

# What does Outreach mean in Light of Interreligious Dialogue?

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## Introduction

Good evening everyone. Rabbi Wendi Geffen, the clergy and lay leadership of North Shore Congregation Israel, have honored me with their kind invitation to address you tonight. The topic for tonight's address centers on the idea of outreach. This is an imprecise term, but it had the virtue of fitting easily on the top of the page. By outreach, I mean all the efforts each of our communities makes to foster belonging through sensitive support and accompaniment in the world. But, I also believe we cannot overlook the new challenges both our communities face in reaching out to our children, handing on to them our traditions and faith, so that others after us will take up the task of reaching out to the world. Tonight I want to talk to you about the need to reach out to our young people in the context of what we are doing in the Archdiocese of Chicago to pass on to them our faith and traditions, knowing that the Jewish community faces similar concerns.

But I also think it is of value to anticipate questions that may arise in the Jewish community about these efforts, convinced that the heart of

Catholic-Jewish relations is mutual understanding, trust and respect. Respect is born of relationships in which trust can develop. Proudly we can say that our two communities in Chicagoland have been working at building relationships and trust for the past 50 years, taking our inspiration from the Second Vatican Council. In fact, I am pleased to say that over my twenty years as a bishop, whenever Jewish or other leaders have expressed concern about a particular contemporary church statement or action, their first question is: is it consistent with the teaching of Vatican II? There is something wonderful about a relationship where such questions are possible and where there is a common point of reference for them to be discussed.

But, I have also learned over the years that understanding one another is an ongoing challenge, or better a blessing that we should always embrace. It places on us the responsibility to ensure that our statements and actions always enhance the relationships we have already built together and not become new obstacles to understanding and fraternity. With that in mind I am going to use *Nostra Aetate: The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*<sup>1</sup> as the point of reference to anchor my remarks.

As you may have heard, the Archdiocese of Chicago is engaged in a multi-year planning process called “Renew My Church.” As I explain the intentions and dimensions of Renew My Church to you tonight, I

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<sup>1</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate: The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965).

also want to go on the record about how this initiative will help the Catholic Church in Chicago maintain all of the commitments made at Vatican II, and which are taught so clearly by Pope Francis in our own day.

So, after briefly sketching out the elements of Renew My Church I will address a word that comes with some ambiguity as it relates to Catholic-Jewish relations. That word is “evangelization.” Finally, I will offer some reflections on an area of outreach that is of concern to both the Jewish and Catholic communities, namely the transmission of the tradition to the next generation and the special roles that family and congregation play in this effort.

## Renew My Church

On the day I was installed as the Archbishop of Chicago, I made frequent reference to the vision Pope Francis offered in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel).<sup>2</sup> I did so because I fully share that vision and have used it as a point of reference in leading the Archdiocese in this new chapter of its history. It is a vision that animates the pastoral planning of Renew My Church. The expression, Renew My Church, comes from the life of Saint Francis, who is the inspiration from whom Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio chose his papal name.

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<sup>2</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium: Apostolic Exhortation on the Joy of the Gospel* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013). See especially par. 238-241, 247-249, and 255-258,

Born in Assisi in the year 1181, Francis originally was named Giovanni at his baptism. But his father, who traveled to France for business on occasion became a Francophile and gave his son the nickname Francesco (which means the Frenchman). Like a lot of nicknames, this one stuck. Perhaps the father's admiration for the culture and refinement he saw in France created a hope that his son would follow a similar path of sophistication and success. This would not be unlike a custom I understand is familiar to Jewish families of giving a child a name with the hope that the act of naming will shape the child's destiny.

