

“CLOSER THAN WE THINK : 60 years of Jewish-Christian Relations & their importance to the Church”

NDS Canada-USA Relation & Encounter Team Offers Parish Workshop in Toronto



(R&E Team members — from left to right: Héctor Acero Ferrer; Roberta Spatari; Mia Theocharis; Father Bob Langone SA; Murray Watson; Lucy Thorson NDS)

On Saturday, March 29, members of our NDS Canada-USA Relation & Encounter Team animated and hosted a half-day workshop at St. Joan of Arc parish in Toronto, at the invitation of the pastor and parish council. In conjunction with the parish team (including Father Bob Langone, the Atonement Friar who is the pastor), we welcomed 45 people—including parishioners from St. Joan of Arc, other local Catholic parishes, and other Christian communities—for a morning of learning, discussion, and community-building, marking the 60th anniversary of “Nostra Aetate” this year. Of our **R&E Team members**, Lucy Thorson NDS, Roberta Spatari, Héctor Acero Ferrer (Chair of R&E), Mia Theocharis, and Murray Watson were able to be present (photo above); Dr. Mary Marrocco had to send her regrets. St. Joan of Arc is Lucy’s parish, and she proudly welcomed us to her community and introduced us to her many friends there.

After introductions and words of welcome from Héctor (Moderator of Workshop), Sister Lucy and Father Bob, we began with a time of prayer focused on welcoming, celebrating, and fostering God’s gift of diversity. After a music video of the Our Father sung in Swahili, we reflected on two readings, the first from Scripture and then from one of Pope Francis’ messages for the annual World Day of Peace.

The first part of our morning was led by Mia Theocharis, a graduate student of history and theology who is in the final months of her doctoral work at the University of St. Michael's College in Toronto, whose PhD, in part, focuses on the history of Jewish-Christian relations in Canada after Vatican II. Mia led us on a masterful overview of Christian history, exploring the development of supersessionism and religious anti-Judaism, leading up to the time of Vatican II. She then took us through the six decades since, shining a spotlight on roughly 25 key actions and documents that have contributed to putting *Nostra Aetate* into practice, and advancing its vision. Throughout her presentation, Mia provided reflection and discussion questions for the audience, and sparked some wonderful feedback and sharing; it was beautiful to see the many connections which people made between their own life experience and those official teachings. Mia did an amazing job of distilling down key moments of 2000 years into a half-hour presentation!



(Héctor and Mia relaxing during a break)

After a coffee break, Murray Watson led the second half of the morning, with a discussion of some of the relationship between Passover and Easter—emphasizing both similarities and differences. Murray mentioned how, depending on your language, the linguistic connections between Passover and Easter might be easily discernible (Pesach→Pascha→Pasqua, Pâques, etc.). He explored how, because of Jesus' own Jewishness, Passover played a central role in his life, with Passover week forming the framework for the events of Holy Week (Murray mentioned that there are ambiguities in the Gospels regarding the exact relationship of the Last Supper to the Passover Seder). Murray spoke about both festivals as celebrations of liberation and new life, and how Passover has provided inspiration for social justice movements in both Judaism and Christianity, including Catholic Social Teaching. Murray concluded by looking at the

question of “Christian Seders” celebrated in some Christian settings, and explained why they are problematic and unhelpful, on both a historical and theological level.

Our R&E Team was very pleased by the large turnout on a grey, rainy, cold morning, and it was very clear from the comments that people both appreciated and learned from the materials that were presented. There is definitely a hunger on the part of many Christians to understand Judaism and the Jewish-Christian relationship in greater depth, and we believe that this session was an important step in sharing that message on a grassroots level. This was the first opportunity our Relation & Encounter team has had to engage in this kind of formational activity in a parish, but we hope it will not be the last. It was a wonderful partnership between St. Joan of Arc parish and the R&E Team, with Sister Lucy taking a leadership role in presenting the idea to the pastor and parish council, and then promoting it through various networks in the Toronto area.

After the months of planning that went into this event, it was gratifying to see so much interest on the part of people in the Toronto area. We will reflect further on this experience, both to integrate our learnings from this first workshop, and to consider what future “next steps” could look like for our Canada-US Relation & Encounter team. We are grateful for all the support and encouragement that made it possible.

On behalf of the Canada-US R&E Team,

Murray Watson