

Bridges

Building relationships between Christians and Muslims



No. 112 September 2026

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From the Editor

I have been mindful of the number of obituaries in recent issues of *Bridges*.

Professor Leonard Swidler was a pioneer of interreligious dialogue. He died on 23 March 2026 at the age of 97.

Fr Aloysius Pieris SJ was a pioneer in Buddhist-Christian relations. He died on 22 March 2026 at the age of 92.

Professor John L. Esposito was a scholar in Christian-Muslim relations. He died on 15 July 2026 at the age of 86 (p. 10).

Rev Dr John Pawlikowski OSM was a pioneer in Christian-Jewish relations. He died on 26 June 2026 at the age of 85 (p. 10).

Fr Tom Michel SJ was a pioneer in Christian-Muslim relations in South-East Asia. He died on 24 November 2025 at the age of 84.

These veteran Catholic scholars were pioneers in interfaith. They opened doors. They broke down walls. They ventured where others had not dared. They provided new vistas. They gave us knowledge and insight. We are their inheritors. We have benefited from their bold, courageous, ground-breaking research. Their trail-blazing scholarship

paved our way. Their diligent originality provided the architecture for us to build interfaith relations. We sat at their feet. We listened to their talks. We read their articles and books. Our minds and hearts were expanded to vast horizons. Whatever we have been able to do in interfaith 'in our time' is built on the foundations these pioneers laid. As Isaac Newton wrote in 1675, "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."

As we are the successors of these pioneers, I cannot help but wonder: who will our successors be? Who will follow us? Who will take up our mantle? Who will be caught up in the great apostolic drama of interfaith relations?

Catholic teaching is unequivocal: "Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice dialogue" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, #57). That is, every individual Catholic, and every Catholic parish, school, diocese, and organisation, is called to engage in interreligious dialogue. Partners in other churches and faiths eagerly await us. May our successors be as many as the sands of the seas.

REV DR PATRICK MCINERNEY

Talks on Peace

On 4 July 2026, **Fr Patrick McNerney** spoke on “*Peace and Harmony in the Christian Faith*” at an interfaith seminar at St John’s Anglican Church, Padstow. He enjoyed hearing the courtly cadences of the Urdu language from his Pakistani-Australian Muslim community and religious co-panellists. On 30 July 2026, he was the guest speaker for the World Christian Leadership Conference’s Webinar, “*United for Peace: Christians in a Multi-Faith World*”. There were 160+ live participants, with simultaneous translations in French, Korean, Japanese, Spanish, and Portuguese. The seminar video is being promoted around the world on YouTube and Facebook. From these invitations, it is evident that people are hungering and thirsting for peace and harmony in our highly conflicted times. View the webinar at l1nq.com/nlc3yl7 - Fr Patrick’s 10-minute talk begins at 35:45.



Museum of Islamic Art Australia

On 25 July 2026, **Fr Patrick McNerney** attended a Gala Dinner at the Art Gallery of NSW for the unveiling of the architectural design for the Museum of Islamic Art Australia (MIAA). The design is truly impressive, a work of art in its own right. This exciting venture is the initiative of the Islamic Sciences & Research Academy (ISRA). A multi-million-dollar project, it is funded by the NSW Government WestInvest program and community donations. The museum will be on

99 Parramatta Road, Granville. It will house art representing the diverse civilisations and cultures of Islam, including Australia. It will be a place for Muslims to celebrate their heritage, and for others to learn about and admire the achievements and beauty that Muslim artists have generated in different ages and various places. The museum will host educational tours for schools, community, faith, and interfaith groups. We salute the great ambition, scope, and potential of this major multicultural Muslim project. It will be a boon for all Australians. For media report see bit.ly/4wAKOwx.

Social Cohesion

On 20 July 2026, **Fr Patrick McNerney** attended a Social Cohesion Roundtable hosted by the Chancellor of the University of Western Sydney. There were 60 participants, including university academics, a former Governor-General, two sitting mayors, and business, sports, community, and religious leaders – the traditional priest, rabbi, and imam! Two days later, he attended a Social Cohesion Roundtable hosted by the Baha’i community on “Creating an Inclusive Narrative”. In the context of the current deep polarisation in society over the conduct of the Israeli attacks on Gaza, exacerbated by reports of the narrow focus of the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion, it is heartening that leaders in civil and religious society are addressing the broad issues of social cohesion, including education, gender, economic, and social disparities and all forms of racial and religious discrimination.

