

**2026 Guidelines for the Celebration of an
Inter-religious and Ecumenical Service for the
40th Anniversary of the World Day of Prayer for Peace
held in Assisi on 27th October 1986**

27th October marks the 40th anniversary of the World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi. The courageous decision of Pope John Paul II to invite world religious leaders to Assisi to fast and pray for peace was a milestone in interreligious dialogue. Pope John Paul II and subsequently his successors have been continuing this journey to “maintain good fellowship among the nations (1 Peter 2:12) and, if possible, to live for their part in peace” with all people. (*Nostra Aetate*, 5).

The leaders of the various religious traditions came to Assisi to pray for peace on 27th October 1986. The presence of the representatives of world religions communicated a powerful symbolic message to the world – the spirit of prayer and non-violence. Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, leaders of African and American Traditional Religions and of Shinto took part in this event.

Assisi was selected as the meeting place as, according to the words of Pope John Paul II, it was “because of the particular significance of the holy man venerated here – Saint Francis – known and revered by so many throughout the world as a symbol of peace, reconciliation and brotherhood” (*Basilica of St Mary of the Angels*, 27 October 1986). This 40th Anniversary falls in the Franciscan Jubilee Year, proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Leo XIV from 10 January 2026 to 10 January 2027.

His Eminence, George Jacob Cardinal Koovakad, prefect for the Dicastery for Inter-religious Dialogue, wrote to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences across the world on 10th June 2026, recognising their commitment to dialogue and peace and reminding them that 27 October 1986 was a turning point in the history of inter-religious dialogue, becoming a lasting symbol of the Church’s commitment to promoting social justice, moral well-being, peace and freedom for the benefit of all.

His Eminence acknowledged that the anniversary will be commemorated in Assisi on 27 October 2026 in the presence of the Holy Father. The theme that will be used is ‘Unarmed and Disarming Peace’.

His Eminence extended an invitation to the local Church community to commemorate this historic milestone. It was suggested that the commemoration could take the form of initiatives such as conferences, interreligious and ecumenical prayer gatherings, and/or academic reflections or public events, as outlined in the attached message from the Dicastery for Inter-religious Dialogue.

The following guidelines and resources are presented as suggestions for the preparation of an inter religious and ecumenical service.

Preparation	It is recommended that representatives of all the faith communities, which are to participate in the service, be involved in the planning. It is most important that the purpose of the occasion is clearly presented. Demonstrating respect for the beliefs and customs of another faith tradition is foundational to interfaith relationships.
Venue	In some situations, a neutral space, such as a hall, a public building or even an open-air site, may be preferable. On the other hand, participants may prefer that the event take place in a church. The main thing is that all are at ease with the venue.

<i>Invitations</i>	Invitations should be sent to as many representatives of the various Christian denominations and Faith Traditions as possible.
<i>Participation</i>	It is recommended that there should be an overall presider for the gathering, with separate segments of the service led by leaders or representatives appointed by the faith groups and communities involved. The Christian contribution should be ecumenical, representing as many Christian traditions as possible, but as a single voice. The different branches of each of the other faith tradition should also select someone to speak for the tradition as a single voice.
<i>Possible Structure</i>	1. Welcome and Introduction 2. Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country 3. Each faith tradition is allocated a time to pray or read or recite, while others listen in respectful silence. 4. One or other leader may give some reflections appropriate to the occasion. 5. Affirmation of shared commitments or hopes. (E.g., 'Decalogue of Assisi for Peace', in full or a concise summary.) 6. Symbolic Act 7. Conclusion 8. Hospitality
<i>Welcome and Introduction</i>	As it is the anniversary of a significant event in Catholic history, a brief introduction could be given focusing on Assisi and St Francis. Invite an Aboriginal elder to Welcome all to Country. If this is not possible, an Acknowledgement of Country should be given. The Presider or a nominated spokesperson may give an address or reflection on the theme of the event (not as a representative but as a spokesperson for the event.)
<i>Religious Contribution</i>	The various religious traditions make their distinctive contribution - on the common theme of peace - which may be in the form of readings from sacred texts, poems, teachings etc. (An equal time should be given to each.) If another language is used, a translation or at least a summary should be provided (orally or in the service booklet). A period of silence should be observed between the various contributions, for reflection. Suitable sacred music, song or even dance from one of the traditions may also be performed during the service.
<i>Affirmation</i>	An affirmation of shared commitments or hopes, inspired by the 'Spirit of Assisi'. This may take the form of the 'Decalogue of Assisi for Peace', either in full or a concise summary. It may be read by representatives of the faith traditions or by all present.
<i>Symbolic Act</i>	An element of ritual, carefully chosen to reflect the purpose of the event, may be incorporated. (E.g., a representative of each religion could light a candle and add it to a display.)
<i>Conclusion</i>	Concluding remarks from the overall presider or suitable leader.