Francis excelled at the life of a rich young man, in ways that would hardly resemble the poor simple man he would become. But the experience of military service, captivity as a prisoner of war, illness and a growing spiritual sensitivity eventually redirected his life. During a pilgrimage, Francis experienced a mystical vision of Jesus speaking to him from the image of the Crucified Christ in the chapel of San Damiano just outside of Assisi. Francis reported that he heard Jesus say to him "Francis, Francis, go and repair my house which, as you can see, is falling into ruins." Initially, he thought he was being called to physically rebuild San Damiano's. Gradually, he realized that it was a call to renew the spiritual life of the universal Church, by returning to the roots of Christianity found in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

The vision of Pope Francis for the Universal Church and my vision for the Archdiocese of Chicago, flow from this simple insight—the ever present need to renew our spiritual lives by returning to the radical call of Jesus. At the core is a shift, from maintaining an institution, to fostering vital faith communities, a shift from maintenance to mission. Certainly, this will mean how we use our resources, human, institutional and financial in new configurations. But at its heart, Renew My Church seeks spiritual renewal that reinvigorates our call to discipleship, builds up our communities and inspires witness through service to the world. As Pope Francis puts it, all of this positions the Church to become a field hospital, reaching out to those in need rather than waiting until they come to us.

This spiritual renewal begins with evangelization, a word that no doubt means different things in different Christian communities. Because I value the Catholic/Jewish relationship, which is so strong here in Chicagoland, I want to be clear about that our approach to evangelization is entirely congruous with the teachings found in *Nostra Aetate*, and in the Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*.

### What is included in evangelization?

The word “evangelization” comes from the Greek word, *evangelion*, which means gospel, or good news. For us Christians,

evangelization is the process by which to share the good news of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> But that involves more than message or a teaching. It is about introducing someone to a new way of living through an encounter with the person of Jesus.

Comparisons between religions are always difficult, but I'm going to try to make one and do so in the field of liturgical practice. I understand that at the conclusion of the reading of a Torah portion, a blessing is recited. "Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has given us the Torah of truth, planting everlasting life in our midst. Blessed are you, Lord, Giver of the Torah."<sup>4</sup> The image of planting the Torah in our midst recalls God planting the tree of life in the Garden.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, at the end of the readings in the Christian liturgy, the deacon or priest proclaims, "The Gospel of the Lord" and kisses the *Book of the Gospels*, with the people responding, "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ." In both cases, the liturgical practice draws attention to how the sacred book, the Torah or the Gospel, refers to the totality of the entire life it animates. Just as your community aspires to "a life centered in the Torah" in the wide sense, so too we Christians aspire to a life centered in the Gospel.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Mark 1:1. "Here begins the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God." The "good news" is the identity of Jesus, his role in salvation history and the promise of eternal life he brings.

<sup>4</sup> *The Koren Siddur*, trans. Jonathan Sacks (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2006), 162.

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 2:9 "9Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (RSV-CE)

<sup>6</sup> David Neuhaus has noted that the ordering canon in the Hebrew Bible is reflected in the ordering of the writings of the New Testament. *Tanakh*, the term Jews use for the Hebrew Bible, is not a word, but an

The word “evangelization” should be heard through this analogy. Indeed, in the New Testament, Jesus is often presented as a rabbinic teacher, whom the disciples encounter as they gather around him. This encounter with Jesus as the Teacher, *didascalos* in Greek, calls the disciple into a new way of living that is characterized by three things. First of all, disciples leave their previous life behind and follow him. Secondly, they continue to learn from him in both word and example. Finally, and most importantly, as a community around Jesus, they share his life, this good news, this Gospel, with others by witnessing to all that this Gospel-centered life offers them. In concrete terms, this means living a life of service, a member of that field hospital in the world.

### What is excluded from evangelization?

Having said that, I think I need to say what evangelization does not mean, what Catholics exclude from it. I do so recognizing that other Christian communities use the same word, but not always in the same way we Catholics do. In fact, the nuance we give to this word benefits from the growth we have experienced through our interreligious dialogue and the commitments we have made in the Second Vatican Council documents cited above.

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acronym. It is composed of the initial letter in Hebrew of the three sections of the Hebrew Bible in the Massoretic text. These divisions are the Torah, the Nevi'im and the Ketuvim. Fr. Neuhaus notes that the Torah (Teaching and Histories) corresponds to the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. The Ketuvim (Writings) correspond to the Epistles. The Nevi'im (Prophets) corresponds to the Book of Revelation. Fr. Neuhaus' point is that the literary connections between the Jewish and Christian scriptures are deeply embedded, even in the structure of the canon itself. Christians need to pay attention to the Old Testament for the proper understanding of the New Testament.

