

***From the Guest Editors***  
**Introduction**

Dr. Adam Afterman and Dr. Taras Dzyubanskyy

This special issue of the *Journal of Interreligious Studies* is the fruit of an international conference celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Russell Berrie Fellowship program in Interreligious Studies at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome, Italy.

The Russell Berrie Fellowship of the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue provides future leaders in the field of interreligious dialogue with the theoretical and practical tools to become interfaith leaders who make a difference in the world.

The international conference “Education for Action: The Urgency of Interreligious Leadership for the Global Good” was dedicated to the future of interreligious dialogue and to future leaders and their formation and education as they move from the university to the field. The participants in the conference, members of the John Paul II Center network of global leaders and major international interfaith organizations, were invited to reflect upon a series of questions:

- How can interfaith leaders evolve from study in the university to practice in the field, from education to action?
- What form of theoretical formation is needed in order to become an effective leader in the world of interfaith engagement and peace building?
- What steps do leaders at all levels need to take to activate our networks, build bridges and move to impactful actions that address global challenges?

The fruitful discussions reflected upon the power of interfaith leadership in bringing about positive change and highlighted examples of inspiring initiatives: from grassroots activism to leading and influencing policymakers in secular and religious institutions. This was also an opportunity for the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue to invite a substantial number of its alumni network of global leaders back to Rome to cooperate and collaborate on new ideas, amplifying interreligious dialogue in the face of complex global challenges.

Following the fruitful discussions at the international conference in Rome, The John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue invited several global interreligious leaders from its alumni network to articulate their thoughts for this publication, focusing on the questions discussed in Rome.

**Alumna Elena Dini** ’15 reviews in her article “Dialogue Documents and Their Call to Implementation: A Reflection on Statements and Initiatives about Jewish-Catholic and Muslim-Catholic Relations” some of the public statements issued in the past decades from the Catholic Church. She also looks at statements from some Jewish and Muslim leaders addressing the Church and Christian leaders (in particular Catholics) on the theme of interreligious relationships and dialogue. The article focuses on the challenges of the “practical implementation” of these calls as it seems that the documents “telling” about

dialogue are much more in the public eye than experiences of lived dialogue and the actual work done in the field.

**Alumna McKenzie Flowers Fergus '20** argues in her article “Dialogue Speaks Louder in Action: Defining Interreligious Dialogue in Four Stages” that interreligious dialogue is interpreted differently by governments, civil society, religious communities, and the general public. Thus, the term’s meaning is often misconstrued, and its trajectories limited. To clarify expert opinions on the meaning and purpose of interreligious dialogue, she presents an operational definition by drawing on the 1991 Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue’s categorization of the forms of interreligious dialogue: 1) the dialogue of life, 2) the dialogue of religious experience, 3) the dialogue of theological exchange, and 4) the dialogue of action. Arguing that the four dialogues are stages offering a strong platform for achieving the objectives of interreligious dialogue and furthering the interfaith movement. By using visualization techniques, theological reflections, and literary analysis, she expands on interreligious dialogue’s definition, function, and goals.

**Alumna Allyson Zacharoff '14**, Rabbinical Student at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, discusses in her article “Women in Religious Leadership and Interfaith Dialogue: The Challenges Faced and Possible Solutions” both the great contribution women have already made to the field of interfaith relations and dialogue and also the critical challenges they face in what has long been the male-dominated field of religious leadership. She presents a brief history of the rise in women’s ability to become clergy, particularly in the United States, then looks at some of the modesty requirements in parts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam around gender issues and how they can play a role in preventing women from fully participating in the relationship-building portion of interfaith work. She underscores how all of these factors combine to put women at a disadvantage in certain interfaith situations, before ultimately suggesting ways in which we can all come together and ensure that all people committed to doing this important work—regardless of their gender—can join in making the world a more understanding, respectful place through dialogue.

**Alum Peter Dziedzic '14** discusses in his article “The Tent at the Crossroads: Insights from the Contemplative Encounter in Interreligious Dialogue” the contemplative encounter which he argues remains underexplored, yet may prove essential for deep cross-religious engagement. The “contemplative encounter” goes beyond the cultivation of religious literacy and the flourishing of mutual understanding. Those of other traditions are enlisted as partners in the search for existential fulfilment and are approached as fountains of insight for theological reasoning and sources of valid spiritual wisdom. After briefly reviewing key Vatican documents on dialogue, he proposes that there is both a created space and a need for a deeper dialogue of spirituality. Three themes reveal and reflect the possibilities of this encounter—a renewed intra-religious (i.e. introspective) dialogue, a rediscovery of key symbolic portrayals of this space of dialogue, and an exploration of the dialogical and spiritual chiasm of silence.

**Alum Taras Dzyubansky '11** in his article “Interfaith Leadership and Typologies of Religious Plurality” discusses one of the main challenges for religions today is to explain theologically the diversity of religions and the complexities that arise when members of

different religious traditions and faiths encounter one another. It is a challenge for any representative of any religion to maintain his/her identity and, at the same time, be open to dialogue with other religious traditions. The task of religious leaders has become an interfaith task in and of itself as the diversity of religions poses a serious question to the truthfulness and authenticity of every religion. As a response to this religious diversity, four views are important: exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, and the recently proposed notion of particularism. The article tackles these typologies together with the concept of interfaith leadership and the various forms it can take within each of these frameworks. It also provides some examples of programs that train religious leaders to become interfaith leaders.

We would like to convey our thanks to the editors of the *Journal of Interreligious Studies* for the kind invitation to serve as guest editors of this special issue. We especially thank Rabbi Or Rose and Axel Oaks Takacs. The John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue is supported by The Russell Berrie Foundation and we would like to convey our deepest gratitude to the leadership team of The Russell Berrie Foundation: Angelica Berrie, Ruth Salzman, Idana Goldberg, and Naomi Shank. The editors are also grateful to our partners at the Institute of International Education: Cheryl Francisconi and Korlan Smagulova. Many thanks to Rabbi Jack Bemporad, the Founding Director of the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue. Lastly, we want to thank the network of the John Paul II Center interreligious leaders for their contributions to the conference and this special issue and for the work they are doing all over the world to make this world a better place for of us.

Dr. Adam Afterman  
Director, John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue

Dr. Taras Dzyubanskyy  
Alumni Network Coordinator, John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue