



The Archbishop of Canterbury hosted a reception at Lambeth Palace last night for the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, which was attended by Christians, Muslims and members of other faiths.

The evening reception, on the first day of the Grand Imam's two-day visit with Archbishop Justin, was an opportunity to commend the wide range of positive, innovative and creative interfaith work being done around the UK.

Speaking at the reception Archbishop Justin hailed "the significant change" taking place within interfaith work, which he said was becoming more global in its outlook, more focused on action and more grounded in relationships of transparency and integrity.

The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, Professor Dr Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, is visiting Archbishop Justin for two-days as part of the formal relationship between the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar.

The relationship was officially established in 2002 after the events of 9/11 in 2001 to encourage learning and dialogue between the Christian and Muslims faiths.

***Read the Archbishop's remarks below:***

"It's a great pleasure to welcome you to Lambeth Palace this evening. For those of you have not been before it's wonderful to have you here for the first time. For those of you have, it's wonderful to have you back.

"It is a particular pleasure and honour to welcome His Eminence Professor al-Tayyeb, the Shaykh Al-Azhar, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar. It is an extraordinary privilege to have him and his party staying here with us this week.

"They arrived on Tuesday and we have had wonderful discussions today. We also met a group of girls from a local school, a mixed group of Muslim and Christian, and that was a wonderful meeting, it was really exciting.



"We also had some very serious conversations this morning, particularly in the light of many of the tensions that there are around the world, especially in Christian-Muslim relations, and the way in which the media portray what's happening so often in such a negative light.

"What is clear to me – and I said at the end of the meeting this morning that I was filled with joy – is that Professor al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam, is someone with a powerful, practical and courageous vision for what interfaith relations can be. Too often they can merely be declarations, endless bits of paper that are important to start things off but too often start things and finish things – nothing happens afterwards.

"It's clear that there is a significant change in the way that interfaith work is being done. It is first of all being seen as much more global. You can't just do things in one country any longer because that doesn't deal with the influences that come from abroad, and it doesn't touch those who are abroad; it is self-serving.

"Secondly, there is much more in the way of action. How can we serve on joint projects? How can we be seen to bless the communities in which we live? How can we reach out to the poor, to those on the edge? How can we be those who clearly exhibit the love of God which we speak?"



"And lastly it is something that is pragmatic in the sense of being aimed at what we can achieve, not what we can't achieve. There is much more integrity and transparency developing in the relationships. And much more of a case of saying, 'So what does this mean, how is it delivered, what happens?' And I've learned a great deal today in our discussions, particularly on this last point.

"So I want to say how enormously privileged we all feel at Lambeth Palace to have this visit. In the English expression, the cream on the cake has been the presence of the Anglican Archbishop of Jerusalem and the Middle East, Archbishop Mouneer, who has played an absolutely invaluable part in Egypt in the last few years in some very difficult times.

"His courage has been considerable. The Grand Imam's courage has been extraordinary. And to have them here together contributing to these discussions has been wonderful.

"So, welcome and thank you for being here."

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