


# 2026 G20 INTERFAITH FORUM

*Resilient Hope, Shared Future*

**October 15–17, 2026 | Salt Lake City,**

## Summaries Include:

**Peacemaking through Disagreeing Better**

**Opening Ceremony in the Salt Lake City Tabernacle at Temple Square**

**Plenaries**

**Concurrent Sessions**

**Closing Ceremony in the Salt Lake City Cathedral of the Madeleine**

## Introduction

The 2026 G20 USA year was a landmark year for G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) because it was our first Forum in the United States. G20 is hosted by a different country every year, so it may be a couple of decades before IF20 hosts another Forum in the USA.

The theme this year was "Resilient Hope, Shared Future," which expresses the feelings of the people who came to the Forum. At the Forum and tabernacle events combined, there were **1,700** people who attended from **55 countries** and **28 religions**. We had over 740 people who registered for the plenaries and concurrent sessions, as well as an additional 1,000 who registered just for the Opening Ceremony at the Tabernacle.

Before the opening ceremony, IF20 hosted a session entitled, "Peacemaking Through Disagreeing Better," where Governor Spencer Cox (governor of Utah), David Beasley (former governor of South Carolina) and Martin Luther King III (humanitarian and civic leader) discussed the pursuit of peacemaking in an era marked by rising contempt and disagreements. To illustrate the need for peace building, Jewish and Muslim religious leaders signed the Jewish-Muslim Declaration of Fraternity of Faith as a sign of seeking to build a new paradigm for interreligious relations.

The opening and closing ceremonies also added a new dimension to the Forum proceedings. This year, both meetings included music: the Tabernacle Choir and the orchestra at Temple Square and the choir at the Cathedral of the Madeline along with the cathedral's orchestra.

The plenaries and concurrent sessions were held on the University of Utah campus. Summaries of each are included in this document. To view the videos of any of the sessions, please go to our YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAF-WHXXcGk&list=PLWq-Ms5xKH9c

The Forum hosted some significant keynote speeches. The complete text of the following speeches can be found in the Appendix:

1. Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States of America, Message on Behalf of the Holy See
2. H.E. Prof. Ibrahim Saleh Al-Naimi, Chairman of the Board of Directors, Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID), and Undersecretary, Ministry of Education and Higher Education, State of Qatar
3. Ambassador Jamieson Greer, United States Trade Representative
4. The Honorable Scott Morrison AC, 30th Prime Minister of Australia
5. Elder Gerrit W. Gong, Apostle, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

If you have any additional questions about the event, please contact us at: g20secretariat@g20interfaith.org

Thank you for your support of this important event.

## Peacemaking through Disagreeing Better

In an era marked by rising contempt and hyper-partisanship, peacemaking has become a vital necessity for religious communities and civic institutions alike. The Forum's first session was sponsored by Disagree Better and brought together public and political leaders from across the political spectrum. They explored healthy conflict not as mere civility but as a civic skill that strengthens democracy, rebuilds trust and reduces polarization. The panel drew on the legacy of nonviolent social change, global humanitarian work and national efforts at political de-escalation. It considered how faith-informed values cultivate civic cohesion and pluralism, and how leaders can advocate passionately for their convictions while treating others with dignity. Sarah Jane Weaver, Editor of the Deseret News, moderated the discussion.

***Lord Russell Rook***, Partner, Good Faith Partnership; House of Lords, opened what he described as the largest interfaith gathering in Utah's history. He explained that the interfaith movement has become skilled at agreeing well but has not yet learned to disagree well, and that faith communities are best placed to help the world do so. He proposed three commitments for the week, summed up as "ICU." The first is integrity: speaking and hearing the truth while acknowledging we are not always right. The second is charity: speaking and listening in love. The third is unity: paying the cost of acting together by choosing embrace over exclusion, welcome over walls, and deeper friendships over won arguments. After the panel, Rook called it one of the most life-giving discussions he had heard in a long time and invited attendees to meet the people seated around them.

***Governor Spencer Cox***, Governor of Utah, welcomed participants on behalf of the state. He described faith in Utah as an active verb rather than a passive word: a sacred commitment to love one's neighbor and leave things better than one found them. Turning to the roots of polarization, he argued that the deeper crisis is a loss of connection and belonging. As churches and civic associations declined, social media promised a connection it could not deliver, and its algorithms rewarded outrage. Many people settled for hating the same people together, until politics became a religion of its own.

If the social sciences have a theory of everything, Cox said, it is community. People feel unmoored by forces beyond their control, yet often do not know the neighbor next door, where they could actually make a difference. The world is repaired one conversation, one disagreement and one act of service at a time. He is most worried about homes and neighborhoods: the share of Americans who have lost a family member or close friend over politics has grown fivefold in five years. Disagreeing better does not mean abandoning one's principles, he said, but holding them with curiosity, empathy and charity. "Politicians are not worth it. We are not worth it. We are not worth losing a single friend or family member—we will let you down every time. So value your friends more than you value the politics."

Belonging and purpose are the two most powerful forces on earth, Cox said, and politicians need to get better at listening. Simply asking someone to say more about why they hold a view creates instant connection, and listening to understand rather than to argue is how an enemy becomes a friend. Asked for a final call to action, he offered a single word: hope.

***Governor David Beasley***, Breaking Bread Together; Former Governor of South Carolina, said Americans are not as divided as they appear, though they are divided and on a bad trajectory. Six years in conflict zones showed him what happens when people stop talking to one another. His remedy is simple: sitting down and breaking bread together, because sharing a meal makes it harder to hate someone, even when disagreements remain. He traced that conviction to his youth at one of South Carolina's first racially integrated schools, and to years of feeding the hungry. That work taught him that even the most ruthless people bear the image of God, and that one cannot love God without loving God's image in others.

Beasley recalled the 2015 shooting at a historic African American church in Charleston. Two days later, the victims' families went on national television to forgive the gunman, proof that love is the most powerful weapon on the planet. He noted that 87 percent of members of Congress identify as Christian yet spend the week fighting, which he called inexcusable. He described seeing each starving child in Yemen not as a statistic but as his own little brother or sister. He challenged everyone present to break bread during the Forum week with someone different from them.

***Martin Luther King III***, Humanitarian and Civic Leader; Ambassador for Global Human Rights, said people can disagree without being disagreeable, and called for a consciousness of love. He warned that the nation's current course is not sustainable. Drawing on his father's final book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, he urged a choice of community over chaos. Human beings are not monolithic, he said; that diversity is how God made us. Communities are sustained by their values and by leadership, especially faith leadership, and community advances when faith brings people together rather than pulling them apart.

King recalled the losses his family endured: his father was assassinated when he was ten, his uncle drowned under mysterious circumstances, and his grandmother was killed in her church. "I could have easily chosen to hate. But I'm so grateful for what my family taught me: to hate the act, but not the person."

Better communities, like strong marriages, require work, King said. The civil rights movement was carried by a relatively small number of committed people, yet it changed the world. Today's challenge is to keep young people from losing hope, and to ask why a nation with so much wealth still has people without food or shelter. Building the beloved community requires love practiced every day, and when he feels overwhelmed, he chooses one small thing to do. He urged listeners to be ashamed to die until they have done something, however small, to make the world better.

Recommendations from the session:

- Break bread during the Forum week with someone different from you (Beasley).
- Practice integrity, charity and unity ("ICU") in every exchange (Rook).
- Listen to understand rather than to argue, and value friends and family more than politics (Cox).
- Do one small thing each day to make the world better (King).

## The Jewish–Muslim Declaration of Fraternity in Faith




If learning to disagree better enables us to live together despite our differences, the Jewish–Muslim Declaration of Fraternity in Faith asks what it would mean to go further. It envisions distinct identities becoming sources of blessing in our relationships. The Declaration grew out of a call issued by Jewish and Muslim religious leaders at the 2025 IF20 Summit in Cape Town. It moves beyond tolerance as a response to hatred, and beyond coexistence as the peaceful management of difference. In their place, it offers a narrative of shared story, mutual responsibility and "co-elevation." Deeply rooted in the sacred sources of Judaism and Islam, it offers a model for relationships among religions and among distinct identities more broadly. Lord Russell Rook introduced the presentation, reminding participants that the IF20 is about doing, not only hearing.

***Imam Dr. Talib Shareef***, President, International Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation; Masjid Muhammad, The Nation's Mosque, said much of the world is exhausted by conflict. Suffering in the Middle East has normalized distrust between peoples who share far more than divides them. The greatest danger, he argued, is not disagreement but the hardening of hearts: when people stop recognizing one another's dignity, violence becomes easier and suffering becomes statistics. Citing the Qur'anic teaching that humanity was made into nations and tribes in order to know one another, he described years of dialogue with Rabbi Nagen. Together they explored how their

texts and traditions, without compromise, can become a foundation for mutual blessing. “We aren’t here to coexist. We’re here to co-elevate.”

That vision, Shareef said, requires communities willing to resist inheriting the hatreds of history and the moral courage to protect others’ dignity even amid disagreement. Peace is not only the absence of war but the presence of justice, dignity, compassion and mutual responsibility. Building it belongs to people of faith, educators and civil society as well as governments and diplomats. The Declaration speaks to anyone who has inherited both kinship and conflict, he said, because our scars should not divide us but make us healers.

***Rabbi Dr. Yakov Nagen***, President, The Jerusalem Interfaith Center, described a fraternity that exists not despite different religions but is deepened, enriched and blessed by them. He called it fitting to gather in a Christian house of prayer, completing the circle of the Abrahamic family. When ego dominates, he said, we see only ourselves; when we make room for God, we make room for the other. Real differences exist between the two faiths, but they should not diminish love. “Let us not just ask, ‘Can I tolerate you?’ but, ‘What can I learn from you?’” Before we belonged to different nations and religions, he said, we belonged to one human family. Shareef and Nagen then read the Declaration aloud, signed it and invited all in attendance to add their signatures.

