

## **FROM MUTUAL ESTEEM TO MUTUAL COLLABORATION: MIDWEST MUSLIM-CATHOLIC DIALOGUE REFLECTS ON POVERTY AND PRIVILEGE AMONG CATHOLICS AND MUSLIMS, MISSION AND DA'WAH IN THE UNITED STATES**

WASHINGTON—The 19<sup>th</sup> annual Midwest Muslim-Catholic Dialogue convened to reflect on the topics of poverty and privilege, as well as missionary activity, by Muslims and Catholics in the U.S. since the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* (NA). The meeting was held at John Carroll University in University Heights, OH on October 27-28, 2014. Bishop Francis Reiss of the Archdiocese of Detroit, Michigan, and Sayyid Syeed, Ph.D., of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), presided. Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, former President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, was in attendance as an observer.

In the first part of the meeting, the co-chairs welcomed the assembly. In his opening remarks, Bishop Reiss indicated that in 2015, the Catholic Church will commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of NA with a celebration that will take place on the campus of The Catholic University of America. In addition to keynote addresses by dignitaries from the Vatican, as well as noted scholars and religious leaders from the Muslim and Jewish communities, he announced that the SEIA will organize the 2<sup>nd</sup> national plenary of its regional dialogues with national Muslim organizations. Turning to the international situation, Bishop Reiss indicated that “(s)ince our last meeting in 2013, we have seen a rise in international tensions that have been responsible for increasing violence and human suffering. And yet, there are signs of hope, not least with the work of our dialogue which has formed a lasting bond of trust and mutual esteem between us.” Our commitment to this dialogue,” the bishop said, “has been reaffirmed publicly by the statement of solidarity issued this year by the bishops’ committee.” Following Bishop Reiss, Dr. Sayyid Syeed remarked that ISNA remains committed to the work of dialogue with the USCCB and that the fruits of this national dialogue over a twenty year period have extended to the international arena in which increasing signs of Christian and Muslim collaboration for extending democratic principles and advancing peace initiatives continues despite continuing violence and suffering.

In the second part of the meeting, Dr. Anas Malik presented a lecture on poverty and privilege from a Muslim perspective. Dr. Malik’s lecture explored potential collaboration between Muslims and Catholics on efforts to revitalize local communities. “Existing collaboration,” Dr. Anas asserted, “is primarily around the dialogue process and service provision in such areas as coordinating help to the homeless... Yet Muslims and Catholics together may have the critical mass needed for developing co-ops (as ways to provide food in urban food deserts, for example), equity-based financing (as alternatives to predatory lenders such as “check-cashing” entities), and mutual insurance (a cooperative form of insurance that returns more revenue to the community than commercial insurance).” Dr. Malik continued, “with appropriate governance, building on *Nostra Aetate* and “A Common Word Between Us”, and drawing on the resources of Muslim and Catholic networks, these initiatives may strengthen community ties, return more local dollars to local residents, and help shift the deeper context in which poverty persists.”

In a second presentation on poverty and privilege, Judith Longdin provided a Catholic perspective asserting that “the principles of Ignatian spirituality and the see, judge, act model of social analysis undergird Pope Francis’s approach to social action and provide a discernment tool that can be effective in creating a ‘mindset of solidarity’ with the poor. This mindset of solidarity requires that Catholics confront the concept of privilege and the structural injustice it engenders and commit to a public poverty agenda that is consistent with the fundamental teachings of the church on poverty and human dignity. Such an agenda along with further conversation regarding the principles of discernment and the mindset of solidarity could provide rich fodder for future dialogue between Catholics and Muslims.”

In the next part of the meeting, presentations were offered on “mission” in the Catholic and Muslim communities. Presenting the Catholic perspective, Fr. Tom Baima's explored the relationship between mission and dialogue in the Catholic Church during the 50 years since the Second Vatican Council. Fr. Baima indicated that “(w)hile recognizing that Muslims and Catholics hold certain beliefs which are incompatible with each other, there exists enough common ground in their shared theism for them to work together at promoting religious freedom in a democratic society and opposing discrimination on the basis of religion.” In his lecture on da’wah in the U.S. Muslim community, Dr. Zeki Saritoprak focused on the importance of living by example rather than by force. He explicated several Qur'anic verses to support this including “one on wisdom and beautiful advocacy (16:125),” as well as the sayings of the Prophet. Dr. Saritoprak argued that da’wah, however it has been perceived by some, is “God’s invitation to live according to God’s will, and not an occasion for proselytism.” “The goal”, Dr. Saritoprak continued, “is to enable believers to grow in humility and goodness.”

In addition to the co-chairs, those present at the meeting included Muslim participants Dr. Zeki Saritoprak, John Carroll University; Ms. Inshirah Farhoud, Islamic Society of Milwaukee; and, Dr. Anas Malik, Xavier University. Additional Catholic participants included Ms. Judith Longdin, Archdiocese of Milwaukee; Fr. Raymond Webb, University of St. Mary of the Lake; Fr. Tom Baima, University of St. Mary of the Lake; Dr. Scott Alexander, Catholic Theological Union; Fr. David Bruning, Diocese of Toledo; Dr. Anthony Cirelli, SEIA.

The next meeting is scheduled to take place in May 2015 at CUA as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Plenary of the regional Muslim-Catholic dialogues.