

# NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SYNAGOGUES UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

November 3, 2021  
Washington, D. C.

## Attendance:

Rabbi David Straus, Rabbi Wayne Franklin, Rabbi Lewis Eron, Leslie Brier, Martin Budd\*, Rabbi Leonard Gordon\*, Dr. Adam Gregerman\*, Rabbi Steve Gutow, Rabbi Noam Marans, Rabbi Daniel Polish, Rabbi David Sandmel, Rabbi David Saperstein, Rabbi Burton Visotzky, Rabbi Jonathan Waxman, Rabbi Elyse Wechterman\*, Rabbi Jeffrey Wohlberg\*, Allyson Zacharoff, Rabbi Harold Berman

Guest: The Hon. Ira Forman, Former Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism,  
U. S. Department of State

H. E. Wilton Cardinal Gregory, Most Rev. Denis Madden, Sr. Anita Baird,  
Rev. Charles Cortinovis, Rev. Lawrence Frizzell\*, Rev. James Loughran, Julia McStravog, Rev.  
Brian McWeeney, Rev. Guy Massie\*, Rev. David Michael, Jan Skrehot, Rev. Walter Kedjierski, Rev.  
Dennis McManus, Rebecca Cohen

(\*Participation on Zoom)

## MINUTES RECORDED BY RABBI HAROLD BERMAN

**Cardinal Wilton Gregory** welcomed participants at the headquarters of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, where breakfast was served before boarding transportation to the **National Museum of African American History and Culture**.

Upon arrival, delegates were welcomed and given a brief orientation to the Museum, after which individuals spent several hours exploring the exhibits of the Museum.

Upon return to the offices of the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, lunch was served.

## REFLECTIONS ON THE MUSEUM VISIT AND ON ANTI-SEMITISM TODAY

**Fr. McManus** introduced **Ira Forman**, Former Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, U. S. State Department.

**Mr. Forman** began by acknowledging emotional reactions to the museum visit, with the realization that knowing and identifying historical experiences is an essential element of shaping a better future. He noted that in 1939 governments all over the world maintained antisemitic policies. But he also noted that antisemitism does not tell the story of the Jewish people. In Poland, a thousand years of Jewish life was reflected in scholarship,

commerce and culture. In telling the story of any people, it is important to appreciate and emphasize its uniqueness and its achievements.

While there are similarities of prejudice, regarding antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism, etc., **Mr. Forman** warned that one should never get into the argument of who may have suffered more. No group can fight prejudice entirely on its own and we all need to stand together.

Responding to a question by **Fr. McManus** as to where stories intersect, **Mr. Forman** emphasized the significance of the Civil Rights movement as an example of cooperative effort.

In reference to the Catholic Church in America, it was noted that approximately **3.5% of Catholics in America identify as Black**. But the inclusion of Asian, Hispanic and African church members raises the number of People of Color among America's seventy million Catholics.

**Fr. McWeeney** raised a concern for lack of civility in American political life, and suggested that religious leaders of all faiths cannot sit on the sidelines but must work together in facing this.

**Rabbi Sandmel** added the concern that in the Jewish community, as in other communities, there has not always been the same respect offered to people who don't look like those in the majority. Some Jews, like some Catholics, have become "White," but some cannot. **Cardinal Gregory** noted that when he takes off his collar he is regarded differently in the larger world.

**Rabbi Marans** noted that some of the scenes of ongoing horror in the Museum were scenes to which a Jew must relate on an emotional level. The material is so compelling that, remarkably, the Museum has not become part of ongoing culture wars of our time.

**Fr. McManus** raised the question of how the church comes to terms with racism in its past. He noted that it has acknowledged antisemitism in its history and has taken steps to deal with it.

It was noted that the church is not monolithic, and that many parishes have done remarkable things with their communities, even though some efforts by church leadership may not be reflected uniformly in different places.

**Sr. Anita Baird** made reference to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa to suggest that there is much yet to learn and that many different groups in our communities don't know each other well.

**Cardinal Gregory** added that it is important for seminarians to learn history and be able to discuss its significance in their lives and their work. He added that change is taking place in the Church, although it is not happening at the pace we might wish.

## REVIEWING: GALATIANS CATECHESSES IN THE AMERICAN CONTEXT

**Rabbi Straus** spoke of the Jews as the “ever anxious” people. Statements that emerge from the Vatican can cause anxiety and raise questions in some places about the value of dialogue. **Fr. Kedjierski** reviewed the statement by Pope Francis in August that seemed to denigrate “the law” and noted that clarification was forthcoming from the Church very quickly.

**Rabbi Sandmel** noted that in the controversy over the statement by the Pope, the original quotation was highlighted by the media far more than the clarification. Media tend to highlight controversy, and it is important for all to think about how we communicate among neighbors before we make public statements that can be hurtful. The challenge is to sensitize people to outdated tropes that perpetuate misunderstandings.

**Rev. McManus** added that we should have learned that the best way to deal with conflict is to take it “off stage.” We have worked hard to find ways to make our positive intentions clear in our dialogues and to use the contacts we have to resolve tensions rather than exacerbate them. The fact that we have misunderstandings shows the importance of dialogue. **Rabbi Marans** noted that a statement by Israel’s Chief Rabbinate which raised possible questions about future dialogue was not helpful.

**Rabbi Straus** suggested that we need to carefully adjust the language we use in ways that will increase understanding in education, in dialogue and in public statement, on all sides in our communities and in public conversation.

### NEXT MEETING

At the close of the meeting it was announced that the next dialogue is planned for **Atlanta, GA, for May 9-10**, with the hope of making a pilgrimage to Civil Rights historic places on **May 10 and 11**.

Respectfully submitted,

Rabbi Harold J. Berman  
Executive Director  
National Council of Synagogues