Recommendations from the session:

- Find someone from a different tradition who can become a source of friendship, wisdom and blessing (Nagen).
- Add your signature to the Declaration.
- Resist inheriting the hatreds of history, and protect the dignity of others even amid disagreement (Shareef).

**The full text of The Jewish–Muslim Declaration of Fraternity in Faith can be found on the website. Here is a link to the pamphlet: Jewish-Muslim_Declaration_Pamphlet.docx**

## Opening Ceremony and Welcome Concert by The Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square



The Forum formally opened in the Historic Tabernacle at Temple Square with an evening of addresses and music under the theme “Resilient Hope, Shared Future.” Senior leaders from across the world’s faith traditions reflected on hope as something chosen and built rather than awaited. They also spoke about keeping the human person at the center of economic and technological progress, and about the G20’s responsibility to the most vulnerable. The Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square performed between addresses. President Dallin H. Oaks hosted the evening. The Right Reverend Alastair Redfern offered the opening prayer, and Lord Russell Rook offered the closing prayer after the choir sang “Come, Come, Ye Saints.”

***President Michael O. Leavitt***, The Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square; Former United States Secretary of Health and Human Services; Former Governor of the State of Utah, conducted the ceremony. He noted the symbolism of a choir founded by religious refugees. Drawing on his years in government, he described how faith leaders can catalyze action through trust. As governor, his call for foster families in Utah went unanswered until faith leaders engaged. Later, in Ethiopia’s fight against AIDS, a call to action from the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church moved people to get tested and treated. “A government can use taxes to build a clinic, but it often takes the trust of a faith leader to get people to walk through the door. Faith cannot

compel. It depends on freedom to survive. That is why protecting religious freedom must never end."

***Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa***, Secretary General, Muslim World League, delivered the opening keynote as guest of honor. He distinguished hope from mere optimism: "Optimism waits for things to improve on their own. Hope, however, is a decision taken by people of living conscience and a willingness to do hard work for tomorrow." In Islam, he said, despair is considered a departure from faith, and hope is both a duty and a sustained endeavor.

That duty is being tested by escalating hate speech, Al-Issa said. History teaches that violence begins with words, digital platforms now amplify them, and hate speech often borrows the language of religion, so faith leaders must be the first to reject it. He described the Muslim World League's initiative to build bridges between East and West, launched in 2023. He also noted that he had represented Islam when the World Economic Forum in Davos hosted its first dialogue forum on bringing people together. Lasting impact begins with the family's role in shaping children, followed by education and wider society, with spiritual influence running through all three.

The real threat, Al-Issa warned, is allowing differences to harden into walls of hatred. Any unjust war, including one waged in the name of religion, serves evil rather than God. People must not hate a religion because of those who claim it and do wrong, nor use religion to shield wrongdoers.

***Full remarks of Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States of America, Message on Behalf of the Holy See can be found in the Appendix.***

***President Dallin H. Oaks***, President, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, welcomed delegates to the Church's world headquarters. He called the assembly the most prominent gathering of faith leaders ever to convene in Salt Lake City, and said the Church fully supports the cause that brought them together. The IF20's approach is broader than what any community does separately, he said: it cares for the world's most vulnerable and achieves cooperation without compromising religious commitments. Faith-informed perspectives have a meaningful place in global policymaking, but even more important are the relationships built to promote peacemaking. He commended participants as peacemakers, said the Church wants to be part of their efforts, and invoked a blessing on their work.

***Professor W. Cole Durham***, President, G20 Interfaith Forum Association, recalled growing up with stories of how the Tabernacle's builders used the soft power of rawhide to hold its structure in place. The Forum's work, he said, likewise relies on soft power within the G20. Since 2014, the IF20 has worked to care for the most vulnerable and to ensure that faith-informed perspectives have a seat at the diplomatic table. Its mission is to translate religious values into action and dialogue into "diapraxis."

***Professor Katherine Marshall***, Vice President, G20 Interfaith Forum Association, said the Forum builds on twelve years of commitment to the idea that the finest of religious values and experience belongs at the G20 table. Questions of justice and fairness run through the economic

agendas G20 leaders will take up in December. Religious communities sustain care through crises, rebuild shattered lives and keep hope alive when institutions falter. Ideas are contested, but participants share solid common ground and can achieve far more together than separately. The test of prosperity, she said, must begin with what it means for those with the least resources and power.

***His Virtue Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh***, Chairman, Caucasus Muslims Board, conveyed the greetings of the President of Azerbaijan. He said dialogue among religions and civilizations, and joint action between religious and secular communities, matter more than ever. He was honored to take part in discussions on establishing a permanent religious advisory council within the IF20. It is now time for the council to be established and begin its work, he said, in the hope that its recommendations on building global peace will prove useful to political leaders. He thanked the United States, its people and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for hosting the Forum.

***Elder Metropolitan Emmanuel of Chalcedon***, Ecumenical Patriarchate, represents a church that has lived in Constantinople for seventeen centuries. He noted that in Greek the word "shared," from the Forum's theme, shares a root with the word for community. When the Apostle Paul addressed the Athenians, he began not with what separated them but with the God who made all people. Variety belongs to creation itself, the Metropolitan said: in the choir, the bass does not ask the soprano to come down to his range, and the music is beautiful because the voices remain different.

The original meaning of patience is "to remain underneath," the Metropolitan said: to bear the weight and not walk away. The earth also belongs to our shared future. A crisis in humanity's relationship with God becomes a crisis in its relationship with creation, and the consequences are visible in our rivers and forests. Real dialogue is measured in years. It also requires the courage to ask those within one's own tradition who use God's name against their neighbor to change.

***Pujya Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati***, Secretary-General, Global Interfaith WASH Alliance, found the Forum's theme in the Tabernacle itself. Its pioneer builders walked more than a thousand miles to worship according to conscience, and built not a fortress but a place to sing: a handcart that becomes a choir. Human progress, she said, rests on three trainable beliefs: that I can act now, that my actions matter, and that I can imagine a future that does not yet exist. "Hope is not a mood we wait for. It is a capacity we build. Therefore every house of worship on this planet is a school of hope."

Before the world's brokenness can be fixed, Saraswati said, people must heal what is broken within and between themselves. India's G20 presidency described humanity as one earth and one family sharing one future. In that light, she said, every G20 decision is a family decision, measured by how it cares for the most vulnerable. Like voices in a choir, the world's religions need not become the same, but they can sing the same song of hope.

***Rabbi Mark Dratch***, Executive Vice President Emeritus, Rabbinical Council of America; Chair, International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, began with the prophet Ezekiel's vision of a valley of dry bones. It was the remains of a people who said their hope was

lost, until God restored it. The prophet Zechariah later called them "prisoners of hope." The Jewish people have held fast to hope throughout history, Dratch said. Naftali Herz Imber's "Hatikvah," "The Hope," turned Ezekiel's lament into the declaration that "our hope is not yet lost." Concentration camp survivors sang those words just days after their liberation. As the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks observed, optimism requires no courage, but hope does. Faced with today's challenges, the reasonable conclusion is despair, but every tradition knows how to say no to despair and calls its people to act.

***Dr. Francis Kuria Kagema***, Secretary General, Religions for Peace, said the gathering gave him hope because it already symbolized togetherness. The world faces a polycrisis: strain on the planet, ongoing conflict, growing migration, mainstream xenophobia, and eroding trust as AI accelerates disinformation. A shared future requires resilience grounded in the inherent worth of every being, and peace, since flourishing cannot exist amid violence. Religious freedom allows each tradition to teach and uphold its own virtues. Compassion, mercy and charity need not be invented anew; they already live in sacred traditions and must be applied to conflict and to climate change, whose burden falls hardest on those least responsible. Faith leaders share a moral responsibility to act together for the sacred, shared flourishing of all.

Recommendations from the session:

- Establish a permanent religious advisory council within the IF20 to offer recommendations on global peace to political leaders (Pashazadeh).
- Measure prosperity, and every G20 decision, by its impact on those with the least resources and power (Marshall, Saraswati).
- Protect religious freedom so faith leaders can build trust and each tradition can teach its own virtues (Leavitt, Kuria).
- Faith leaders should be the first to reject hate speech that borrows the language of religion (Al-Issa).
- Call on those within one's own tradition who use God's name against their neighbor to change (Metropolitan Emmanuel).

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## Plenary 1: Unleashing Human Potential for the Common Good

Abundant riches and stunning progress in human welfare sit alongside stubborn poverty and suffering, and this contrast is a core challenge for people of faith. The 2026 G20 agenda traces paths toward prosperity by unleashing creative and entrepreneurial energy. Faith communities share that commitment to improving lives, confident that prosperity can and must serve the common good, with balance and equity as core objectives. Their shared concern for those left behind, a continuing IF20 imperative, demands that economic policy focus on the causes of inequality, from broad socio-political systems to the realities of families and communities. The session asked how the G20 and faith communities can support entrepreneurship, address unsustainable debt burdens and ensure effective social protection. Timothy Stratford, Senior Counsel at Covington & Burling LLP, moderated the discussion.

***Professor W. Cole Durham***, President, G20 Interfaith Forum Association, welcomed participants to the first full day of the Forum. He explained that the program takes into account the three priorities of the 2026 U.S. G20 presidency, adapted to the work of the IF20.

***Professor Katherine Marshall***, Vice President, G20 Interfaith Forum Association, said the program blends those priorities with other issues the IF20 has long considered important. The IF20's ambition is to bring the best of religious wisdom and experience into the global governance system. She described 2026 as a stock-taking year between G20 cycles, in which partner organizations had proposed their own sessions. Academic partners, especially Georgetown University, had helped make the Forum's proposals rigorous enough to influence the G20 agenda. With roughly three-quarters of the world's population claiming a religious affiliation, she said, the IF20 functions as a network of networks. Its policy recommendations draw on the experience and wisdom of those institutions.

***Full remarks of Ambassador Jamieson Greer, United States Trade Representative can be found in the Appendix.***

***Dr. Kim Tan***, Co-Founder, Transformational Business Network Alliance, invests in businesses that tackle poverty, education and social issues among marginalized groups. Some fifty years ago, he noted, several African economies were larger than those of Singapore and Taiwan. Those Asian economies transformed themselves through enterprise, while many African economies did not. Aid and charity will always have a place, he said, but long-term transformation requires enterprise.

