

Plenary Session

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 27, 2018 (KECSKEMÉT, THEATRE)

Opportunities for Jewish-Christian and Interfaith Dialogue with Youth: Perspectives of Young Professionals

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When I was about to come to this interfaith dialogue trip some of my friends asked very honest questions: “So why are you going there?” “What is the benefit of this on the earth?” “Why should we get into a dialogue with the followers of other religions about religion?!”

They really wanted to know what the purpose of interfaith activities is.

This question may seem strange to you as the experts in this field and as the generation who has clearly experienced the harms of religious conflicts. But for the younger generation, it is a real and legitimate question. They have not seen what you have witnessed. World Wars are far away from them.

So, this very first question that they ask is because many youth in all of our communities are not aware of the importance and the outcomes of interfaith engagement and the benefits of getting in touch and talking about religion with people who are considered *others* for them.

And also, the dangers of not having a proper relationship with other religions are much clearer for you but not for many of the youth.

The second point is a question that I have: “how do we define a religious human?” A worshipper? A believer in God? A person who goes to the church or synagogue or mosque or temple etc.? My answer to this question is that I believe a religious person can be best defined as “*a responsible being*”.

It is good that at this conference we were talking about responsibility. Because one of the common characteristics of our faith traditions is that we all believe that God has created all of us as responsible beings.

According to our religions we have four different types of responsibilities. We have responsibilities about God. We have responsibilities about ourselves. We have responsibilities about other people including our family, relatives, friends, neighbors, strangers, clients, teachers, students, fellow-human beings, etc. And finally, we have responsibilities about the environment, including, animals, plants, air, water and other living and non-living beings.

Based on these two premises I can conclude that we need to always remember that we, as people of faith and as children of Abraham and followers of Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, have a great responsibility about creating awareness. The prophet Muhammad says: “God loves most the servants who benefit other servants most.” And nothing is more beneficial for people than knowledge and awareness.

The youth are the makers of the future. They are the only ones who can continue this path. The beautiful path that you have started is to be continued by the future generations and they will do it only if they are aware of its importance.

It is upon us as those who have more experience in the field of interfaith activities and those who have more knowledge about the importance of it, to be kind enough and share that knowledge with our beautiful younger generation. And also make them aware of the problems and dangers that may emerge by not having relationships with the others. Make them aware of the big problems, misunderstandings and civil wars and all the bad things that have happened in the past just because people didn't know enough about each other and were not in touch with one another in a proper and sufficient way.

This is our *responsibility*:

We need to invite the youth and try to bring them to our meetings and bring the importance and necessity of interfaith activities and interreligious engagement to the attention of the youth.

We always talk about the dialogue between religions. I want to ask everyone here to think about dialogue with the youth of our own communities about the importance of dialogue.

Let me finish this way: to have a better future and to have one of our responsibilities fulfilled, it is important for us as people of faith and activists in the field of interreligious relations to have dialogues with our own fellow people about the importance of dialogue. So, there must be dialogues and the topic of those dialogues should be the importance of dialogue.

Thank you.