

June 1, 2017



Dear Friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

Last month, Rabbi Uri and I participated in an International Meeting of Cardinals, Bishops and Rabbis that took place in the Upper Galilee, in Israel, promoted by the Neocatechumenal Way.

Rabbi Uri and I were part of the 120 rabbis invited from all over the world, including 50 rabbis from the United States. Among the Jewish leaders who signed the invitation were Rabbi Jay Rosenbaum, President of the North American Board of Rabbis and Rabbi Yitz Greenberg. Blu Greenberg, Rabbi Eugene Korn, Rabbi Shlomoh Riskin, and Rabbi Rosen, Director of the American Jewish Committee's Department of Interreligious Affairs, were among the main Jewish speakers. From the Catholic community, we were honored with the presence of five cardinals, including Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the apostolic administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, a Franciscan who addressed the audience in perfect Hebrew.

This is the second international meeting promoted by the Neocatechumenal Way, that I was invited to, and the third interfaith activity between Christians and Jews, during a one-month period, in which I participated. As many of you know, a few days before leaving for Israel, Hillcrest Jewish Center hosted a Korean embroidery exhibit on Biblical themes by a talented Christian artist who wishes to connect to and reclaim the Jewish roots of her religion. Also, a few days ago, I was invited by the New York Board of Rabbis to the home of the Consul General of Israel, Dani Dayan, to meet the top leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, where the similarities between the Mormon and Jewish faiths were highlighted by the speakers.

Interfaith activities are not a new thing. Jews and Christians have been trying to build bridges for a while, especially since the Second Vatican Council, which took place between 1962 and 1965.

In the past, however, the relations building process was led, for the most part, by the liberal elements in each religion, with an emphasis on social justice, equality, anti-discrimination laws, and the civil rights movement. These were the historical days of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. walking together, and the days of Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, who became the director of International Affairs of the American Jewish Committee.

Today we see a different picture in interfaith relationships. While the dialogue and cooperation still exist in the liberal religious circles, we started seeing a vigorous interest in interfaith dialogue and cooperation both from conservative Christian (Evangelical, Catholic, Mormon) and orthodox Jews. I must confess that it was an interesting experience, seeing ultra-orthodox rabbis dining (kosher food, of course) with cardinals and bishops.

I have been invited to speak on June 20th at 12:30 PM, at the HJC Hadassah monthly meeting, on my experiences at the conference and I look forward to sharing pictures, vignettes, anecdotes, and reflections on what I consider to be interesting and promising times in the area of interfaith relationships. In the meantime, I leave you with a picture of me and Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, speaking in Hebrew, at a gorgeous monastery in the land of Israel.

Who would have thought!

Many blessings,

Rabbi Manes Kogan