Tan described several of his network's ventures:

- a chain of schools that costs $5 per child per month and now employs 100,000 teachers;
- a call center inside a Singapore prison that pays incarcerated workers and rehires them on release, now expanding to nine prisons in Indonesia;
- a business employing trafficking survivors in the Philippines;
- an ecotourism venture that has restored 40,000 acres in South Africa.

His network aims to be faith-based but not faith-biased. He described it as a group of "frustrated philanthropists and repentant bankers" whose largest investors are now sovereign wealth funds. He invoked *tikkun olam*, repairing a world in disrepair, as the reason faith communities belong in this work.

***Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne***, President, Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, traced the movement to the late 1950s in Sri Lanka. Volunteers inspired by Buddhist and Gandhian teaching began sharing their labor to meet community needs, starting with building roads. "We build the road and the road builds us." The movement understands development as an awakening that begins in individuals and spreads through families, communities and society, with spiritual and moral transformation coming first. Its model organizes communities, identifies and meets their needs, and then launches entrepreneurship. Over nearly seven decades, it has reached some 15,000 communities, about 5,000 of which now function as independent legal entities. It avoids businesses, such as gambling and alcohol, that are legal but not ethical.

Ariyaratne stressed that international trade policies directly affect households, and that resilience must be built at the grassroots, household and community levels. He called for regulatory environments that encourage values-based economic sharing. He also called for connecting communities as networks so they have a voice when harmful policies arise.

***Eric LeCompte***, Executive Director, Jubilee USA Network, said that God has given us a rich and abundant world, and that we are closest to God and to one another when we share it. The Torah called for debts to be forgiven, slaves freed and land left fallow every seven years, and for all of it again in the Jubilee year. This protected people from becoming too poor or too rich. For 25 years, Jubilee USA has built a global campaign around that vision, and debt relief remains one of the last bipartisan causes in the United States.

One in ten people lives in extreme poverty, LeCompte said, and 23 million more fell into it in the past year. He had just returned from IMF, World Bank and G20 meetings in Bangkok. Little good news is coming from international meetings, he said, but the G20 continues to lead on debt relief, debt swaps, improved restructuring and economic stability. When trading partners fall into crisis, food and fuel prices rise at home. He urged advocates to move from broad faith principles to actionable structural policies, such as the debt swaps prioritized by the U.S. Development Finance Corporation.

***Kevin Hyland OBE,*** chair of the IF20 anti-trafficking working group and primary author of the UN SDG against human trafficking, pointed to global systemic failures as a key reason that roughly 50 million people in the 21st century are being trafficked and enslaved. Trafficking corrupts economies and destabilizes national and international security, but it persists because it is a lucrative, almost risk-free business for international crime. Set up under Pope Francis, the Santa Marta Group seeks global partners to fight trafficking among government, law enforcement, religious groups, business, and justice actors.

The group's six-point plan begins with a call to governments to ensure their procurements do not fund trafficking. It also calls for chasing the 'tainted money' by which trafficking corrupts economies, and for making more robust use of technology to detect and combat trafficking. Hyland believes the G20 is in a good position to lead the global fight against trafficking, and that the IF20 can do much to make that happen.

***Anne Simmons-Benton***, Chair, Women20 USA, said there is one world and enough resources if we share them well. This year's W20 brought together more than 100 delegates from 15 countries and produced a guidebook of case studies, policy recommendations and metrics. Women make up 42 percent of the global agrifood workforce. Closing gender gaps in agrifood systems would add $1 trillion to global GDP, lift 45 million people out of food insecurity and make 245 million more resilient to shocks. The W20 also called for investment in care systems for elders, children and people with disabilities, which benefit women and men alike and generate growth.

Faith communities are on the ground serving the poorest of the poor, Simmons-Benton said. If women are half the planet and faith groups represent some 80 percent of it, together they can

amplify these priorities. The W20's theme this year was radical collaboration, she noted, and it is time to act.

In the discussion, Stratford asked Greer for his takeaways and his advice for working with governments. Greer said he had heard creativity, pragmatism and action. Governments often treat partnerships with faith groups as a transfer of wealth, which does not create lasting relief. The panel instead offered fundamental solutions that help people create wealth in their own towns, regions and countries. That matters in an era of unprecedented economic migration, because it allows people to stay home with their families and jobs. He described his office as action-based and invited faith groups to bring granular, creative proposals. Simmons-Benton thanked him for his values-based remarks.

Recommendations from the session:

- Bring granular, practical proposals for helping people build wealth in their own communities to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (Greer).
- Pair aid with enterprise and impact investment, including from sovereign wealth funds, for long-term transformation (Tan).
- Create regulatory environments that encourage values-based economic sharing, and connect grassroots communities as networks with a policy voice (Ariyaratne).
- Sustain G20 leadership on debt relief, debt swaps and debt restructuring that include social protections (LeCompte).
- Adopt the Santa Marta Group's six-point plan against trafficking (Hyland):
    - due diligence in government procurement and supply chains;
    - pursuing tainted money and using it for enforcement and victim compensation;
    - scrutinizing technology's role;
    - enforcing existing instruments such as the U.S. Tariff Act;
    - elevating the issue at the G20;
    - ethical leadership.
- Close gender gaps in agrifood systems and invest in care systems, as set out in the W20's recommendations (Simmons-Benton).

## Plenary 2: Deadline 2030: Extending G20 Horizons




Progress toward human flourishing is expanding on many fronts. Better health stands as a stunning modern achievement and a witness to the deep integration of faith and contemporary science. Universal literacy, a distant dream a century ago, is now a shared imperative. Global governance now sets specific objectives, grounded in what is acknowledged to be a fragile consensus about goals and how to achieve them. The IF20's twelve years of experience highlight the interwoven ethical and practical demands of peace, prosperity and care for the planet. With the 2030 deadline for the UN Sustainable Development Goals four years away, the session asked what lies on the more distant horizon. Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi, Executive Director of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, moderated the discussion.

***Full remarks of The Honorable Scott Morrison AC, 30th Prime Minister of Australia can be found in the Appendix.***

***Professor Melissa Rogers***, Distinguished Scholar in Faith, Law, and Public Policy, Wake Forest University School of Divinity, delivered a keynote address. She said the Forum meets at a time of urgent and daunting challenges but also great hope. The IF20 network, launched more than a decade ago, continues to bear good fruit and is needed more than ever. There is growing consensus that we cannot understand our nations or our world without understanding religion. The Ebola response in West Africa required religious leaders and faith-based organizations

alongside public health and policy experts, since burial practices were spreading the virus and faith personnel were heroically fighting it. Governments frequently cannot work effectively without partnering with people of goodwill, she said, which calls for greater religious literacy and collaboration.

Rogers also pointed to growing consensus around multifaith groups that forge common strategies based on shared beliefs while keeping distinct traditions and real disagreements. She called for restoring humanitarian aid where it has been cut, calling it both the right and the smart thing to do. She also urged promoting religious freedom for everyone, everywhere, and speaking up when leaders claim to defend religious liberty while spreading falsehoods about other faiths. Because the executive branch can be notoriously difficult for faith communities to navigate, she urged the IF20 to develop a more robust process for carrying its recommendations through to the G20.

***Professor Katherine Marshall***, Vice President, G20 Interfaith Forum Association, said that for most of human history, people assumed the poor would always be with us. That is no longer true: a decent life for every person is possible, and that knowledge brings a responsibility to end extreme poverty. Leaving no one behind is at the core of the IF20's ethics, she said, and must be translated into policy that moves from bandages to truly sustainable development. The IF20 pairs the message that a better world is possible with practical work on how to achieve it, from the community to the global level. Children's health and care are among the most obvious areas for engagement.

***Dr. Esben Lunde Larsen***, Senior One Health Specialist, The Pandemic Fund at the World Bank, shared that he was born in Denmark with heart failure and survived surgery at nine months old with a 50 percent chance of survival. Millions are not so lucky, he said, and the world needs stronger health infrastructure, capacity and workforce. The Pandemic Fund, established in 2022, works with some $11.5 billion to build laboratories and health workforces. Faith-based organizations are key partners but are not yet sufficiently part of the model. He proposed organizing them into national councils that governments can work with, backed by co-investment mechanisms to which faith groups can contribute cash or volunteer hours. He urged that these councils include young people, since reaching the last mile will require both technology and youth.

***Reverend Dr. David Beckmann***, President Emeritus, Bread for the World, said recent decades have brought more progress against poverty than any time in history, but that progress is grinding to a halt. He attributed this to a shift in the priorities of the world's most powerful governments, led by the United States. He cited cuts in aid, mass deportation, disruption of global climate efforts and now war in the Middle East, all of which are increasing poverty and hunger. G20 summits have discussed the SDGs for years, he noted, but they are absent from this year's U.S. agenda. He urged participants to press governments to raise these concerns in December, and to remember God's special concern for people in need whenever they vote. Prayer, he added, shapes those who pray, and public prayer shapes whole congregations.

***Elissa McConkie Gifford***, Director, Humanitarian Services, Welfare and Self-Reliance Services, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, said that despite the Church's significant

humanitarian investment, much remains to be done. The Church works to strengthen women and children both by partnering with nonprofits and governments to strengthen systems and by working at the grassroots. On weekdays and Saturdays, its meetinghouses may be filled with families attending nutrition screenings run by government health workers and Church volunteers. Starting with children, literacy, health and self-reliance, she said, the goal is an environment in which people have the agency to make better choices for themselves and their families.

***Steve Messeh***, Director, Center for Faith, U.S. Department of Agriculture, said the larger framing for the 2030 goals must be the relationship between government and faith. Today's problems are too dire to wait for government solutions that are often a dollar short and a minute too late. Government should instead empower and walk alongside faith-based organizations, while removing unnecessary strings on its funding. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the USDA and local faith-based organizations delivered 17 million boxes of food through the Farmers to Families Food Box program. "That's not a political strategy. That's not a sermon. That's government and faith communities working hand in hand."