For instance, as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has made clear over these many years, evangelization is not about proselytism. Evangelization, as I have already defined it, is about living a Gospel-centered life, as disciples continually encountering Jesus and formed into a community that inspires witness through service to others. In freedom and with the help of God’s grace, a Gospel-centered life will attract some people to the Catholic Church. But note, our understanding of evangelization must always include a deep reverence for the religious freedom of every human person, which is a natural right, indeed it is a God-given right.<sup>7</sup>

Distinct from this, and decisively rejected by the Second Vatican Council, is proselytism. By proselytism, we mean any outreach that involves any form of coercion or deception. As Pope Benedict XVI clearly stated in his address over a decade ago, the Church considers herself “missionary only insofar as she is a disciple, capable of being attracted constantly and with renewed wonder by the God who has loved us and who loves us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:10). The Church does not engage in proselytism. Instead, she grows by ‘attraction’: just as Christ ‘draws all to himself’ by the power of his love...”<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis himself, just a

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<sup>7</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Dignitatis Humanae*: The Declaration on Religious Freedom (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), no. 2.

<sup>8</sup> The full citation reads: “It is Love that gives life: and so the Church has been sent forth to spread Christ’s Love throughout the world, so that individuals and peoples “may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10). To you, who represent the Church in Latin America, today I symbolically entrust my Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, in which I sought to point out to everyone the essence of the Christian message. The Church considers herself the disciple and missionary of this Love: missionary only insofar as she is a disciple, capable of being attracted constantly and with renewed wonder by the God who has loved us



year ago, stated in the strongest terms that proselytism is a sin.<sup>9</sup> Sadly, mission efforts by Catholics and some other Christian communities have not always avoided these sins. There have been times when human and financial support have been tied to conversion. Other times, conversion was required through the force of state power. Still other times, and even in our own day, deception is found in the presentation of the Christianity to others. Often this means presenting only the positive elements of one's own religion in contrast with the weaknesses of the other.

Again, we have to admit frankly that Catholics have not been free from such attitudes or actions. In 2000, Pope John Paul II acknowledged the errors born of missionary zeal and a false sense of service to the truth. He said: "Let us ask pardon . . . for the violence some have used in the service of the truth and for the distrustful and hostile attitudes sometimes taken towards the followers of other religions. . . . We humbly ask forgiveness for the part which each of us has had in these evils by our own actions, thus helping to disfigure the

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and who loves us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:10). The Church does not engage in proselytism. Instead, she grows by "attraction": just as Christ "draws all to himself" by the power of his love, culminating in the sacrifice of the Cross, so the Church fulfils her mission to the extent that, in union with Christ, she accomplishes every one of her works in spiritual and practical imitation of the love of her Lord." See Benedict XVI, "Homily for the Inaugural Mass of the Fifth General Assembly of Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean," (Aparecida, Brazil, May 13, 2007). [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20070513\\_conference-brazil.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20070513_conference-brazil.html) Accessed January 14, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> The interview by Fr. Anthony Spadaro, S.J., was published in *La Civiltà Cattolica*. In analyzing the text, there is continuity between what Pope Francis said, and the address of Pope Benedict at Aparecida cited above. In other words, this is not a novel teaching by Pope Francis, but one which stands in continuity with his predecessors.

face of the Church.”<sup>10</sup> Tonight, if any of you experienced anything of this nature from Catholics in your own life, I too ask for your forgiveness.

Some people today worry that the new stress on evangelization by the Catholic Church means that we are abandoning the commitments made at Vatican II around ecumenism, interreligious dialogue and religious freedom. I want to be as clear as possible tonight: We will not abandon these commitments either here in Chicago or throughout the universal Church, for abandoning them would mean abandoning who we are.