View the Baha’i report at sl1nk.com/i66chtX.





Abraham Conference Listening Circles

On 28 June 2026, the Abraham Conference Organising Committee hosted their second Listening Circles at our Centre. This initiative brought together Sydney's Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities to engage in compassionate listening during a period of heightened communal anxiety. The event comprised intimate circles led by experienced mediators. Guidelines prioritised personal experience over political argumentation. Participants shared their story without rebuttal, advice, or judgment. Discussions focused on sorrow, fear, shared humanity and hope following the violence in the Middle East and the antisemitic terror attack in Bondi. The space fostered deep mutual respect and dismantled stereotypes.

For media report see sl1nk.com/5twvznmw.

Interfaith Food Drive

The Centre partnered with St Andrew the Apostle Catholic Parish in Marayong to organise an interfaith food drive supporting Mahboba's Promise, a Muslim-woman founded charity that provides vital relief to vulnerable Afghan women and children, locally and in Afghanistan. On Sunday 26 July 2026, following Mass, parishioners gathered to welcome charity founder Mahboba Rawi OAM and three Afghan refugee teens she helped evacuate to Australia four years ago.

Mahboba spoke about the organisation's mission in both regions, and the formal presentation transitioned into personal conversations over morning tea. Parishioners engaged attentively, asking questions and offering warm words of welcome to Mahboba and the teenagers. To wrap up the July initiative, two large carloads of groceries donated by the community were transported to Mahboba's offices. These essential supplies will be distributed among the 86 children brought to Australia following the return of the Taliban in 2021. More than just a successful charity drive, this project served as a powerful, living expression of interfaith dialogue in action.

For media report see sl1nk.com/xbnptyp.



Interfaith Panel at St Patrick's College Spirituality Day

On 9 June 2026, St Patrick's College, Strathfield, hosted a Spirituality Day exploring Faith, Hope, and Love for approximately 200 teachers and staff members. A key highlight was an interreligious panel on Faith, coordinated by the Centre. The panel featured Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Baha'i representatives who explored modern spirituality. They defined faith as a living framework for navigating life, rather than passive belief, in accordance with each of their religions. They also noted that while secularism can at times risk losing shared moral vocabularies, it also encourages faith communities to be more authentic, inclusive, and creative.

The panel unified around human dignity, interconnectedness, and active compassion. They urged educators to foster religious literacy of different faiths, dismantle stereotypes, and create judgment-free spaces for students, demonstrating a shared commitment to empathy, mutual respect, and ethical responsibility. For media report, see l1nq.com/q56fzp2.

Demography, Migration, and Literacy: Shaping Australia's Future

Australia's immigration debate often polarises between open-ended growth and a hard national reset. Writing on managing migration sustainably amid housing and workforce pressures, Professor Halim Rane of Griffith University argues that Australia urgently requires greater public religious literacy rather than discriminatory policy tests or securitisation. With fertility falling to 1.481, migration remains vital for health, aged care, and construction. Future migration will increasingly draw from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Africa, with Muslim arrivals projected at 12-25%. Rane emphasises that Islam has deep Australian historical roots, extending from pre-colonial Makassan trade with First Nations communities to 19th-century cameleers, and that Australian Muslims overwhelmingly embrace civic commitments. Critically, Rane highlights institutional inequality in how bigotry is handled. Apart from the swift responses following the Bondi tragedy, he argues that the Australian government treats antisemitism as an urgent national priority while managing Islamophobia as a lesser social problem, demonstrating an imbalance to the treatment of racism. Ultimately, Rane contends that dismantling anti-Muslim bias and improving religious literacy are essential.

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3U8eYso and bit.ly/4pXvc3A.



Building Bridges of Fraternity Across Europe

In late June, the international conference "Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, and Sikhs in Europe: Building Fraternity through Dialogue and Collaboration" was held at the Angelicum in Rome. Co-organised by the Vatican's Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Council of Churches, this landmark gathering at the *Aula Minor* brought together religious leaders, scholars, and peace activists from across the continent. The event responded to Europe's shifting landscape, shaped by migration and secularisation, by

exploring how diversity can be a human richness rather than a source of tension. Participants prioritised concrete ways to contribute to social cohesion, religious freedom, and peaceful citizenship. Inspired by the vision of building bridges through encounter, the sessions built on previous efforts to foster a culture of fraternity. This collaboration across Dharmic and Christian traditions remains essential for ensuring that religious pluralism serves as a foundation for lasting peace. Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/4z1CQ0K.