***H.E. Cheikhna Al Mahfoudh Bin Bayyah***, Secretary General, Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace, said he works with many people who have never heard of the SDGs and are not waiting for 2030 to act. He described an effort that delivered one billion meals in a single year and is now repeated every Ramadan, helping people access government assistance. A man forced to sell his cattle because the rains will fail cannot wait until 2030, he said; people need education, health care and help now. He proposed that the IF20 recommend G20 leaders fast for one day during their Miami summit while the religious community prays for them, because to help the hungry, one must feel hunger.

In the question-and-answer session, panelists returned to themes of freedom, organizing and hope. Marshall urged bridging the gulf between humanitarian aid and development. Lunde Larsen said societies without freedom of speech and religion become corrupt, and that organized faith communities can mobilize voters to push politicians toward better decisions. Beckmann agreed. Gifford pointed to how much progress has been made since the goals were set through people working together locally. Messeh, a Coptic Christian, said religious freedom that protects only the majority misses the mark. Bin Bayyah reminded participants that no one should sleep with a full stomach while a neighbor goes hungry.

Recommendations from the session:

- Restore humanitarian aid where it has been cut, supported through both public and private funding (Rogers).
- Promote religious freedom for everyone, everywhere, including minorities, and speak up when leaders spread falsehoods about other faiths (Rogers, Messeh).
- Strengthen religious literacy in government, and build a more robust IF20 process for carrying recommendations to the G20 (Rogers).
- Organize faith-based organizations into national councils that governments can partner with, backed by co-investment mechanisms and youth representation (Lunde Larsen).
- Urge G20 governments to keep the SDGs on the agenda at the Miami Leaders' Summit (Beckmann).

- Bridge humanitarian aid and long-term development (Marshall).
- Reduce unnecessary conditions on government partnerships with faith-based organizations (Messeh).
- Invite G20 leaders to fast for one day during the Miami summit while faith communities pray for them (Bin Bayyah).

## CONCURRENT SESSIONS A

### A1 - Preventing Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery (HTMS)




For nearly a decade, the IF20's premise has been that action by G20 governments is vital to the fight against modern slavery and human trafficking. This panel, moderated by Dr Fred Axelgard of the G20 Interfaith Forum Association, focused on how faith communities, lawmakers, businesses and financial institutions worldwide can be effectively involved. It also highlighted the state of Utah's work against trafficking as a prelude to hosting the 2034 Olympic games.

***The Right Reverend Dr. Alastair Redfern***, founder of the Church of England's multi-faith response to human trafficking, said churches, as trusted actors, can educate local communities to see signs of trafficking and abuse which in turn enables law enforcement to be effective. At higher levels, he argued that governments and especially businesses must get involved to change the systems and structures that now facilitate trafficking. He also cited a new initiative whereby the fifty-six Commonwealth governments have agreed to fight slavery together, including through compatible business supply chain legislation, taxation policies that encourage good business, and giving priority to systems and structures that notice and care for the most vulnerable.

***Katie Boller Gosewisch***, Executive Director, Alliance to End Human Trafficking, asked: How can we stop creating new victims of trafficking. The AEHT focuses on prevention through education about attitudes, behaviors and systems that allow trafficking, with a focus on the foundational principles of boundaries and own consent. Children can learn to recognize the abuse of trust and the manipulation of power. Effective services must also address the conditions that traffickers exploit, such as poverty, poor housing, forced migration, and discrimination. She added that no single faith group can do this alone; ever-widening collaboration is essential.

***Most Reverend Brendan Cahill***, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Joliet, Illinois, and Chairman, USCCB Committee for Migration, described the origins of the 'Communities of Faith' in Victor, Texas, that grew out of friendship among Muslim, Christian, and Jewish citizens. It provided healing and help after the local Islamic center was burned in a hate act and a hurricane destroyed much of the town. When the Catholic parish later began an initiative to combat trafficking, it drew on existing interfaith relationships for support. He noted that the Santa Marta Group, a global initiative, began with a policeman's talk to a local church, and urged collaboration between churches, law enforcement, and legislators. He challenged church leaders to share ways to preach about trafficking, to allow people to hear and have permission to talk about combatting it, and thereby give reality to our efforts to make a better world.

***The Honorable Melissa Garff Ballard***, Utah House of Representatives, District 20, brought Utah 'best practices' against trafficking into the discussion. She defined trafficking as sex and labor trafficking, forced criminality, and organ trafficking. Constituents reaching out to her led to important changes in tracking money; guardianship; tracking money; and identifying traffickers. Utah is in the process of identifying gaps in their legislation. In 2026, Utah first defined 'coercion' as a requirement for assisting victims. Due to mothers in Utah, state law now calls for young children to learn boundary strategies and approaching alternative adults. Best practices have been identified for agencies, businesses, victims, service providers, faith communities. There is power in collaboration between citizens and legislators.

***Tim Rollins***, Founder, JTR Impact Advisory; Cofounder, Section 2, focused on the role the private sector can play in stopping trafficking. He described how proper, collaborative investigation uncovered money-laundering from trafficking, identified women who had been trafficked, and enabled law enforcement to intervene effectively. Most banks are required to watch for money laundering but don't have the needed expertise. There is much to be done to create a shared language to enable banks, law enforcement, and legislators to work together effectively. People charged with looking for this illegal money don't know where to look. We

need a system that allows intelligence information to flow from law enforcement to financial institutions. Those moving this money are often large international actors, and it will require collective action to address. Changes also need to be made to allow money seized from trafficking to be used to help victims. .  and helped protect dozens of women. He called for systems that connect banks, lawmakers and law enforcement to detect financial crimes.

***Timothy Wren***, the British Standards Institution, described BSI as a for-profit, non-distributing business that aims to create impact for a fair society and sustainable world. It makes money but puts it back into the purposes for which BSI was created. BSI is a founding member of the International Standards Organization; audits include social audits, modern slavery, sustainability, and more. He cited the UK Modern Slavery Act as it forced businesses to deal with the issue; it was no longer optional. Law and regulation dictate what must be done; standards can show how to do it, create an opportunity for effective action. An international standard on modern slavery is about to be released, which can be referenced in regulation and that will make businesses accountable. Standards also address the need for common vocabulary, enabling communication across sectors. He closed by endorsing the importance of prayer and urging faith leaders to inspire their people to do better.

In supplemental remarks, ***Victor Ubakaez*e** of Southern Utah University, a specialist on the impact of technology on trafficking, noted that trafficking reaches people regardless of class or education. It is a reality in Utah, and trafficking survivors are often targeted again. He urged everyone to learn the warning signs. Axelgard noted that a common thread in the presentations was the need for often unglamorous work like developing common vocabulary and definitions, drafting and refining legislation, and the power of prayer.

Recommendations from the session:

- Involve churches in raising communities' awareness of trafficking the signs of its existence (Redfern).
- Teach children about boundaries and consent from an early age; engage multiple faith groups in the effort (Boller Gosewisch).
- Faith leaders should find ways to preach about trafficking, enabling their followers to understand it and articulate ways to address it (Cahill)
- Encourage citizens to bring concerns to lawmakers; and adopt shared definitions of trafficking across countries and sectors (Garff Ballard, Wren).
- Developing a shared language is essential to collective action between banks, lawmakers and law enforcement to track and block money generated by trafficking (Rollins).
- Consider using the forthcoming BSI/ISO international standard on modern slavery to work for a slavery-free 2034 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City (Wren).




## A2 - Faith Engagement on Pandemic Prevention and Preparedness

The Pandemic Fund is a major effort to address the recurring tragedies that flow from pandemics. This session drew on an extensive consultation aimed at engaging religious communities more directly in the Fund's work. Dr. Esben Larsen, Senior One Health Specialist at The Pandemic Fund at the World Bank, and Doug Fountain, Executive Director of Christian Connections for International Health, moderated. Panelists included:

- Affan Cheema, Director of International Programs, Islamic Relief Worldwide;
- Robert Hokanson, Senior Manager, Global Priorities, Welfare and Self-Reliance Services, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints;
- Professor Katherine Marshall, Vice President, G20 Interfaith Forum Association.

***Dr. Esben Larsen*** presented the Pandemic Fund's portfolio: 67 projects in 128 countries across six regions that strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, including 25 projects in sub-Saharan Africa.

Panelists described faith-based organizations as bridges to communities. Because they are local, they are often said to provide up to half of health care in some regions, a figure panelists said deserves careful scrutiny. Where ties between governments and faith-based organizations are

weak, creative approaches can help, such as televising Ugandan bishops receiving COVID-19 vaccinations.

Recommendations from the session:

- Bring faith-based organizations together before they meet with governments, so they speak with a unified voice.
- Use creative approaches, such as public endorsements by trusted religious leaders, to connect health systems with faith communities.
- Scrutinize estimates of faith-based organizations' share of health care, to build a sound evidence base.

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## A3 – Promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief




The panel explored the foundational role of religious freedom in promoting democratic governance, economic prosperity, social cohesion, human dignity, and peace. Drawing on empirical research, legal analysis, historical experience, and practical case studies, the speakers argued that religious freedom is not merely an individual right but a social good that strengthens societies. Several panelists emphasized that countries with greater religious freedom tend to experience stronger democratic institutions, more robust economic growth, lower levels of violence, and greater opportunities for women and marginalized communities. At the same time,

they warned that religious freedom requires more than constitutional guarantees; it depends upon cultivating a culture of respect, equality, and protection for all people regardless of their faith or beliefs. The panel concluded that protecting freedom of religion or belief for everyone, including majorities, minorities, indigenous communities, and nonbelievers, remains one of the most effective ways to advance broader human rights and the common good.

***Prof. W. Cole Durham***, president of IF20 and the moderator, opened the session by emphasizing that religious freedom is foundational to many other human rights and social goods. He observed that growing empirical evidence demonstrates strong correlations between religious freedom and positive outcomes such as democracy, prosperity, and social development.