### What about the Catholic Church’s relationship to Jews?

I make such a commitment knowing that it lies at the heart of the new direction taken at the Second Vatican Council and expressed in *Nostra Aetate* and *Dignitatis Humanae*. Yet, the need for continual vigilance remains. The church is still receiving this teaching and further expressing its rich depth. It is important for leaders like me to remind my community that no Catholic is free to reject the teaching of *Nostra Aetate*. It is grounded in the Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*.<sup>11</sup> It is not optional. Likewise, it is important for me to remind those I serve that our own understanding of these

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<sup>10</sup> John Paul II, Homily, “Day of Pardon” March 12, 2000. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_20000312\\_pardon.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000312_pardon.html) Accessed January 20, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, no. 16. [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html) Accessed January 18, 2018.

teachings has further developed over the past fifty years, and that too must be observed. *Nostra Aetate* was not a solitary moment in church history. It began a process rather than completing one. That process included further reflections on the part of the Church, which have produced a series of thoughtful documents. For example, there is a document on the proper presentation of Jews and Judaism in preaching and religious education.<sup>12</sup> There is another on the Shoah.<sup>13</sup> Most recently *Nostra Aetate* itself was reviewed and extended in a theological paper titled “The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable.”<sup>14</sup> I am very happy that this document will be the topic of the upcoming presentation by Dr. Elena Procario-Foley, the John G. Driscoll Professor of Jewish-Catholic Studies at Iona College, whom we will welcome as the 2018 Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Jerusalem Lecturer. In anticipation of that event, I will quote only a short portion of that 2015 document to highlight this point:

God revealed himself in his Word, so that it may be understood by humanity in actual historical situations. This Word invites all

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<sup>12</sup> See Pontifical Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews, “Notes on the correct way to present Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church” (1985).

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_19820306\\_jews-judaism\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19820306_jews-judaism_en.html) Accessed January 18, 2018

<sup>13</sup> Pontifical Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews, “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah” (1998). [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_19820306\\_jews-judaism\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19820306_jews-judaism_en.html) Accessed January 18, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable” (Romans 11:29): A Reflection on the Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, (2015).

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20151210\\_ebraismo-nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20151210_ebraismo-nostra-aetate_en.html) Accessed January 18, 2018.

people to respond. If their responses are in accord with the Word of God they stand in right relationship with him. For Jews this Word can be learned through the Torah and the traditions based on it. The Torah is the instruction for a successful life in right relationship with God. Whoever observes the Torah has life in its fullness (cf. Pirke Avot II, 7). By observing the Torah the Jew receives a share in communion with God.<sup>15</sup>

In concrete terms, this means that the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission directed towards Jews.<sup>16</sup>

It is this vision of respect which must shape every dimension of Catholic Christians' relationship to Jews and Judaism.

### Close to home: Families, Youth and Catholic-Jewish relations

Let me now offer some thoughts about how our efforts with Renew my Church might provide an opening for further dialogue to strengthen Catholic-Jewish relationships, and conclude by making a case for why vigilance in the way we speak and act should also concern us as we enter this new area of dialogue.

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<sup>15</sup> Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, "The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable" (Romans 11:29): A Reflection on the Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, No. 4 See paragraph 24.

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20151210\\_ebraismo-nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20151210_ebraismo-nostra-aetate_en.html) Accessed January 13, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 40.

Over the course of the past fifty years, we have learned that the challenge of passing on our faith and traditions to the next generation is anything but abstract. It is real and personal beyond measure and it comes in the form of the phenomenon of religious identification in America, called the “nones.” These are people who, when asked on surveys about their religious affiliation, reply “none.” This is a new phenomenon. Social science research tells us that the new generations include an ever increasing number of such non-affiliating persons.<sup>17</sup>

As I go around the archdiocese and talk to parishioners, one of the main concerns I hear is anxiety about whether their grandchildren will be Catholic. Or, as one grandmother put it: “I wonder if I am going to be the last Catholic in my family.” I suspect you hear the same concerns in your congregations. If we listen to the research, we will realize that in some sense we have failed our children and their children by not teaching them to aspire to a life of faith that God is planting in our midst. In fact, I sometimes wonder if instead of being true to our best instincts about transmitting our faith to our children, we have instead focused on what makes us unique and different, bringing a kind of identity politics into religion.