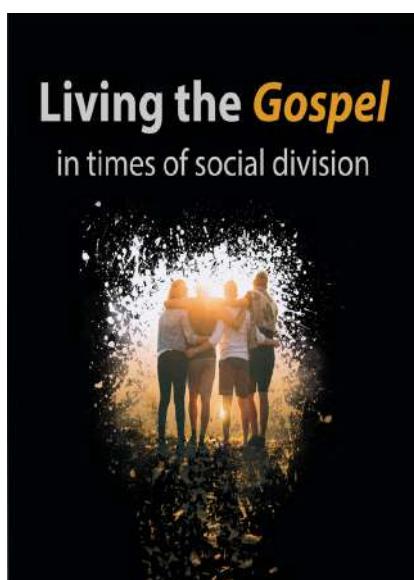
New Study of 2 million Online Posts Shows Persistent Anti-Jew and Anti-Muslim Hate in Australia

New research from the Tackling Hate Lab reveals a lasting shift in Australian social cohesion since 7 October 2023. Analysing millions of social media posts and offline incidents up to 2026, the study found that both anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim hate have become persistent, highly reactive to real-world events, and deeply intertwined with online activity. Rather than isolated spikes, online hostility now forms a continuous cycle with offline vandalism and harassment. For example, verified offline anti-Muslim incidents triggered substantial waves of online abuse. As Australia weighs its response through current government inquiries and special envoys, researchers urge a transition from reactive crisis management to long-term prevention. They recommend establishing a permanent national Observatory of Hate to monitor trends across all vulnerable communities, fostering greater understanding, accountability, and peace across our society. Condensed and adapted from shorturl.at/kiZJH.



Pope Leo Calls on Christians and Muslims to Rebuild Global Empathy

On 11 May 2026, Pope Leo XIV met with Christian and Muslim delegates at the Vatican following the eighth interfaith colloquium organised alongside Jordan's Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies. Speaking in the Clementine Hall to attendees including Jordan's Prince Hasan bin Talal, the Pontiff urged both faith communities to counter modern social apathy. Addressing the gathering on human empathy, Pope Leo emphasised that compassion remains essential to daily faith. "For our traditions, human compassion and empathy are not something additional or optional, but are a call from God to reflect his goodness in our daily lives [...]" Christians and Muslims, drawing from the richness of our respective traditions, are called to a common mission: to revive humanity where it has grown cold, to give voice to those who suffer and to transform indifference into solidarity." He praised Jordan's generous efforts in supporting regional refugees and their genuine human solidarity. *Condensed and adapted from shorturl.at/u5KGi.*



ACBC Social Justice Statement Launched

On 7 August 2026, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) launched its 2026-27 Social Justice Statement, *Living the Gospel in Times of Social Division*. Bishop Tim Harris, chair of the Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service, introduced the document, which addresses an alarming rise in social division, online toxicity, and racial hatred across Australia. The statement reflects on recent tragedies, including the December 2025 Bondi attack, and urges a move beyond us and them politics. Bishop Harris encouraged Australians to build a culture of encounter by responding to hatred with kindness, friendship, and genuine listening. Conference President Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB noted that the current social climate is an opportunity to witness to the Gospel through hospitality and solidarity. Ultimately, the bishops emphasise that peace is the fruit of justice and reconciliation, rooted in the inherent dignity of every human person. *Read the Statement at l1nq.com/1xkiilp. Condensed and adapted from shorturl.at/0uo8O and shorturl.at/2oGoS.*



Fourth Edition of NZ Statement on Religious Diversity Launched

Te Kāhui Tika Tangata Human Rights Commission has unveiled the fourth edition of the *Statement on Religious Diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Updated on 30 June 2026, this version reaffirms the nation's commitment to embracing its diverse religious landscape, which includes various faiths, spiritualities, and those with no religious affiliation. A key feature of the Statement is its human rights-based framework, designed to foster harmonious interactions between faith communities, the government, and society. It recognises the significant role these communities play in enhancing social cohesion and acknowledges their ongoing contributions to national life. Endorsed by a wide array of religious groups and featuring a foreword by Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, the *Statement* addresses Aotearoa's shifting demography. This update is vital for promoting mutual respect and upholding dignity for all. *Read the Statement at l1nq.com/87qywgqy.*