***Dr. Allen Hertzke***, David Ross Boyd Professor Emeritus, University of Oklahoma, presented findings from extensive global research demonstrating that religious freedom contributes significantly to democratic stability, economic growth, poverty reduction, women's empowerment, and peaceful societies. He argued that religious repression often fuels violence and terrorism, while religious freedom serves as a powerful force for human flourishing and social progress.

***Ivo Pereira da Silva***, Professor, Universidade Federal do Pará, examined the history of religious freedom in Brazil, tracing its evolution from a Catholic state church system to modern constitutional protections. He stressed that meaningful religious freedom requires not only legal safeguards but also equality, respect for religious diversity, and effective protection for minority faith communities.

***Dr. Nicholas Miller***, Professor of Law and Religion, Washington Adventist University, warned that religious freedom can be threatened not only by secular hostility but also by religious majorities seeking political influence or dominance. He highlighted the importance of protecting minority religions, indigenous faiths, and nonbelievers, arguing that genuine religious freedom must promote pluralism rather than privilege.

***Tina Ramirez***, President, Hardwired Global, shared experiences from Iraq following the rise of ISIS, illustrating how religious persecution devastates communities and undermines human flourishing. She described educational initiatives that have helped rebuild trust and promote religious freedom, showing how respect for religious diversity can contribute to peace and societal recovery.

***Eric Rassbach***, V.P. and Senior Counsel, The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty**,** focused on developments in religious liberty jurisprudence in the United States and Europe, particularly concerning religious institutional autonomy. He argued that courts are increasingly recognizing the right of religious organizations to govern their internal affairs independently of state interference, a trend he sees as critical to preserving religious freedom.

***Michael Swain***, Executive Director, Freedom of Religion South Africa (FOR SA), discussed religious freedom across Africa, noting that many countries possess constitutional protections but face growing pressures from government regulation, restrictions on religious expression, and

challenges to parental rights. He emphasized that religious freedom provides a common framework through which diverse faith communities can cooperate and strengthen social peace.

***Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett***, President, Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice, concluded by describing religious freedom as the "first freedom" upon which many other liberties depend. She argued that robust protection of religious exercise, combined with government neutrality toward religion, creates conditions in which faith communities can contribute positively to society while respecting the rights and dignity of others.

The audience discussion period explored why societies often find it easier to advocate for religious freedom abroad than to address contentious issues at home. Panelists emphasized the importance of dialogue, humility, institutional protections, and what Allen Hertzke described as "covenantal pluralism," a commitment not merely to tolerate differences but to respect and defend the rights of people with profoundly different beliefs.

Recommendations from the session:

- Strengthen protections for freedom of religion or belief by ensuring that all faith communities, minority groups, and nonbelievers enjoy equal rights under the law.
- Preserve the autonomy of religious institutions while maintaining appropriate separation between religion and the state to prevent government favoritism or interference.
- Promote religious pluralism through education and dialogue, fostering mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation among people of different beliefs.
- Build interfaith partnerships around shared values and common concerns, using religious freedom as a foundation for peace, social cohesion, and human flourishing.

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## A4 - Faith Engagement on Poverty and Hunger

Every major faith tradition commands its followers to feed the hungry. This session explored how faith communities can move beyond charity to advocacy and structural change on poverty and hunger, and what they should ask of the G20. Imam Mohamed Hag Magid, Executive Religious Director of the ADAMS Center, moderated.

***Rev. Dr. David Beckmann***, President Emeritus, Bread for the World, urged faith communities to join advocacy organizations, press elected officials and engage in elections. He noted that people who believe in a forgiving God are more likely to support policies that help the poor.

***Luisa Banchoff***, Program Associate, World Faiths Development Dialogue, said faith communities are well placed to fight hunger for three reasons. Feeding the hungry is a religious obligation, congregations know their neighbors by name, and faith communities can see both the formal and informal food systems that low-income families rely on.

***Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne***, President, Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, called poverty and hunger symptoms of deeper structural injustice. He argued that addressing poverty also means addressing excessive affluence and food waste. He described village organizations in Sri Lanka that bargain collectively for fair prices and train local women as preschool teachers.

***Professor Rodrigo Alves***, Federal University of Uberlândia, linked the religious duty to feed the hungry with the human right to adequate food, noting that some 645 million people faced hunger in 2025. He urged faith actors to join the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, launched under Brazil's 2024 G20 presidency.

***Ambassador (Rabbi) David Saperstein***, Senior Advisor for Policy, Union for Reform Judaism, described Judaism's tradition of communal responsibility, including the obligation to provide for the stranger. He framed hunger as a matter of responsibility as well as rights. He warned that cuts to U.S. food assistance at home and abroad will deepen hunger, and highlighted girls' education as one of the most powerful tools against poverty.

In the Q&A, panelists discussed building relationships across income lines, community organizing that lets people in poverty speak for themselves, scaling proven community models with government support, and the overlooked humanitarian crisis in Sudan.

Recommendations from the session:

- Raise poverty and hunger at the G20 even when they are not on the agenda, and advance debt relief (Beckmann, Saperstein).
- Seek religious representation in the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, and make the right to food a shared language (Alves).
- Document faith communities' anti-hunger work so their contribution can be seen and supported (Banchoff).
- Expand civic space and remove barriers that keep faith-based and community groups from scaling proven models (Ariyaratne).

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## A5 - Preventing and Addressing Gender Based Violence

More than three decades after landmark UN commitments on violence against women, nearly one in three women worldwide experiences violence in her lifetime. This session examined how faith and community actors can prevent gender-based violence and support survivors. Audrey Kitagawa, President and Founder of the International Academy for Multicultural Cooperation, moderated.

***Tia Oros Peters***, CEO, Seventh Generation Fund for Indigenous Peoples, said 84 percent of Native women in the United States experience violence in their lifetime, overwhelmingly at the hands of non-Native perpetrators. She linked that violence to the loss of Native land and the arrival of extractive industries. Her organization's Thriving Women program has made more than 700 grants, totaling $14 million, to Indigenous community initiatives.

***Karen Volker***, Executive Director, United Religions Initiative, described a public health approach that treats violence as preventable behavior. She drew on examples from URI's network, including a hotline and bus-driver training against sexual harassment on Sri Lanka's buses.

***Anne Simmons-Benton***, Chair, Women20 USA, presented W20 recommendations on women, peace and security, noting that peace agreements signed by women are more likely to last. She urged stronger accountability for conflict-related sexual violence and laws against technology-facilitated abuse such as deepfakes.

***Liliana Olvera-Arbon***, Executive Director, Utah Coalition Against Sexual Assault, stressed prevention through teaching consent and challenging harmful norms. She described Utah's 24-hour helpline and its expanded network of rape crisis centers. Faith leaders are often the first to hear a disclosure, she said, and should start with three words: "I believe you."

In the Q&A, Rabbi Mark Dratch urged attention to how religious teachings can either prevent or enable abuse. Panelists described interfaith dialogue in Chad and programs that engage men in challenging harmful norms of masculinity.

Recommendations from the session:

- Equip local faith actors as part of the infrastructure for preventing violence, not only as responders after it happens (Volker).
- Have G20 nations and faith leaders jointly condemn rape as a weapon of war (Volker).
- Engage Indigenous women experts, collect disaggregated data, and incorporate the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into IF20 work (Oros Peters).

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## A6 - Linking International Educational Initiatives to G20 Priorities

This session explored how faith-based institutions can expand access to education and connect learning to livelihoods across the developing world. Heather Staker, President of Guide School, moderated.

***Elder Robert C. Gay***, Emeritus General Authority Seventy, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, described an effort begun in 2000 to lift a million people out of poverty that has now reached 150 million. He urged that training start with employers' needs rather than offer false hope, noting that a bank in Ghana had hired more than 70 BYU-Pathway students that very day.

***Todd Miner***, VP, Global Engagement and Operations, BYU-Pathway Worldwide, said talent is evenly distributed but opportunity is not. He described BYU-Pathway's low-cost online model, which serves nearly 100,000 students in 200 countries, nearly half of them in Africa. Students earn job-ready certificates on the way to their degrees.

***Lindsey Williams***, Director of Career Development, BYU-Pathway Worldwide, described a free employer platform where students measure their English and computer skills against what employers require. Employers who join agree to report whom they hire and what they pay, so exploitative employers can be screened out.

***Dr. Juvenal Balisasa***, Education Associate Director, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, described saving a Cameroonian university from corruption and debt by replacing its leadership and adding job-ready diplomas. He also described the church's plan to add technical and vocational programs so graduates can create jobs rather than only seek them.

In the Q&A, panelists discussed guarding graduates against exploitative jobs, raising awareness of their programs, and whether faith-based schools still add value when information is free. They answered that faith builds confidence and moral formation, and that face-to-face teaching remains essential.

Recommendations from the session:

- Design education for flexibility and affordability, tie credentials to work, and measure communities strengthened, not just graduates (Miner).
- Reintroduce moral education into public school curricula (Balisasa).
- Measure spiritual and civic outcomes alongside economic ones (Williams).

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## A7 - The Abrahamic Family: Shared Values, Deep Roots, Joint Action

Building on the Jewish–Muslim Declaration of Fraternity in Faith, signed the day before, this session explored the shared heritage of the Abrahamic traditions through dialogue and shared study. Rabbanit Adena Berkowitz, Scholar in Residence at Kol HaNeshamah NYC, moderated. Panelists included:

- Rabbi Dr. Aharon Ariel Lavi, Chief Executive Officer, The Jerusalem Interfaith Center;
- Rabbi Dr. Yakov Nagen, President, The Jerusalem Interfaith Center;
- Rabbi Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz, President and Dean, Valley Beit Midrash;
- Imam Dr. Talib Shareef, President, International Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation;
- Muslim Shakir, Special Assistant, Masjid Muhammad;
- Imam Rashad Abdul-Rahmaan, Director, The Institute of Qur'an Study and Leadership.