As the archdiocese works to revitalize our faith communities, our people are being called to make a collective examination of conscience in this regard. I suspect similar discussions are going on in your

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<sup>17</sup> One such study is the work of Robert Putnam and David Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Unites and Divides Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

communities as you observe the patterns of religious practice of your young people. We should not be afraid to take up these questions. How can we foster belonging? How can we accompany the next generation with sensitivity and support? This is the sort of outreach I believe we need, not only for the benefit of sustaining our own communities, but to rebuild the social fabric of this country with concern for the weak, for the marginalized, and for, if I might borrow a phrase from the poet Emma Lazarus: “[the] poor, . . . huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”<sup>18</sup>

All people of good will struggle with these concerns. Both of our communities esteem tradition, in the sense that we see belonging as the means to move children and young people into a life of adult faith that takes responsibility for the needs of others, that makes us our brother’s keeper. In our relationship, we might want to explore together how clergy support families, especially Catholic-Jewish families. We might explore together the general issue of young adults disengaging from organized religion. We might explore how to support any seeker in the spiritual quest.

There are no easy answers and I am not here tonight to offer certain prescriptions for how to proceed. I merely want to bring what I have said about this basic level of outreach down to earth and invite conversation about the important place where all of this will touch

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<sup>18</sup> Quotation on the Statue of Liberty. This is from the sonnet by Emma Lazarus, “New Colossus”

people's lives. Both of our communities are concerned about handing on our religion to the next generation, realizing the rich contribution people of faith and tradition have made to this country and to the world. We know from long experience that belonging, behaving and believing, the basic elements of religious life, are inculcated and develop in and through the example and experience of families. This is a major focus for Pope Francis. That's why he called together the world's bishops to discuss family life in 2014 and 2015, and why he has called us to discuss youth and the transmission of the faith to the future generations at an upcoming meeting. As these are common concerns for both our communities, I want to encourage the Catholic-Jewish Scholars Dialogue—of which Rabbi Geffen is a member—to continue their engagement of the important issues and challenges of family life which both communities face.

## Conclusion

This evening I began by noting there is something wonderful about a relationship in which frank questions are possible. Understanding one another is both an ongoing challenge and opportunity, which will require all of us to take responsibility to ensure that our statements and actions build our relationships and do not become new obstacles to understanding and fraternity.

But, we also need to take responsibility for and remember the past. Just this morning, in fact, spoke about the importance of memory to participants gathered for a conference in Rome on combatting Anti-Semitism, Pope Francis stated,

We have just celebrated International Holocaust Remembrance Day. In order to recover our humanity; to recover our human understanding of reality and to overcome so many deplorable forms of apathy towards our neighbor, we need this memory, this capacity to involve ourselves together in remembering. Memory is the key to accessing the future, and it is our responsibility to hand it on in a dignified way to young generations....'However, it is not only a question of recalling the past. The common future of Jews and Christians demands that we remember, for 'there is no future without memory' (*We Remember*, par. 1).<sup>19</sup>

It is for our future together that I welcome this chance to be with you this evening. It is also why I look forward to the upcoming Bernardin/Jerusalem Lecture as another opportunity to explore our dialogue even further. I hope you will attend. But, I also make a plea for all of us to act and speak responsibly on matters religious out of a special concern for the impact we are having on the faith lives of future generations. Studies have repeatedly shown that conflict among religious

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<sup>19</sup> Francis, "Address to the Participants of the International Conference on the Responsibility of States, Institutions and Individuals in the Fight Against Anti-Semitism and Crimes Connected with Anti-Semitic Hatred", Jan 29, 2018. See <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/en/2018/1/29/lotta-antisemitismo.html>. Accessed Jan, 29, 2018.



leaders is one of the key factors that discourages young people from continuing the practice of the faith in their own families' religious traditions. The bottom line is that if we have any hope of reaching out to the next generation to pass on the everlasting life that God has planted in our midst, we have to reach out to each other in friendship and respect.

Thank you for reaching out to me with your invitation to share these thoughts with you tonight. I pledge to you that my hand of friendship will always be ready to reach back in return.