Pope Leo XIV, Magnifica Humanitas

Pope's encyclical highlights pluralism and dialogue for humanity in AI era



In his encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, Pope Leo XIV issues a direct call to communities across every faith tradition to work collaboratively, encouraging genuine solidarity amid

rapid technological shifts and global uncertainties. Addressing a world fractured by division, Pope Leo elevates pluralism and interfaith dialogue not as mere diplomacy, but as essential pillars for the common good. He invites all faith traditions to ensure technical progress serves humanity rather than deepens social and moral divides. He emphasises that meaningful human dignity and flourishing rely on mutual respect, and a steadfast commitment to cultural and religious pluralism. Following are a few direct quotes:

"We wish to engage in dialogue with all men and women of our time, with whom we share in the events, questions and aspirations of humanity. Together with them, we seek to identify new paths for the common good and for promoting a dignified life for all" (#2.)

"Indeed, openness to dialogue is an integral part of the Church's vocation because, constituted in Christ as 'a sacrament... of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race', she recognises history as the place where the Gospel challenges and directs human experience" (#2).

"Rebuilding today means recognising that, precisely from the plurality of voices and visions... a bright possibility emerges. Indeed, this is the possibility of building together, of transforming diversity into a resource and of making listening and dialogue the common ground upon which to cultivate justice and fraternity" (#10).

"Within this shared task, Christians discover their unique role of guiding actions toward God so that, in his light, pluralism does not dissipate into disorder, but instead... becomes the space in which humanity rediscovers its solid foundations" (#10).

"This is not a truth that fears diversity, but instead welcomes and guides it. It does not eliminate conflicts, but transforms them, reuniting that which history tends to scatter. This concept can also be illustrated by the image of a multifaceted polyhedron, in which the one truth of the Gospel is reflected from different angles" (#25).

"[...] the People of God are not only gathered together from many peoples, but are also intertwined through different functions, vocations, cultures and traditions, each being called to support and enrich one another" (#26).

"When the dignity of our brothers and sisters is violated... the Church – together with other Christian denominations and believers of other religions – must make her voice heard, not in order to dominate, but to promote communion" (#27).

"It is clear that there are many ideological and practical differences among people... but that does not mean it is impossible to engage in dialogue to establish a set of basic agreements that enable the creation of a shared vision, upon which everyone can move forward together" (#62).

"In order to build the civilization of love, we must engage in dialogue, for this is the primary means of coexistence between people and nations, and it is the alternative to open conflict. On the eve of the Second World War, Pius XII affirmed that nothing is lost with peace, whereas with war everything can be lost. He insisted that people must return to speaking with one another, because a sincere and persevering dialogue always opens up the possibility of an honorable solution" (#219).

"In rejecting the mindset of violence, interreligious dialogue plays a decisive role, because at the heart of the great spiritual paths lies a message of peace" (#223).

"The 'spirit of Assisi', evoked by Saint John Paul II and carried forward by Pope Francis – for example, through his dialogue with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar – shows that believers can draw upon the most authentic sources of their particular spiritual traditions, where there is no room for 'sanctified hatred'" (#223).

Read *Magnifica Humanitas* at [1nq.com/qm3eo4a](https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/encyclicals/encyclicals_index.html).

Holding the Tension of Salvation

Fr Ron Rolheiser OMI offers 10 principles on universal salvation

As Christians, we are called to carry a very real tension regarding how we understand the salvation of non-Christians. This tension arises because we find two seemingly conflicting teachings within our scriptures and tradition. On the one hand, Jesus reveals a God who is forever just and fair, who unequivocally wills the salvation of everyone. On the other hand, Jesus tells us that he alone is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one goes to God except through him. For 2000 years, Christians have taken those words to mean essentially what they say.

