

Statement of Purpose

9th Annual Interreligious Prayer Service for Peace and Justice

Celebrating World Interfaith Harmony Week

Charles S. Chesnavage

February 3, 2013

Good afternoon and welcome to the 9th Annual Interreligious Prayer Service for Peace and Justice celebrating World Interfaith Harmony Week. I am so happy to have for the first time representatives from all 9 world religions included in today's service. I am also happy that we are blessed to have with us the Mayor of Yonkers, the Honorable Michael Spano, Chairman of the Westchester County Board of Legislators, Mr. Ken Jenkins, and the recently announced Liaison for Westchester County Faith Based Organization Ms. Rosa Boone.

This service began 9 years ago, when I was Director of Liturgy of the Shrine Church of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in Williamsburg/Brooklyn, New York and I'm happy to have it continue this day at my home parish of the Monastery Church of the Sacred Heart.

This is a special year in the Catholic tradition, in which Pope Benedict XVI announced it to be the "Year of Faith" commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Second Vatican Council and the 20th Anniversary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

It was the Second Vatican Council that produced the document *Nostra Aetate*, which opened a new chapter in the Church's relationship with non-Christian religions by stating that the church rejects nothing that is true and holy in other world religions.

This year's theme will reflect on the Spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, since the Monastery Church of the Sacred Heart is a Franciscan parish and specifically the meeting between St. Francis and Sultan Malik al-Kamal.

On October 27, 1986, Blessed Pope John Paul II invited religious representatives from many religious traditions to gather in Assisi for a historic World Day of Peace. His words speak to us this day:

I have chosen this town of Assisi as the place for our Day of Prayer for peace because of the particular significance of the holy man venerated here—St. Francis—known and revered by so many throughout the world as a symbol of peace, reconciliation, and brotherhood. Inspired by his example, his meekness and humility let us dispose our hearts for prayer in true internal silence. Let us make this Day an anticipation of a peaceful world.ⁱ

I thank Fr. Maurice Moreau, in the spirit of St. Francis, for hosting this years' service. Interreligious prayer is the topic of my dissertation at Fordham University and I believe different religious traditions that are willing to pray together are less likely willing to kill or hate each other. If we believe what we pray, pray what we believe, and live out what we pray and believe than our prayer can be realized through peace and justice in our world.

In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "We will either learn to live together as brothers and sisters, or we will perish together as fools."

May peace prevail on earth and in the world.

At this time I invite the Honorable Mayor of the City of Yonkers, Michael Spano, Chairman of the County Board of Legislators, Ken Jenkins, and Rosa Boone, liaison for the faith-based organizations of Westchester County to present proclamations and offer a few words.

ⁱ Steven McMichael, "Francis and the Encounter with the Sultan," in *The Cambridge Companion to Francis of Assisi* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2012), 127.