

The full speech written by Archbishop Justin and delivered in person by Revd Dr Richard Sudworth, for the 2023 Emerging Peacemakers Forum Graduation Ceremony at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Geneva.

With great thanks to Dr Jerry Pillay and the World Council of Churches for kindly hosting the conference, Judge Abdelsalam and his team and the Muslim Council of Elders for their investment in making this happen, and for the Rose Castle Foundation, Dr Sarah Snyder and her team for their skill and wisdom in providing vital input.

The full speech that had been prepared by Archbishop Justin:

I want to thank my friend, the Grand Imam, for his foresight in taking the initiative for this whole project of Emerging Peacemakers. My prayers are with him for a full recovery after his operation. It is important to frame the context of this graduation ceremony and this whole event within friendship.

My hope is that you have made friends over this last week: friends across the boundaries of faith. Friends do not mimic each other. Friends are not reflections of ourselves. Friends are people of difference that we are committed to the welfare of. It is as friends that we can both receive the gift of the other, and in time, offer challenge, knowing that we seek a shared good.

This is the vision I have for our respective religious communities and most especially for Christians, Jews, and Muslims: that we are friends across and with our difference, not needing uniformity and agreement, to celebrate the welfare of each other.

You may be aware that it has been a busy year for the Church of England most especially as we made preparations for the coronation of King Charles in May of this year. If you watched the event on television, you will have seen that it was opened by a young schoolboy, framing everything under the theme of service; that power and authority only have value when put to the service of others, and particularly in service of the most vulnerable: the elderly, children, the stranger, the refugee.

Which brings me to the title of this keynote “the importance of empowering youth in interfaith relationships”. Implicit in this very title is the sense that someone like me, with authority, power, and seniority in age, has to make space to a younger generation, to be serving you as you embark on a calling to build friendships across different faiths. It is why I would have sought to be listening to your reflections on this last week more than speaking into this event.

I believe you have been hearing about the 12 Habits of a Reconciler. I want to use the 3 habits of Reconciliation that our team at Lambeth Palace have honed down from these 12 as touchstones for what I share now. These are: 1. Be Curious 2. Be Present 3. Reimagine.

Be Curious

You don't need me to remind you that the world is changing at a huge rate. It's become a truism that we need to train young people for jobs that haven't yet been created such are the technological revolutions that are taking place right now. Professor Kwame Anthony Appiah has said that “The problem is not that we don't know each other but that, too soon, we think we know enough of each other.”

As Christians, Jews, Muslims, curiosity assumes that we do not know everything about the other. In fact, the changes of our modern world mean

that the realities of being a religious person in any one context are likely to look very different in other contexts. The internet means that there is no longer, if ever there was, a one-size-fits-all way of being a Christian, a Muslim, a Jew.

Being a Pentecostal Christian of Nigerian descent living in London will look different to being a white Anglican working class Christian in the city of Bradford. Whether you are a man or woman, Jewish or Muslim, different traditions and cultures are mixing and shaping our lived realities.

So, be curious! What are the stories that have shaped this person I am meeting now? And my experience of any communal interfaith dialogue is that we often discover as much difference and strangeness within our own community as much as the other's.

We talk a lot of dialogue across the East and the West in terms of religions. I can see that the world that you are growing in leadership to is one which will recognise that the notions of East and West are increasingly unhelpful. Muslims in the UK, for example, are fashioning a very British way of being Muslim, because it is their home.

Some of the most vibrant Christian communities in the UK right now, the growing younger churches, are British-Nigerian and British-Chinese. And the Christians of North Africa and the Middle East are the most ancient Christian communities in the world and rooted firmly in these lands. How we are attentive to the complexities of lived faith today demands that we be curious.

Be Present

Being curious leads to being present because it requires us to make space to listen; being present to the surprises we encounter: surprises of similarity and resonance, as well as bafflement or challenge. Being present means sticking with some of the difficulties and discomforts. I'm sure some of you will have encountered these moments already this week. When I am present to my family and friends, I am prepared to hear their perspectives, not impose my own on them.

This gathering of Emerging Peacemakers is an opportunity to build on the particular links that exist across the three Abrahamic Faiths: Jewish, Christian and Muslim. Albeit that we do tell very different versions of some shared stories, there are important resonances that demand that we seek peaceable common ground. But I'm mindful that being present to each other means there are always ghosts in the room that may not be physically present, but are there nonetheless.

Being present as people of faith, believing in the one God, does mean that we believe in the preciousness of each person: the dignity of every human. So, when we talk together as Jews, Christians and Muslims, how do we talk in ways that give respect, care, love to those that are not with us: Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists, agnostics, atheists and others? This is the vista of our interconnected world today, and the future of interfaith peace-making: that our voices and actions seek the good of all and have integrity across all communities.

Reimagine

Being curious and being present in today's world, then means that we need to reimagine new possibilities for relationship. One of the reasons that older leaders need to give space for younger leaders is that we oldies are too fond of saying, "We tried that and it didn't work". Reimagining requires risk.

There is a glorious prophetic vision in the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Old Testament, in the book of Isaiah. It is in the picture language of a world where the lion lies down with the lamb and a child plays by the nest of the adder. It's meant to be an arresting image that shocks and delights. What situations today can be completely overturned by reimagining old enemies coming together as friends playfully?

In another prophetic book, Joel, it talks of the elderly dreaming dreams and the young having visions. What is your vision? What might need to happen to get there? It's clearly intentional that it's the young that have the visions, the portents of future possibilities, and it's the old that have the dreams. I'm not going to flesh out a vision out for you. It's your turn now: but be bold, that's what visions are for.

I want to share a final few words for the Christian Emerging Peacemakers in particular. Whenever I preach at a wedding, there's always a sense of speaking just to the couple, about married life, love and permanence, but with the wider congregation listening in for words that may be helpful for them. I'm now speaking to the Christians, but you can all listen in, and some of these words may work for you, some may not, or they may need to be worked out in other ways from within your own traditions.

So, to the Christians, to be peacemakers, to build good relationships across faith traditions: continue to pray, read your Bible, share in the eucharist, worship with other Christians – have deep roots! Roots down, walls down! Stay faithful to Christ and he will be faithful to you as you risk in relationship to others.

And back to all of us. Thank you for listening: be curious, be present, reimagine. The world needs you. And once again, I am sorry I cannot be with you in person.

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