So where does this leave us? How do we take seriously both the universal salvific will of God and the belief that everyone needs to be saved through Christ? There are no easy answers, though radical conservatives and radical liberals are both tempted to think so. We are asked to carry that tension without being able to fully resolve it. Here are 10 principles to help us carry it:

1. Given our theology of God, we may not believe that God favors some people to the detriment of others.
2. Given our theology of God, we must believe that the whole of humankind has never lacked Divine Providence.
3. Given our theology of God, we should be hesitant in judging others and allow, both for others and for ourselves, the possibility of “invincible ignorance”.
4. Given our theology of God, we may not believe that God has somehow deemed as illegitimate and unworthy of salvation the sincere hearts and sincere prayers of billions of people simply because their hearts and prayers were not explicitly Christian.
5. Given our theology of God, we may not believe that, at any given time in history, the vast majority of humanity is excluded from salvation because they have no explicit link to Jesus or the Christian churches.
6. Given our theology of God, we may not believe that a purely external, historical connection to Christianity is more important to our intimacy with God and the salvation of our souls than are gratitude, warmth, humility, willingness to reconcile, and openness of heart.
7. Given our theology of God, it is wise to believe that compassion of heart and the gifts of the Holy Spirit within a person trump all externals in terms of our connection to God.
8. Given our theology of God and our Christian tradition, we are asked to believe these truths:
 - The full mystery of Christ is larger than what can be perceived within historical Christianity; there is both a “visible Christ” and an “invisible Christ”.
 - All good things have God as their author; therefore, everything that is good, true, and beautiful inside other religions and within secular culture comes from God.
 - God is revealed in multiple ways: within nature, within human reason, within human conscience, and within our lives.
 - Christ is a structure within physical creation, and physical creation itself was made through Christ and bears his imprint.
 - Non-Christians can be saints.
 - The visible Christian community offers tangible grace and salvation in the present, providing the explicit support, challenge, revelation, wisdom, and celebration needed to reach fullness of life.
 - The visible Christian community informs individuals of their birthright as children of God and brothers or sisters to all who are sincere.
 - The visible Christian community is a privileged instrument of mediation, asked by Jesus to preach salvation explicitly to all the earth.
9. Given our scriptures and tradition, we have two ultimate options for understanding the salvation of non-Christians: a theologically agnostic posture (leaving it to God without speculation) or a nuanced Christian perspective that recognises distinctions like “baptism by desire”, “baptism by blood”, or “Anonymous Christianity”.
10. Given our theology of God, it is healthiest to step back into the beauty and richness of mystery and hold to the words of Kenneth Cragg: “It takes a whole world to understand a whole Christ.”



Condensed and adapted from shorturl.at/4IEEu.

Fed Government Responds to Islamophobia Report

Government adopts key recommendations but omits critical law reform

In July, the Australian federal government formally released its response to the landmark report by the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, Aftab Malik, marking what has been described as an unprecedented step in acknowledging the serious impact of anti-Muslim hate in the country. Released 10 months after the original 54 recommendations were submitted, the government has adopted 35 measures aimed at addressing a problem that Prime Minister Anthony Albanese warns is “dangerously close to becoming normalised”.

The response is structured around four primary pillars: education and awareness, protection and support, building social cohesion, and accountability. Key initiatives include the establishment of a national Islamophobia Education Taskforce to support teacher training, the creation of a national information hub, and a review of the Australian curriculum to strengthen racial and religious tolerance. Furthermore, the government has committed \$41.9 million to improve security at faith-based places and increased funding for mental health services tailored for Muslim women and youth who have been disproportionately affected by harassment.

While prominent organisations like the Australian National Imams Council (ANIC) and the Alliance of Australian Muslims (AAM) have welcomed the recognition of Islamophobia as a “real, dangerous and deeply harmful” force, they have also noted that “much more remains to be done”. A significant point of contention is the government’s refusal to overhaul

counter-terrorism laws. Malik had recommended reducing the reliance on “religious motivation” as a central criterion for terrorist offences to prevent the stigmatisation of the Muslim community. However, the Prime Minister rejected this, citing advice from national security agencies.

In delivering this response, the government has had to navigate a complex social landscape marked by a disturbing rise in various forms of prejudice, including a sensitive and equally urgent increase in antisemitism. Observers have noted a disparity in how these two forms of hatred are addressed. While the government’s plan for the Jewish community focuses on “eliminating” antisemitism through legislative reform and institutional compliance, the Islamophobia response is framed as “combatting” the issue through softer measures like education and community resilience. Some Muslim leaders have described the lack of legislative change or legal enforcement in the Islamophobia response as a “glaring omission” compared to the robust protections recently afforded to other groups.

The political dimensions of the report were further highlighted by the Prime Minister’s criticism of One Nation leader Pauline Hanson, whom he accused of “undermining social cohesion” for decades. Malik warned that dehumanising rhetoric from political figures can have violent real-world consequences, referencing the 2019 Christchurch massacre as a sobering reminder of where hateful ideas can lead.

