

**Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations
Rome 2012
Thomas P. Rausch, S.J.**

Father General met with the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations at the Curia in Rome, September 5 to 8. In his opening remarks, he reported on the funeral for Cardinal Carlo Martini, where representatives of the Jewish and Islamic community remembered him as “our brother, friend, and guide.” He called attention to the increasing suffering, poverty, and search for resources in the contemporary world, commenting that we need wisdom more than ever. Jesuits especially need to help foster dialogue, beginning with an unrestricted desire for unity, showing both God is love as well as the compassionate face of the Church. Persecution is not just a negative but part of the paschal mystery.

The members of the Secretariat met with representatives of two Vatican dicasteries, the new secretary of the Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue, Father Miguel Angel Ayuso and the prefect and secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Cardinal Kurt Koch and Archbishop Brian Farrell respectfully. Stressing the importance of continuing the dialogue, Cardinal Koch also emphasized spiritual ecumenism as the soul of all ecumenical work, and spoke of a new ecumenism. Both meetings were cordial conversations, with the members of the Secretariat asking questions that they had prepared earlier.



Front row: Gerald Blaszcak, Christian Troll, Fr. General, Xavier Albo
Back row: Tom Rausch, Noel Sheth, Milan Žust, Aloysius Pieris (on SKYPE), Jean-Pierre Sonnet, Kemboly Mpay

This year the members of the Secretariat focused their reports, first on their own areas of responsibility, and second on religious persecution. Topics included the challenges of prayer in common, tensions between evangelization and dialogue, a western, especially European emphasis on abstract systems verses an Asian concern for the spiritual experience of the other, relativism and relativity, syncretism and symbiosis, diversity as reflecting the Triune God, and the need for a “new ecumenism” or paradigm (though different from Konrad Reiser’s paradigm which rejects visible unity), an ecumenism centered on the heart more than on doctrine.

Challenges to greater ecumenical and interreligious understanding include fundamentalism, an aggressive proselytism by evangelical communities in some parts of the world, how to maintain the balance between our Catholic identity and respect for pluralism in our schools, a lack of interest in ecumenism and interreligious dialogue on the part of some seminarians, including younger Jesuits, and the need for Jesuit to study cultures and religions to prepare for dialogue.

Speaking of the religious diversity as increasingly a reality in Europe today, one member observed that “God has sent Muslims as our neighbors.” In Africa especially Christian-Muslim relations should be a priority. Also stressed was the importance of “inter living” or an insertion experience with another religious community for a time, rather than simply studying another religion, and the importance of preparing the ground for future reform. Ignatius followed the Pauline principle, try everything and keep what is good.

The general sense was that the meeting was highly successful, that the extra day was beneficial, the reports and conversations were much more substantive, and Father General’s comments were very helpful. Possible topics for the future include spiritual ecumenism, why so much hostility among religions, ecology, justice, and inculturation, fundamentalism, and how we hold together the one God, his Son, and the Spirit with God’s work in other churches, cultures, and religions. Milan Žust was chosen as the new convener. Next year, 2013, the meeting will be in the second week of September.

A final comment from Fr. Aloysius Pieris who has cancer; he asked for prayers, saying that he had wanted to die at 33 like Christ, but now will dies like Buddha at 80. He is in our prayers.