Panelists said Jews, Christians and Muslims share a heritage that lets them connect in peace as spiritual cousins. They can foster love for one another by reading and studying one another's scriptures. After a 30-minute panel, participants broke into small groups to read and discuss passages from each tradition's scriptures, then reconvened to share what they had learned. Many found the shared study valuable. The session closed with prayer.

Recommendations from the session:

- Make shared scripture study a regular part of interfaith encounters.
- Include more prayer and small-group discussion in future IF20 Forums.

## CONCURRENT SESSIONS B

### B1 - Priority to Addressing Disabilities: Treating Clubfoot

Clubfoot, a congenital condition in which the foot is rigidly turned inward and downward, has been documented since ancient Egypt and Greece. It affects some 200,000 children born each year, yet it can be corrected with the simple, low-cost Ponseti method. This session explored how faith and civic networks can help close the global treatment gap. Martin Egbert, Advisory Board Member of the Ponseti International Association, University of Iowa Health Care, moderated.

***Dr. Theressa Henessey***, General Pediatric Orthopaedics, Shriners Hospital for Children, explained the Ponseti method:

- weekly manipulation and casting for six to ten weeks;
- a minor Achilles tendon procedure;
- three to four years of bracing.

The method is non-surgical and works for adults as well as children. Clubfoot occurs in about one in 750 births, and hundreds of thousands of people have never been treated.

***Dr. George Santhosh***, Founding Director, CURE India, said lack of awareness is a major barrier to treatment. CURE India makes treatment accessible and follows children for years afterward, and has expanded to serve children with a range of birth defects.

***Todd Becker***, Executive Director, Clubfoot Solutions Inc., called untreated clubfoot a preventable lifelong disability that limits mobility, schooling and work. The global treatment gap is often a bracing gap, he said. His organization designed a lightweight, affordable, reusable brace, and donates one for every brace sold.

***Ann Parker***, Administrative Assistant, Rotary Action Group for Clubfoot, described how Rotary's global volunteer network, proven in polio eradication, now connects doctors, Rotary clubs and partners to expand treatment. Only about 22 percent of children with clubfoot in low- and middle-income countries are treated, and some 7.8 million people live with untreated clubfoot.

***Dr. Monica Nogueira***, Orthopaedic Surgeon, Ponseti International Association, described training orthopedists and parents to eradicate clubfoot in Brazil and across South America. She called for national public policies that organize referrals and build quality-controlled, self-sustaining treatment systems.

In the Q&A, panelists said the method can be taught widely, though professional follow-up is best. The strongest resistance comes from physicians who prefer surgery to a simple, inexpensive

solution, and family commitment is essential. Treating adults takes about four months of casting and several years of bracing.

Recommendations from the session:

- Integrate Ponseti treatment into national health systems, with public policies that organize referrals (Nogueira).
- Close the bracing gap with affordable, durable braces and recycling programs (Becker).
- Use established networks like Rotary's for training, grants and awareness (Parker).
- Raise awareness so children are diagnosed and treated early (Santhosh, Parker).

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## B2 - Faith Approaches to Mental Health Challenges

Mental health is neither solely a medical challenge nor solely a spiritual one. Faith communities reach billions of people and are often among the first places people turn when they are suffering. They should not substitute for professional care, but they can be powerful partners in reducing stigma, recognizing distress, strengthening social connection and helping people find care. This session explored how science, health care, faith communities and governments can work together, with attention to approaches that could be scaled across G20 nations. David Huntsman, President and CEO of the Huntsman Family Foundation, moderated. Panelists included:

- Dr. Bob Carter, MD, PhD, Chief Executive Officer, University of Utah Health;
- Dr. Elizabeta Kitanovic, Chief Executive Officer, IF20-Europe;
- Dr. Diana Rayes, Initiative on Faith, Trust, and Health, Georgetown University.

Panelists described mental health as complex and many-sided. Faith-based organizations are especially important in combating the isolation and stigma of mental illness. They can also build trust in effective Western treatments that don't always carry over easily to other cultures. But they can also hinder treatment, for example by telling people they are ill because of their sins, and differing religious views can delay critical early intervention. Faith communities may also frame issues differently, speaking of "loneliness" rather than "depression." Panelists noted that progress is hard to measure, and that the economic cost of mental illness can shape government priorities.

Recommendations from the session:

- Mental health professionals should actively reach out to their patients' faith communities, with careful attention to language and translation.
- Develop global mapping and shared ways to measure progress.

## B3 - Beyond Dialogue: Religion, Peace, and the Next Generation of Peacemakers

Drawing on ten years of experience at A Common Word Among the Youth (ACWAY), this session asked how interfaith encounters can grow into lasting collaboration and leadership across generations. Sara Rahim, Trustee of ACWAY, moderated.

***Dr. Liliya Khasanova***, Executive Director, ACWAY, said the movement's roughly 500 fellows in 85 countries have delivered some 350 local interfaith activities. Alumni surveys rank mentorship ahead of funding as their greatest need. She noted that 27 young people spoke or moderated at the 2025 IF20 in Cape Town.

***Riley Barton***, Program Officer, ACWAY, who joined at 19, said practical skills and the expectation to act in her own community built her confidence. She urged leaders to set the outcomes they expect but leave the "how" to young people.

***Professor Andrew Reed***, Richard L. Evans Chair of Religious Understanding, BYU, described supporting minority faith communities at a largely Latter-day Saint university, including co-hosting Utah's largest iftar. He also described a class in which students raised $30,000 to study homelessness firsthand in Boise.

***Professor James Patton***, Utah State University, challenged the "youth versus elders" framing, arguing that expertise spans many kinds of lived experience. He said peacebuilding is a real profession whose career paths are shifting as major government programs close.

In the Q&A, audience members shared service projects and described the Sahel's growing crisis. Panelists stressed knowing why you do this work, separating people from their actions, and seeking out mentors.

Recommendations from the session:

- Host an emerging leaders' summit alongside the 2027 IF20 in the United Kingdom (Khasanova).
- Provide sustained funding, not just project-based grants, along with mentorship for emerging leaders (Khasanova).
- Invest in small-scale community innovation, and give young professionals room to fail safely (Patton, Rahim).

## B4 - Educational Initiatives for Social Cohesion

This session started from the premise that education is the key to peacemaking. It showcased curricula, teacher training and leadership models that build trust across religious and cultural lines. Heather Staker, President of Guide School, moderated.

***Matius Ho***, Executive Director, Leimena Institute, described Indonesia's cross-cultural religious literacy program. It teaches three things: understanding one's own faith, understanding others' faiths from their believers' perspective, and collaborating across differences. In one province scarred by religious conflict two decades ago, a Christian school and an Islamic school partnered through the program, and their students now greet each other as brother and sister. Indonesia's education ministry is adopting the approach as an anti-bullying model, and Vietnam and Japan have shown interest.

***Maria Lucia Uribe Torres***, Executive Director, Arigatou International Geneva, said ethics education widens children's sense of who belongs. Working with education ministries in countries such as Nepal, Arigatou has seen teachers recognize their own biases and children call each other names less often. She stressed building ethics education into national curricula, and engaging parents and religious leaders first.

***Amaarah DeCuir***, Associate Professor, American University, introduced "faith honoring," an approach based on religious literacy that public schools can adopt without compromising the separation of church and state. She noted that 40 percent of American Muslim families say their children are bullied at school. She also described a faith-rooted, anti-racist framework for school leadership.

***Dr. Ravan Hasanov***, International Expert on Multiculturalism, described Azerbaijan's multiculturalism curriculum, now required in 27 universities worldwide. He also described summer and winter schools that bring together students from some 50 countries.

In the Q&A, panelists discussed winning over parents and school boards, and using sports and visits to houses of worship to build trust. They also described reaching uninterested students through collaborative, student-led projects.

Recommendations from the session:

- Make ethics and social cohesion education part of every curriculum from the early years, with public funding and trained teachers (Uribe Torres).
- Fund proven initiatives and bring their leaders to the G20 table (DeCuir).
- Treat social cohesion education as character and citizenship education, not an add-on (Ho).

## B5 - Policy and Program Improvement through Systematic Evaluation: Tools for IF20 Partners

This interactive workshop asked a basic question of every IF20 partner: are our organizations doing what we think they are doing, and how do we know? Parker Gardner, Impact Measurement Task Force Vice Chair of the G20 Interfaith Forum Association, moderated. He was joined by a team from Brigham Young University and its Ballard Center for Social Impact.

***Jenna Boden***, Student, BYU MPA Program, urged organizations to move from "we hope" to "evidence says," noting that activity is not the same as impact. She described a well-building program whose follow-up research revealed far more about the problems surrounding its goal. The IF20, she said, must ask whether bringing people together actually leads to policy conversations.

***Professor Timothy B. Smith***, BYU, said the team's aim is to support partners over the long term. He said seeking truth requires looking honestly at negative cases.

***Abigail Morgan***, Faith Team, BYU Ballard Center for Social Impact, stressed gathering stories and qualitative data alongside numbers. She presented the team's evaluation cycle, which Smith calls the "faith to truth" model: trust and goodwill, project management, evidence gathering, and accurate reporting.

***Brook Schaefermeyer***, PhD Candidate in Educational Inquiry, Measurement, and Evaluation, BYU, led participants through building a logic model, which traces how resources and activities lead to measurable and lasting change.

***Chayton Dalby***, Homelessness Team, BYU Ballard Center for Social Impact, said logic models support continuous learning. He urged evidence-based learning rather than evidence-based punishment, so that evaluation builds collaboration instead of fear of losing funding.

***Dominique Bohler***, Altruvia, demonstrated AI-supported software that helps faith-based organizations model and track their impact, offered to participants as a free trial.

In the Q&A, participants asked how the IF20 itself could show its influence on G20 policy, such as by interviewing past G20 leaders. Gardner said the team is exploring using the software to track data across IF20 partners.