Ultimately, while the government views this response as a milestone moment for multicultural Australia, critics and community leaders argue that the deeper architecture of Islamophobia, including securitised policing and political rhetoric, remains largely intact. For many, this response represents merely the start of a journey toward ensuring that all Australians, regardless of their faith, can live free from the fear of discrimination and violence. *Condensed and adapted from shorturl.at/t2uAu, shorturl.at/5tMFq and shorturl.at/t18J2v.*



Photos: Lorie Shaull, Wikipedia Commons;

Inclusive Report Addressing Racism Released

Human Rights Commission amplifies diverse stories from all communities

A new report, *The struggle in being seen, the power in being heard: Community insights from the Seen & Heard project*, was officially released by the Australian Human Rights Commission in April 2026. Commissioned by the Department of Home Affairs, the Seen & Heard project was established to support Australian communities experiencing a surge in racism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia following the events of 7 October 2023.

A defining characteristic of the report is its inclusivity, purposefully engaging a broad spectrum of groups, including Arab, Jewish, Muslim, Palestinian, and Israeli communities. The project was praised for being inclusive of all parties, including those often viewed as protagonists on opposing sides of the conflict. It carefully navigated complex identities, acknowledging that not all Muslims are Arabs, not all Palestinians are Muslim, and not all Jewish people subscribe to the same political views. This nuanced approach also highlighted specific harms, such as anti-Palestinian

racism, which affects supporters of Palestine from other racial, ethnic, or religious backgrounds, and the unique historical roots of antisemitism.

Under the leadership of Race Discrimination Commissioner Giridharan Sivaraman, the project used a qualitative, listening-centered methodology. The team held structured consultations in safe environments, supported by trauma-informed and culturally responsive counsellors. These sessions allowed participants to share personal stories of structural racism in workplaces, media, and law enforcement, alongside the dehumanisation and silencing found in public discourse.

Participants expressed that being heard was “liberating” and “validating” after feeling ignored by the broader community. Ultimately, the release of this report serves to amplify community voices, inform National Anti-Racism Framework goals, and provide a roadmap for policy reform, racial literacy, and national healing.

See details and recommended reforms at shorturl.at/k5gNN.

Aftab Malik Urges National Healing

Restoring social cohesion after the December 2025 Bondi attack

How Can the Healing Begin? *Islamophobia, Anti-Semitism & Social Cohesion After Bondi* by Aftab Malik, Australia’s Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, offers a reflection on the 2025 Bondi terror attack and its aftermath. Published in July, the paper serves as an evidence-driven examination of the forces threatening Australian social cohesion, specifically the rise in Islamophobia and antisemitism.

Malik provides an authoritative theological defense of Islam, arguing that sacred sources explicitly prohibit extremism. He notes that perpetrators are often “religious novices” who lack fundamental knowledge of Islamic theology, morals, or history. Despite these facts, the Australian Muslim community faced a staggering 740 per cent increase in Islamophobic incidents following the tragedy. The report critically analyses the “permission to hate” fostered by social media misinformation and inflammatory political rhetoric that targets the dignity of specific communities. A significant portion of the work is dedicated to the “Palestinian quandary”, where

Malik makes a vital distinction between ISIS-inspired violence and legitimate pro-Palestinian political expression. He warns that conflating the two misleads the public, distorts policy, and erodes trust in democratic institutions.

Ultimately, the report is a call for restorative healing. Drawing on diverse academic and religious perspectives, from Jewish and Muslim leaders alike, Malik suggests that rebuilding trust requires recognising universal humanity and moving beyond “cheap tribalism”. He advocates for creating safe spaces where communities can confront their intergenerational traumas, such as the Holocaust and the *Nakba*, together. By prioritising empathy, moral courage, and curiosity over fear, Malik argues Australia can transition from a landscape of division to a shared future where there is only “us”. This transformation requires time, persistence, and a collective commitment to human dignity, agency, and equal standing in the application of law.

Read the report at sl1nk.com/r0cv1h8.

Condensed and adapted from l1nq.com/mab0gup.

Interfaith Pioneers Leave Lasting Legacy

Esposito and Pawlikowski transformed global interfaith understanding



Vale John L. Esposito Professor John L. Esposito's death on 15 July 2026 at the age of 86 marks the end of a transformative era for global interfaith relations. This pioneer of interfaith dialogue spent decades dismantling the walls of prejudice that once defined the relationship between Christianity and Islam. As the interfaith community mourns this loss, his departure serves as a call for a new generation to continue the work of bridge-building.