Hospitality	Conclude the gathering with continued social discussion over light refreshments whilst observing appropriate dietary requirements for the different faith traditions in attendance.
Resources	Guidelines for Multi-Faith Worship (Liturgical Documents) Guidelines for Multi-Faith Worship (Liturgical Documents) Nostra Aetate: The Catholic Church's Journey into Dialogue by Fr Patrick McNerney Promoting Interfaith Relations- Archdiocese of Melbourne Promoting Interfaith Relations Second Edition single pages Nostra aetate Letter and Decalogue of Assisi for Peace EWTN Letter to all the Heads of State and Government of the world and "Decalogue of Assisi for Peace" (March 4, 2002) Living the Gospel in Times of Social Division – ACBC Social Justice Statement – August 2026 - Social Justice Statements

Message from the Dicastery for Inter-religious Dialogue

World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi (27 October 1986-2026)

40th Anniversary

On 27 October 1986, under the courageous leadership of Pope John Paul II, religious leaders from across the world gathered in Assisi to fast and pray for peace. This unprecedented event marked a decisive moment in the history of interreligious dialogue and remains a living symbol of the Church's commitment "to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom" (Nostra Aetate, 3). As St John Paul II explained, choice of Assisi was itself significant, inspired by the witness of Saint Francis of Assisi, universally revered as a sign of peace, reconciliation, and fraternity—an inspiration that continues to speak to believers and non-believers alike. (Cf. Address at the Basilica of St Mary of the Angels, 27 October 1986).

A distinctive feature of the Assisi gathering was the recognition of the unique value of interreligious prayer for peace. As Pope John Paul II clarified, participants gathered "to be together to pray" (c.f. Pope John Paul II, General Audience 22 October, 1986) and each tradition prayed separately, according to its own identity before gathering in silence for the concluding ceremony. From this experience emerged a profound awareness that "every authentic prayer is under the influence of the Spirit 'who intercedes insistently for us'" (Pope John Paul II, To the Roman Curia, December 22, 1986).

Addressing Christians at the Cathedral of St. Rufino, Pope John Paul II recalled that "Jesus Christ is truly the Prince of Peace" and that "as disciples of Christ we have been sent into the world to proclaim and to bring peace" (27 October 1986, n. 1), calling for unity, sincere self-examination, and a renewed commitment to reconciliation. Later, speaking to religious leaders at the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels, he clarified that Assisi was neither a conference nor an exercise in relativism, but a witness to "another dimension of peace... the result of prayer" (nos. 1–2). He further insisted on the necessity of "intense, humble and trusting prayer" if the world is to become a place of true and lasting peace (ibid., n. 3).

In his concluding address at the Basilica of Saint Francis, Pope John Paul II emphasized that "Peace depends basically on this Power, which we call God" (n.3). He described peace as "a workshop,

open to all,” and invoked the well-known prayer attributed to Saint Francis: “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace...” (n.11).

The meeting brought together representatives of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Shinto, and African and American traditional religions. Its message was clear and compelling: that prayer, nonviolence, and mutual respect are essential paths to peace. The initiative did not seek to blur religious differences or promote relativism, but to bear witness to “another dimension of peace”—a peace rooted in prayer and openness to God.

Held during the tensions of the Cold War, the 1986 gathering inaugurated a path that would be renewed in response to subsequent global crises—from conflicts in the Balkans and the Middle East (1993), to the aftermath of September 11 (2002), the rise of extremism, and what Pope Francis later described as “a third world war fought piecemeal.” (Discourse to the Security Council of the United Nations, 14 June 2023). In each context, Assisi has offered a prophetic alternative to violence and division.

By continuing to invite leaders of other religions to gather in prayer for peace, successive Popes — Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis — have supported and deepened this prophetic intuition. Now, in these turbulent times, Pope Leo XIV renews the “Spirit of Assisi” as a living movement of prayer, dialogue, and fraternity at the service of peace.

In this perspective, the “Spirit of Assisi” expresses the commitment of believers of different religions to come together in prayer, mutual respect, and dialogue, recognizing one another as partners in the search for peace and witnessing that authentic faith fosters fraternity, reconciliation, and nonviolence rather than conflict. It reminds us that peace cannot be reduced to political strategies alone, but must be rooted in prayer, conversion of heart, sincere dialogue, and a concrete commitment to justice.

In order to encourage the promotion of this spirit, initiatives marking the 40th Anniversary may be organised at the local level in various forms, such as:

- interreligious and ecumenical prayer services for peace;*
- academic conferences and public lectures on the legacy of Assisi;*
- youth and student forums dedicated to dialogue and nonviolence;*
- collaborative social and humanitarian initiatives.*