Recommendations from the session:

- Clarify your intended impact before measuring it, and build a logic model that links activities to lasting change (Dalby, Schaefermeyer).
- Gather both stories and data, including negative cases and unintended consequences (Morgan, Smith).
- Develop ways to measure the IF20's own influence on G20 policy (Boden, Gardner).

## B5 - Learning from G20 Interfaith Forums in South Africa

Members of the 2025 South African IF20 organizing committee reflected on how listening to diverse religious communities shaped the priorities of the Cape Town Forum. They also described how faith communities are moving from recommendations to implementation. Professor Maniraj Sukdaven of the University of Pretoria moderated.

***Dr. Sylvia Mmamohapi Pheto***, Member, CRL Rights Commission, explained Ubuntu ("I am because we are") as the moral framework for South Africa's G20 themes of solidarity, equality and sustainability. She described presenting the G20 Social Summit declaration to President Ramaphosa on behalf of civil society. She urged future hosts to build policy from local realities, including Indigenous faith communities.

***Sandile Makasi***, Communication Director, South Africa Area Office, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, described a year of listening sessions with faith, traditional, government and civic leaders. These produced five priorities:

- food security and poverty;
- economic and financial action, including debt justice;
- interreligious education;
- migration and trafficking;
- disaster response.

All five were reflected in the G20 Leaders' Declaration.

***Professor Maniraj Sukdaven***, University of Pretoria, described South Africa's shift from confessional religious instruction to non-confessional religion education. He also described the committee's ongoing role as a catalyst for symposia, research and youth entrepreneurship programs.

In the Q&A, panelists described follow-up symposia on religious freedom and Indigenous knowledge, and a faith leaders' conference on hunger convened by Archbishop Sithembele Sipuka of Cape Town. A video message from Archbishop Sipuka called on faith communities to mobilize their own networks and resources so that no one is left behind.

Recommendations from the session:

- Ground IF20 policy proposals in local realities and voices, including Indigenous communities (Pheto).
- Move from dialogue to delivery by mobilizing faith communities' own networks and resources (Makasi).
- Add a South Africa page to the IF20 website to report ongoing projects (Makasi).

## CAPITOL SESSIONS

### Middle Eastern and Eurasian Perspectives



The IF20's special program at the Utah State Capitol, "Religious Organizations and Furtherance of the Common Good," was co-sponsored with the Sutherland Institute and the Stirling Foundation. It brought government officials responsible for religious affairs together with religious leaders and Utah lawmakers to compare how governments and faith communities can work together for the common good. The first session, held in the Board Room of the Utah State Capitol, presented perspectives from the Middle East and Eurasia. President Stuart Adams of the Utah State Senate moderated.

***President Stuart Adams***, Utah State Senate, welcomed delegates and said that while participants come from different places, they share a common purpose: caring for their families and neighbors. Utah thrives because of who its people are, not because of its policies, he said. Religion and religious principles make societies not only better but more prosperous, and strengthen the families and people we love.

***H.E. Dr. Muzaffar Kamilov***, Advisor to the President of Uzbekistan on Religious and Educational Affairs; Rector, International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, described Uzbekistan's reforms in religious education and freedom of conscience. These build on President Mirziyoyev's proposal on enlightenment and religious tolerance, which the UN General

Assembly adopted unanimously. More than 100,000 citizens have received religious instruction, Hajj participation has tripled to 15,000, and nearly 500 women and children have been brought home from conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. “It is not enough to live side by side. Genuine pluralism requires mutual understanding, commitment to one another, and mutual cooperation.” Uzbekistan seeks to transform its religious heritage from a matter of memory into a source of knowledge for today’s problems, he said, while firmly preventing the use of religion for political or extremist ends.

***H.E. Ramin Mammadov***, Chairman, State Committee on Affairs with Religious Associations, Azerbaijan, presented Azerbaijan’s long tradition of coexistence at the crossroads of East and West. He called for a proactive strategy to protect young people, nurture families and shield societies from radical influences. He highlighted the role of Azerbaijan’s Institute of Theology in preventing radicalization, and reaffirmed Azerbaijan’s commitment to deepening cooperation with the IF20.

***Grand Mufti Abdulaziz Zakirov***, Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, said that because young people make up a large share of Kyrgyzstan’s population, the country’s future depends on their education, moral values and sense of responsibility. He named education, partnership and practical action as the three priorities for preparing young people for peace. Peace efforts remain incomplete, he said, if young people are not given real opportunities to take part in peacebuilding.

***H.E. Talantbek Tashybekov***, Chairman, National Agency for Religious Affairs and Interethnic Relations, Kyrgyz Republic, described the Kyrgyz Republic as a multiethnic, multireligious state committed to a common civic identity. No state can meet today’s challenges alone, he said, and international dialogue should lead not merely to an exchange of views but to concrete joint initiatives. He emphasized education, strong families and local communities, and said nations’ different experiences are not an obstacle but an advantage.

***Mohamed Bahr***, Director of Strategic Planning, Muslim Council of Elders, drew on the Council’s work since the 2019 Document on Human Fraternity, signed with Pope Francis. “Our premise is simple: Faith communities carry a great deal of public trust, and that trust carries a responsibility to serve those who are not our own.” Faith-based organizations reach where policy cannot: prisons, hospitals, young people and the poor. Yet most partnerships with governments fail “at the handoff, not the handshake,” he said. To succeed, they need clear roles, local ownership and measurable follow-up.

***Senator Todd Weiler***, Utah State Senate, described Utah’s 2024 religious freedom law, which he sponsored. The law protects people of all faiths and requires government at every level in the state to meet the highest legal standard before burdening the free exercise of religion.

Recommendations from the session:

- Establish an international coalition for “enlightenment in the digital space,” working with technology platforms and experts to counter hate speech (Kamilov).

- Create a global alliance of think tanks and academic institutions on religious pluralism (Kamilov).
- Launch a G20 “Tolerance for the Future” youth academic program for young researchers in religious pluralism and dialogue (Kamilov).
- Give young people real roles in peacebuilding through education, partnership and practical action (Zakirov).
- Turn international dialogue into concrete joint initiatives (Tashybekov).
- Build government–faith partnerships on clear roles, local ownership and measurable follow-up (Bahr).

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## African Perspectives




The second session of the Capitol program examined how governments and religious communities across Africa, the world’s youngest continent, can work together for peace and the common good. Katrina Lantos Swett, President of the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice, moderated. She framed religious freedom as the foundation on which other rights and social goods depend. Like an error early in a long equation, she said, getting religious freedom wrong undermines everything after it; get it right, and a host of other benefits follow.

***H.E. Omar Ahmed Wais***, Second Vice President, National Assembly, Djibouti, speaking in French, described Djibouti as a small country at the crossroads of Africa and the Middle East

with a strong tradition of dialogue and peaceful coexistence. “Our experience tells us that dialogue is not a weakness; dialogue is a strength. Respect is not a weakness; respect is a strength.”

***H.E. Ambassador Abderrahim Kadmiri***, Acting Executive Secretary, Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), said religion is too often used as a tool by armed groups in the Sahel, even as religious communities remain among the most trusted actors there. Those communities are present in places governments cannot reach, and security responses are necessary but not sufficient. Since 2010, he noted, the African Union has built a strategic partnership with religious leaders and faith-based organizations. His priorities for the future were:

- connecting faith actors to early-warning and mediation systems;
- training religious educators, women alongside men as Morocco does with its imams, to be credible online;
- protecting freedom of religion or belief and social cohesion.

By 2050, one in four people on earth will be African, and most will be young. “Trust takes years to build and moments to lose. The question before all of us is whether we will build partnerships that will outlast the crises before us, for the young people of the Sahel and of the world.”

***H.E. Ambassador Hameed Opeloyeru***, Permanent Observer of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to the United Nations, said governments often assume peace lies exclusively in their domain, but faith leaders bring the trust that mediation requires. Faith-based organizations help prevent conflict through humanitarian support for the vulnerable, and religious leaders play a critical role in resolving conflicts in a transformational way. He described OIC efforts to direct zakat, or almsgiving, toward production rather than consumption so the poor can escape long-term dependency. He pointed to the Welfare Square and Humanitarian Center of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which delegates had visited, as an example of faith acting as a global force for good.

***Dr. Djim Ousmane Dramé***, Director of Religious Affairs and Integration of Arabic-Language Graduates, Presidency of Senegal, presented Senegal’s model of coexistence. The country is more than 95 percent Muslim, yet was led by a Christian president for its first two decades of independence. He described the Saly Declaration on Religious Discourse, adopted in 2025 by Muslim, Christian and traditional religious leaders under the auspices of the Presidency. It commits to a National Observatory for Religious Discourse and a permanent framework for dialogue. Senegal has mineral and economic wealth, he said, but its spiritual resources are no less important.

***Hazel Dixon***, Regional Desk Officer for NGO, Social and Economic Issues, African Union Commission, described the AU’s Citizens and Diaspora Directorate, its main channel for engaging citizens. The directorate runs the AU Interfaith Dialogue Forum and an interfaith initiative that empowers young people to prevent violent extremism. “Africa’s religious and cultural diversity is an important asset for continental peace and solidarity.” Peace and the

common good, she said, are shared responsibilities that require sustained dialogue, mutual respect and collective action.

***Michael Swain***, Executive Director, Freedom of Religion South Africa (FOR SA), called religious freedom the litmus test of a true democracy. "You do not check in your belief system when you go out in the morning. It informs everything. And unfortunately, it is one of those rights that is being slowly but surely chipped away." Africa's population of 1.6 billion, with a median age of 19.5, is projected to reach 2.5 billion by 2050, so whoever shapes Africa's religious landscape shapes the world's. He warned of three threats:

- violence, including within faith traditions;
- creeping state control of religion: in Rwanda, nearly 10,000 churches have been closed and pastors must hold a three-year approved degree;
- laws and policies imported from outside Africa that run contrary to local cultures.

The answer, he said, is to make religious freedom African, rooted in ubuntu, and to put legal tools in local hands.