Born in Brooklyn to a working-class Italian-American family, Esposito's path began in a Capuchin Franciscan seminary before he transitioned to academia under the tutelage of Palestinian-American scholar Ismail Raji al-Faruqi. This apprenticeship instilled in him a lifelong commitment to presenting Islam on its own terms rather than through the distorted lens of Western anxieties.

Esposito's scholarly output was prolific, encompassing more than 55 books that challenged the "Orientalist" orthodoxies of the late 20th century. While many Western academics treated Islamic movements as security threats to be managed, Esposito sought to understand the social conditions and aspirations for dignity and justice. His landmark 2007 study, *Who Speaks for Islam?*, co-authored by Dalia Mogahed, used tens of thousands of interviews to provide an empirical counterpoint to sweeping generalisations about the Muslim world.

At Georgetown University, Esposito founded the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, an institution that became a global hub for interfaith dialogue. He later launched the *Bridge Initiative* to combat the rising tide of Islamophobia, viewing this as a moral necessity. His influence was such that he was received with rock star enthusiasm in nations like Pakistan and Malaysia, where he was regarded as a true friend of the Islamic world.

Beyond the lecture hall, Esposito was a man of principle. He frequently risked his professional standing to support those he felt were unjustly persecuted, famously visiting Dr Sami Al-Arian during years of house arrest. He believed that true dialogue was about ethical responsibility toward those whom power had isolated.

The weight of Esposito's scholarship became especially pronounced following the September 11 attacks, a period when he felt public understanding of Islam was most urgently required to counter rising misinformation. During this era of intense polarisation, he used his platform to challenge the "clash of civilisations" narrative, publishing influential works like *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* and *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam* to counter both the appropriation of faith by extremists and the subsequent exploitation of those acts by those eager to indict an entire religion.

His commitment to grassroots education also extended to Australian audiences, notably through talks in Sydney co-hosted by the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations, Affinity Intercultural Foundation, and Islamic Sciences and Research Academy (ISRA). His capacity for presenting Islam on its own terms resonated with the Centre, best seen in its adaptation of his book into their own educational resources, [10 Things Everyone Needs to Know About Islam](#) and [10 MORE Things Everyone Needs to Know About Islam](#). By bridging the gap between academia and community-level dialogue, he ensured that interfaith encounter was not merely a scholarly pursuit but a tangible ethical responsibility.

Condensed and adapted from shorturl.at/cq0fS, shorturl.at/9Rqzi, shorturl.at/0CbX3, shorturl.at/00da6 and shorturl.at/qpFcZ.



Vale Fr John Pawlikowski Only a month before Esposito's death, the world of interfaith relations was already reeling from the loss of Fr John Pawlikowski, 85. Pawlikowski was foundational to the Catholic Church's renewed relationship with Jews. Serving two terms as president of the International Council of Christians and Jews, he became a pre-eminent theologian in the field. As a founding faculty member of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Pawlikowski's influence extended through the generations of religious leaders he mentored, including the current Pope Leo. His career was defined by the conviction that Catholic social teaching must be inextricably linked to a deep, respectful engagement with the Jewish tradition. Condensed and adapted from shorturl.at/aTYSj.

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			

September 2026

- 01** World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation (Catholic Christian)
- 08** Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Catholic Christian)
- 11** *Nayrouz* (New Year) (Coptic Christian)
- 21** UN International Day of Peace, shorturl.at/EMtek
- 26** UN International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, shorturl.at/UVDKX
- 27** Vatican World Day of Migrants and Refugees, sl1nk.com/0q9ag59

October 2026

- 04** Feast of St Francis of Assisi (Catholic Christian)
- 18** Mission Sunday (Catholic Christian)
- 21** 800th anniversary of the death of St Francis of Assisi (Catholic Christian)

November 2026

- 01** All Saints' Day (Western Christian)
- 02** All Souls' Day (Western Christian)
- 08-15** Inter Faith Week, l1nq.com/vgw0ld7
- 16** UN International Day for Tolerance, l1nq.com/6ucmon5
- 18-13 Dec** White Ribbon Month Australia, sl1nk.com/nj123pb
- 25** International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, sl1nk.com/wzi6pyv
- 29** First Sunday of Advent (Christian)



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