

Rabbi Rosen invested as Papal knight

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Rabbi David Rosen, the American Jewish Committee's international director of interreligious affairs on Thursday became the first Israeli citizen, the first Orthodox rabbi and the fifth living Jew to be invested with a papal knighthood.

Rosen received the decoration and citation attesting to his new status as a Knight Commander of the Pontifical Order of St Gregory the Great at a ceremony hosted at the Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center by the Apostolic Delegate in Jerusalem and Palestine and the Apostolic Nuncio in Israel Archbishop Pietro Sambi.

The investiture was conducted by Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with Jewry. The ceremony coincided with the 40th anniversary celebrations in Israel of Nostra Aetate, the ground-breaking Vatican II document that paved the way for mutual respect and dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Jews.

Kasper credited Rosen with being a moving force in the realization and implementation of the spirit of Nostra Aetate.

Noting that Rosen is active in many fields, Kasper who has known him and worked with him for several years said: "One meets him everywhere that this dialogue is going on - and he keeps the dialogue going on."

He first met Rosen, Kasper recalled, as a Jewish partner in dialogue. He found Rosen to be frank, free and outspoken, saying what pleased him about the Christians and also what didn't please him.

Kasper characterized Rosen as "a fair partner who wants to understand Christianity" and struggles to overcome misunderstandings and slander. He described Rosen as a man of peace and dialogue who builds bridges.

One of the most positive developments of the last half century said Kasper is that Jews and Christians have found a way to gather. "It is a sign of hope and reconciliation, friendship and mutual understanding." Kasper made a point of emphasizing that in his work for reconciliation and peace, Rosen is not a man of compromise, but acts from the depth of his Jewish faith.

Because Jews and Christians are both children of Abraham who received a promise to be a blessing for all people said Kasper, "We have a universal dimension in sanctifying the name of God. In this

secular world in which we live, there is a danger of forgetting the name of God."

In response, the powerfully articulate Rosen said that he was not usually at a loss for words, nor he admitted was he a particularly modest individual, but after hearing what Kasper had said about him, he felt rather inadequate.

In his quest for reconciliation he said, he had remained loyal to his people, his faith and his tradition. His aim in life was to reach out and build bridges of understanding and thus make the world a better place, said Rosen.

A former Chief Rabbi of Ireland, Rosen confessed that when he brought his family to live in Israel 21 years ago, he thought that he had said goodbye to pomp and circumstance and had no idea what providence had in store for him.

"I'm an extremely lucky beneficiary of timing," he said, observing that he had been at the right place at times of historic opportunity.

Rosen who was on the team that negotiated diplomatic relations between Israel and the Vatican was pleased to see among the witnesses to his honor Shmuel Hadass, who was Israel's first ambassador to the Vatican.

He also paid tribute to Zvi Werblovsky whom he lauded as an Israeli pioneer in the field of Jewish-Christian dialogue. "I see myself as a spiritual son of his in this endeavor," said Rosen, who in a post ceremonial conversation, said that Werblovsky should have been given a papal knighthood years ago.

It was a most rewarding day for Rosen and his family. From Notre Dame he continued on to Dormition Abbey, where at another ceremony hosted by Abbot Benedikt Lindemann of the Benedictine Abbey Hagia Maria Sion he was presented with the Mount Zion Foundation's Award for Interreligious Understanding in recognition for his contribution to Jewish-Christian reconciliation, understanding and cooperation.

The Mount Zion award is presented biannually to individuals and institutions that have made outstanding contributions to the enhancement of dialogue between the different religions and cultures of the Holy Land.