal frameworks:

Knowledge Production: Rigorous research proving that many discriminatory laws are "man-made" juristic constructs rather than immutable divine mandates.

Capacity Building: The Islam and Gender Equality and Justice (I-nGEJ) course builds the capacity of activists to engage confidently in public theological debates.



International Advocacy: *Musawah* submits "shadow reports" to the UN's CEDAW Committee, dismantling arguments used by governments to justify discrimination in the name of religion.

Creative Outreach: Collaborating with artists and influencers to popularise progressive narratives and break the hegemony of conservative forces.

What are the concepts of *qiwamah* and *wilayah*, and why are they central to your work?

These two concepts are the pillars of patriarchal family law. *Qiwamah* is traditionally understood as a husband's authority over his wife (provision in exchange for obedience), while *wilayah* refers to male guardianship over female "dependents".

Musawah's research (2010-2018) traced the historical roots of these concepts, proving they are juristic interpretations rather than divine laws. By showing that these constructs no longer reflect contemporary reality or the ethical worldview of the Qur'an, *Musawah* paves the way for legal reforms that recognise women as equal partners in the household.

What obstacles do you face today, and what is the priority for the next decade?

We are currently witnessing a global regression in women's rights. In places like Iraq, family laws face rollbacks due to political and conservative pressures. Even where laws are progressive, such as in Morocco, the gap between the written law and its actual implementation remains wide. The priority for the next decade is holistic collaboration. Legal reform alone cannot solve socio-economic inequalities like poverty or lack of education. *Musawah* aims to build broader coalitions between religious leaders, secular advocates, and state institutions to ensure that reforms translate into meaningful, long-term change in women's daily lives.

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/4c3VlJe.

New Interfaith Declaration Released

'Nurture', 'celebrate', 'welcome' among pledges for an inclusive Glasgow

At a landmark gathering at Glasgow City Chambers during Scottish Interfaith Week 2025, representatives from across Glasgow's faith and belief communities marked the city's 850th anniversary with the launch of the [Glasgow 850 Interfaith Declaration](#), a unifying statement of shared values and commitments to build a more just, inclusive, and compassionate Glasgow. We share it with you here:



The image shows a formal declaration document titled 'Glasgow 850 Interfaith Declaration'. It features the Glasgow City Council crest and the Interfaith Glasgow logo. The text is in a mix of formal and cursive fonts. It lists seven pledges: Nurture, Celebrate, Contribute, Work, Welcome, Advocate, and Challenge. It is signed by representatives from various faiths including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Humanism. A witness signature from the City of Glasgow is also present.

Interfaith GLASGOW

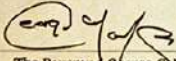
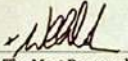
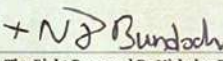
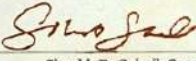
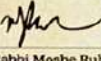
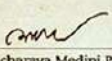
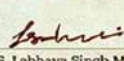
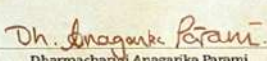
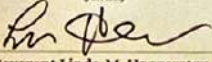
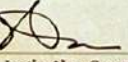
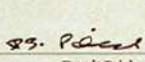
Glasgow 850 Interfaith Declaration

On the occasion of Glasgow's 850th Anniversary

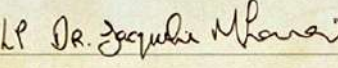
As people from diverse faith and belief communities and out of a shared wish for Glasgow's flourishing - and a wider concern for people and planet - we commit ourselves, in a spirit of friendship and cooperation, to:

- Nurture** constructive relationships with people of all faiths and none, staying in dialogue about the issues that affect us all and striving to understand one another - especially where we differ.
- Celebrate** the role of faith and belief in building a more compassionate, just, and cohesive Glasgow, recognising the values, wisdom, and motivation that diverse traditions offer in the work of healing, serving, and transforming our world.
- Contribute** to efforts to tackle the climate crisis, drawing on the resources of our traditions to speak out for climate justice and advocate for environmental responsibility.
- Work** for equality in our communities, tackling poverty and speaking out for dignity, fairness, and opportunity for all who call Glasgow home.
- Welcome** and support refugees displaced by conflict and persecution, receiving them in a spirit of hospitality and compassion, and helping newcomers participate fully in the life of the city.
- Advocate** for peace in a world marked by conflict, drawing on the moral and spiritual resources of our diverse traditions to speak up courageously for just and lasting alternatives to war.
- Challenge** prejudice and discrimination in all their forms, and support efforts to counter ignorance, stereotyping, and hate, fostering a culture of mutual respect and understanding.

United in our common humanity and in recognition of this city as our shared home, we pledge to work together to build a more just, inclusive, and compassionate Glasgow for generations to come.

 The Reverend George C. Mackay Moderator of Glasgow Presbytery (Christian - Church of Scotland)	 The Most Reverend William Nolan Archbishop of Glasgow (Christian - Roman Catholic)	 The Right Reverend Dr Nicholas Bundock Bishop of Glasgow & Galloway (Christian - Scottish Episcopal)	 Shaykh Dr Sohaib Saeed (Muslim)
 Rabbi Moshe Rubin Senior Rabbi of Scotland (Jewish)	 Acharaya Medini Pati Mishra (Hindu)	 S. Labhaya Singh Mehmi (Sikh)	 Dharmachari Anagarika Parami (Buddhist)
 Reverent Linda M. Haggerstone (Pagan)	 Justin Alae-Carew (Baha'i)	 Dorrit Frichard (Humanist)	 Rose Goodenough (Brahma Kumaris)

GLASGOW 850

Witnessed by  on behalf of the City of Glasgow

Coming Events

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

March 2026

- 08** International Women's Day; bit.ly/4oveWEG
- 15** *Laylat al-Qadr* – The Night of Destiny/Power (tbc) (Islam)
- 19** Bridge Day; bit.ly/4rvnKwV
- 20** *Eid al-Fitr* – The feast marking the end of Ramadan (tbc) (Islam)
- 21** Harmony Day; bit.ly/48rUX3w
- 25** Feast of the Annunciation (Christian)
- 29** Palm Sunday (Western/Catholic Christian)

April 2026

- 02** Holy Thursday (Western/Catholic Christian)
- 03** Good Friday (Western/Catholic Christian)
- 04** Easter Saturday (Western/Catholic Christian)
- 05** Easter Sunday, Resurrection of Jesus Christ (Western/Catholic Christian)
- 05** International Golden Rule Day, bit.ly/48Btomt
- 22** Earth Day, earthday.org

May 2026

- 16** International Day of Living Together in Peace, un.org/en/observances/living-in-peace-day
- 24** Pentecost (Western/Catholic Christian)
- 26** National Sorry Day, healingfoundation.org.au/stolen-generations/national-sorry-day/
- 27-03 June** National Reconciliation Week, reconciliation.org.au
- 30** *Eid al-Adha* (The Feast of Sacrifice) (tbc) (Islam)



Help us spread the news about the Centre and *Bridges* by sending us the names and addresses of all those who may be interested in subscribing to a hard copy (please complete the form), or invite them to subscribe directly online at columban.org.au/media-and-publications/newsletters-and-bulletins/bridges/subscribe-to-bridges

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SUITABLE for teachers, pastoral workers and all involved in community relations, especially between believers from different religions/faiths.



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