

## Monthly Highlights

November 2011

*International Interreligious Affairs*

### Nov. 1-3, Kalamazoo, Michigan

The Fetzer Institute



The Fetzer Institute in Kalamazoo, Michigan, is a philanthropic operating foundation with financial assets of over \$360 million. These assets are used to support a very broad range of programs to advance the Institute's mission of **transforming** the world for the better by strengthening the connection between the inner life of mind and spirit with the outer life of service and action. (see

<http://www.fetzer.org/about-us/mission> and

<http://www.fetzer.org/about-us/faqs> )

Under its new president, Professor Lawrence Sullivan (formerly of Harvard) the Institute has convened advisory councils of experts in some fifteen areas to help prioritize and direct the Institute's funding most effectively. The areas include Arts, Business, Engineering, Design, Governance, Health, Humanities, Labor, Law, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Sports and World Religions and Spirituality.

I was invited to serve on the last of these and participated in its advisory council meeting in Kalamazoo at the beginning of the month.



World Religions & Spirituality  
Advisory Council

### Nov. 6-8, Palermo Sicily

At the request of the Israeli Ambassador to the Holy See, I participated in an interreligious/intercultural conference in Palermo under the patronage of the local government and the Catholic Church in Sicily together with COPPEM , the Standing Committee for the Euro Mediterranean Partnership of Local and Regional Authorities established in Palermo in November 2000 (see <http://www.coppem.org/default.asp?p=86> )

Palermo Cathedral, Sicily



The gathering was held at the Archbishop's Palace which is part of the complex of Palermo Cathedral and was entitled "Days of study and reflection on interreligious and intercultural dialogue" . The conference was chaired by both the Cardinal of Palermo and the President of the

region of Sicily and inter alia involved city/regional mayors and academics from Israel, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Jordan and the Gulf, as well as from European countries. I

participated in a session entitled "If Religion and Peace are or should be synonymous, why is there conflict in the name of religion?" I also spoke on a panel for students and academics held at the Pontifical Faculty of Theology, on the topic "Educating for peaceful coexistence". (see:

<http://translate.google.co.il/translate?hl=en&sl=it&tl=en&u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cittanuo.va.it%2Fcontenuto.php%3FTipoContenuto%3Dweb%26idContenuto%3D331476> and <http://translate.google.co.il/translate?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://www.coppem.org/default.asp%3Fp%3D297&ei=6qXTTsyGBqSO4gSQ09SdDQ&sa=X&oi=translate&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCEQ7gEwAA&prev=/search%3Fq%3DSicilia%2BTeologica%2Binterreligiosa%26hl%3Den%26biw%3D1280%26bih%3D603%26prmd%3Dimvns> .)

## Nov. 9/10, Rome/Vatican

AJC helped establish the Council of the heads of religions in Israel some four years ago. This Council involving all the officially recognized religious communities in Israel meets once a year hosted by the different religions in rotation.



Council of Religious Leaders in Israel hosts Pope Benedict XVI, Nazareth 2009

It was this Council that hosted Pope Benedict XVI for the ecumenical event in Nazareth held during his Papal visit to Israel in 2009.

and was invited by the Pope for a reciprocal visit to the Vatican. This audience (which had been scheduled almost a year before but was cancelled due to industrial strikes in Israel) took place on November 10<sup>th</sup>.

## **Vatican Insider: Israel council of Religious leaders, model of harmony**

**Delegation received by Pope Benedict XVIth on November 10**

LISA PALMIERI-BILLIG

ROME



Just two weeks after the grand Assisi interreligious summit of October 27, a 22 member delegation of the leaders of 18 different religious communities from Israel that constitute Israel's working Interreligious Council, came to Rome to be received by Benedict XVI. The invitation had been extended to them by the Pope in Nazareth during the his visit to the Holy Land in 2009, and its proximity to the Assisi event lent a special meaning as a timely follow-up to the message of brotherhood and common commitment to the pursuit of peace that had been launched there only a few days earlier.

The Middle East is generally associated with descriptions of ongoing interreligious and interethnic conflicts, but this multicolored Hebrew speaking group seemed to flagrantly contradict the common media stereotypes.

On November 9, inhabitants and passersby on the main street of Rome's ancient ghetto seemed amazed and fascinated by the sight of Imams and Sheikhs with white turbans and robes, rabbis with black cylinder hats and kippas (including those of the Chief Rabbi of Kiryat Ono, Ratson Arussi; of Oded Wiener, Director of Israel's Chief Rabbinate, and of AJC's Director of International Interreligious Affairs, Rabbi David Rosen) together with a series of white collared priests strolling around and pausing for tea and espresso, chatting loudly in Hebrew and Arabic with the familiarity of old friends.

**See full article at:**

<http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/homepage/inquiries-and-interviews/detail/articolo/dialogo-interreligioso-interreilious-dialogue-dialogo-interreligioso-10249/>



Pope Benedict XVI hosts Council of Religious Leaders in Israel, The Vatican, 2011

**Video:**

<http://www.romereports.com/palio/benedict-xvi-meets-with-the-israeli-religious-council-english-5371.html>

**Pope Benedict XVI's address to the delegation:**

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2011/november/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20111110\\_israeli-religious-council\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2011/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20111110_israeli-religious-council_en.html)

**Other press reports:**

<http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1104411.htm>

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/pope-meets-with-Israeli-christian-muslim-and-jewish-leaders-1.394858>

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/1,7340,L-4146758,00.html>

## Nov.15-17,Marrakech, Morocco



Marrakech, Morocco

The world interfaith body Religions for Peace (<http://religionsforpeace.org/>) of which I am an international co-President, held both a meeting of its MENA constituent as well as meetings of its Executive Committee on which I serve, in Marrakech at the invitation of Mr. Xavier Hermes who hosted the gathering in his beautiful Moroccan riad.

While the Executive Committee principally focused on preparations for the organization's next world Assembly; the MENA meeting focused primarily on the challenge of guaranteeing security for all religious communities in the wake of the Arab Spring and ongoing upheaval in many countries – in particular, Syria. Participants came from Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and , Iran, and many of them were influential figures in their respective societies; I was the only Israeli present. At the conclusion of the deliberations , a notable declaration was issued entitled Engaging Faiths to Advance Common Good in the Middle East and North Africa (see: <http://religionsforpeace.org/news/sgupdates/summary-the-marrakesh.html>)



RfP Meetings at Xavier Hermes riad, Marrakech, Morocco