

Pope Francis' Message to Muslims Throughout the World for the end of Ramadan ('Id al-Fitr)



To Muslims throughout the World

It gives me great pleasure to greet you as you celebrate 'Id al-Fitr, so concluding the month of Ramadan, dedicated mainly to fasting, prayer and almsgiving.

It is a tradition by now that, on this occasion, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue sends you a message of good wishes, together with a proposed theme for common reflection. This year, the first of my Pontificate, I have decided to sign this traditional message myself and to send it to you, dear friends, as an expression of esteem and friendship for all Muslims, especially those who are religious leaders.

As you all know, when the Cardinals elected me as Bishop of Rome and Universal Pastor of the Catholic Church, I chose the name of "Francis", a very famous saint who loved God and every human being deeply, to the point of being called "universal brother". He loved, helped and served the needy, the sick and the poor; he also cared greatly for creation.

I am aware that family and social dimensions enjoy a particular prominence for Muslims during this period, and it is worth noting that there are certain parallels in each of these areas with Christian faith and practice.

This year, the theme on which I would like to reflect with you and with all who will read this message is one that concerns both Muslims and Christians: Promoting Mutual Respect through Education. This year's theme is intended to underline the importance of education in the way we understand each other, built upon the foundation of mutual respect. "Respect" means an attitude of kindness towards people for whom we have consideration and esteem. "Mutual" means that this is not a one-way process, but something shared by both sides.

What we are called to respect in each person is first of all his life, his physical integrity, his dignity and the rights deriving from that dignity, his reputation, his property, his ethnic and cultural identity, his ideas and his political choices. We are therefore called to think, speak and write respectfully of the other, not only in his presence, but always and everywhere, avoiding unfair criticism or defamation. Families, schools, religious teaching and all forms of media have a role to play in achieving this goal.

Turning to mutual respect in interreligious relations, especially between Christians and Muslims, we are called to respect the religion of the other, its teachings, its symbols, its values. Particular respect is due to religious leaders and to places of worship. How painful are attacks on one or other of these!

It is clear that, when we show respect for the religion of our neighbours or when we offer them our good wishes on the occasion of a religious celebration, we simply seek to share their joy, without making reference to the content of their religious convictions.

Regarding the education of Muslim and Christian youth, we have to bring up our young people to think and speak respectfully of other religions and their followers, and to avoid ridiculing or denigrating their convictions and practices.

We all know that mutual respect is fundamental in any human relationship, especially among people who profess religious belief. In this way, sincere and lasting friendship can grow.

When I received the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See on 22 March 2013, I said: "It is not possible to establish true links with God, while ignoring other people. Hence it is important to intensify dialogue among the various religions, and I am thinking particularly of dialogue with Islam. At the Mass marking the beginning of my ministry, I greatly appreciated the presence of so many civil and religious leaders from the Islamic world." With these words, I wished to emphasize once more the great importance of dialogue and cooperation among believers, in particular Christians and Muslims, and the need for it to be enhanced.

With these sentiments, I reiterate my hope that all Christians and Muslims may be true promoters of mutual respect and friendship, in particular through education.

Finally, I send you my prayerful good wishes, that your lives may glorify the Almighty and give joy to those around you. Happy Feast to you all!