Recommendations from the session:

- Connect faith actors to national early-warning and mediation systems (Kadmiri).
- Train religious educators, women alongside men, to be present and credible online (Kadmiri).
- Have governments formally recognize and facilitate religious organizations' role in peacebuilding (Opeloyeru).
- Direct almsgiving and social finance toward productive livelihoods, not only relief (Opeloyeru).
- Establish a Grand Prize for Peaceful Coexistence and Peaceful Coexistence Clubs in schools (Dramé).
- Resist excessive state regulation of religion through legal means, and root religious freedom in local African values rather than imported models (Swain).

## Service project

After the concurrent sessions and before the evening plenaries, the people attending the Forum joined together to make protective, warm vests for the homeless through the Turtle Shelter project.

The Turtle Shelter Project is a Utah-based, volunteer-driven initiative that provides high-tech, foam-insulated vests to people experiencing homelessness, offering portable warmth that can keep a person safe even in extreme cold and wet conditions.

Founded in 2015 by Jen Spencer after her own experiences with homelessness, the project's mission is to save lives and alleviate suffering by giving unsheltered individuals a "portable shelter" they can carry with them, much like a turtle carries its shell.

The vests are designed to keep wearers warm down to -10°F even when wet and maintain core body temperature in emergencies.

Since its inception, the Turtle Shelter Project has distributed over 6,000 lifesaving vests across Utah, Colorado, Oregon, and Idaho. Each vest is hand-delivered by Jen or volunteers to ensure recipients understand how to use it and to convey a message of love and community support.



## Evening Plenary: Olympics and Interfaith, and Faith and Higher Education




The Forum's evening plenary explored two forces that bring people together across nations and traditions: the Olympic Games and higher education. In the first conversation, leaders of Salt Lake City's 2034 Winter Games and two Olympic medalists described the Games' power to unite and heal. In the second, presidents of two leading faith-based universities discussed forming character as well as minds. The BYU Indonesia Gamelan Orchestra opened the evening with a performance on traditional instruments. Whitney Clayton introduced the evening's two themes, and Ruth Todd, Executive Vice President and Chief Content Officer of Bonneville International, moderated the second conversation.

***Fraser Bullock***, President and Executive Chair, Organizing Committee for the 2034 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, recalled that the 2002 Salt Lake Games, held months after the September 11 attacks, gave the nation and the world a moment of healing. Organizers want the 2034 Games to lead with purpose, he said, so that people leave better connected and inspired. He announced an Athletes' Families Initiative, including a village to welcome the families of athletes from some 100 countries. "Whatever seat we're in, we have an opportunity to do good. We're all in different seats. The Olympics is a marvelous platform, but it's also a stewardship. It's a responsibility to make the world a better place."

***Noelle Pikus-Pace***, Olympic Medalist, described a career shaped by family. A runaway bobsled shattered her leg before the 2006 Games, and she missed a medal in 2010 by a tenth of a second. She retired, believing she could not be both an athlete and a mother, but returned to win silver in 2014 on a sled her husband designed. “We finished together,” she said, recalling how she ran into the stands to embrace her family rather than heading to the media. Finding lodging and logistics for family is one of athletes’ greatest stresses, she said, which makes the new initiative a blessing.

***Peter Vidmar***, Olympic Medalist; VP, Northern Trust, recalled tying China’s Li Ning for gold on the pommel horse in 1984. He said athletes from countries regarded as adversaries never felt like enemies, but shared a fellowship of people who love their sport. He described finding his rival, Japan’s Koji Gushiken, quietly reading aloud in a corner of the training gym on the day of their final, a reminder of athletes reaching for something bigger than themselves. Gushiken went on to defeat him by 25 thousandths of a point. He called the Athletes’ Families Initiative long overdue.



***Professor Ibrahim Saleh Al-Naimi***, Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, was unable to attend; his remarks were read by Nicole Stirling of the Stirling Foundation. He asked whether universities are preparing students to face the world as it is, or to help create the world as it could be. Noting that the first word revealed in the Qur’an is “read,” he said a university must do more than prepare people for employment.

***President Linda Livingstone***, Baylor University, said faith-based universities can ask questions and frame issues differently, giving students broader perspectives, deeper care for others and an

eternal outlook. That begins with hiring faculty of deep faith and training them, through Baylor's Institute for Faith and Learning, to integrate faith into teaching. Baylor's Faith and Character Study, which since 2018 has followed students from their first year to a decade after graduation, found church attendance to be one of the best predictors of retention, graduation and grades. The findings led Baylor to break its chapel program into some 70 options and restructure its scripture courses. She said Baylor helps students own their beliefs, practice civil discourse and build bridges with people unlike themselves.

***President C. Shane Reese***, Brigham Young University, said that for people of faith, education is a religious responsibility. "Contrary to the institutions that are not faith-based, who challenge their students to learn something, we're challenging our students to become something. We're not perfect, but that's the goal." Because faculty shape a campus culture for decades, he said, hiring is vital, alongside required religion courses and a weekly campus-wide devotional. He described a multifaith consortium examining bias in how AI treats faith traditions, questions he said faith-based institutions are uniquely free to ask. Both presidents serve on a new American Council on Education coalition of faith-based institutions, formed after the Council noticed higher graduation rates and a stronger sense of belonging at faith-based schools. Reese invited participants to spend a day on either campus, promising they would leave with hope.

## DAY 2

### Plenary 4: Technology for Good: Is AI a Modern Miracle or an Existential Threat?



Discussions in religious and secular settings rarely fail to focus on the practical and ethical repercussions of rapid technological change and its deep reach into our lives. Religious communities' concerns include both the impact on religious and spiritual life and the broader ethical challenges involved. Pioneering innovation in AI and emerging technologies is among the G20 USA's priorities for 2026. Against that backdrop, the session explored faith perspectives on AI from a variety of religious traditions. Dr. Medlir Mema, Director of the AI Ethics and Governance Institute, moderated. He observed that we seem at once fascinated by AI and unable to make sense of it.

***Professor Katherine Marshall***, Vice President, G20 Interfaith Forum Association, opened the day with a summary of Friday's plenaries, concurrent sessions, meetings at the Utah State Capitol and evening plenary. She noted a strong focus on health, education and preparing young people for the future. Every session has been recorded, she said, and videos, summaries and a report will follow. The Forum's ideas will be carried to G20 governments not in a single communiqué but at the times and places where they can be most effective.

***Full remarks by Elder Gerrit W. Gong, Apostle, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can be found in the Appendix.***

***Ambassador Lamia Mekhemar***, Former Egyptian Ambassador to the Holy See, said the debate over AI has shifted from how humanity should adapt to whether AI will help it or shake the foundations of society. She sees AI as a mixture of miracle and threat: a mirror of our intentions that reflects our wisdom and sometimes our carelessness. Speaking as an Egyptian shaped by a civilization in which each era built on the last without erasing it, she asked how something radically new can enter our world without losing what should never be lost. Human intelligence includes conscience, free will, responsibility and the capacity to love and sacrifice, she said, and AI should complement it, never replace it.

"Technology can tell us what is possible, but it cannot tell us what is right. And it cannot tell us what is worth protecting, because the judgment belongs to us, and it has a name: ethics." Ethics are a prerequisite for continuity, Mekhemar said, but principles alone cannot guarantee conduct, so law and regulation are needed as well. Human beings must be the beneficiaries of the technologies they create, never their servants. The world does not lack ideas or expertise; it lacks collective will.

***Ambassador Muhammadou Kah***, Ambassador of the Republic of The Gambia to the Swiss Confederation, said the Abrahamic traditions share a sacred conviction that every person is created with inherent dignity and called to be a steward of creation. Technology is never neutral, he said. AI is neither pure miracle nor inevitable threat but a tool that will amplify our highest virtues or deepest flaws, and therefore a test of our moral maturity. Religious communities bring three gifts to this age: moral memory, ethical imagination and a relentless commitment to the vulnerable.

Faith traditions offer not technical code but moral code, Kah said. That code translates into demands for transparency, fairness, human oversight and protection against algorithmic harm, and it supplies the "why" that must inform regulators. He urged G20 leaders and international bodies to embed faith-informed ethical guardrails into data and AI governance, noting that agreement on red lines is both realistic and urgent. Small countries like The Gambia are not peripheral actors, he said; they speak for the majority of humanity who will live with the consequences. The global south must never be reduced to a data source or a testing ground.

***Dr. DZ Kalman***, Fellow, Berkman Klein Center; Shalom Hartman Institute, called this a remarkable moment. For decades, religion and technology sat on the margins of each other's conversations, to the detriment of both, but AI raises questions that are religious in nature. He pointed to four developments:

- religious communities organizing effectively around AI, from Pope Leo XIV's *Magnifica humanitas* to the National Association of Evangelicals;
- the AI safety community actively courting religious groups;
- AI companies, such as Anthropic, beginning to engage religious leaders;
- religious communities engaging one another, because AI is moving too fast for them to disagree, making the conversation "default multi-faith."

***Dr. Tomicah Tilleman***, CEO, Pro-Human AI Coalition, organized his remarks around agency, incentives and opportunity. Almost all faith traditions hold that people are moral agents, and AI's trajectory is not inevitable. Social media was built on a business model designed to be addictive, harvest data and manipulate behavior, and that scenario must not be replayed in a more extreme form. Many AI developers operate amid poor incentives, he said, while the democratic tools that could change those incentives are struggling. When democratic institutions are under strain, faith communities hold an authority few others can replicate, and they can emerge as a constituency for human flourishing and agency.

In the question-and-answer session, Kalman observed that AI systems offer apologies, yet no one responds "I forgive you," because there is nothing there to forgive. He called this a telling sign of AI's moral status. Much of the task, he said, is clarifying the values we want to preserve. Tilleman argued that AI's current design is not a given: on-device AI could keep data in users' hands, and communities whose data trains a model could become its co-owners. "In the digital age, our data is our personhood." Kah stressed that AI governance must be multistakeholder. Tilleman added that middle powers are listening ahead of the 2027 AI summit in Geneva, and that people feel AI is being done to them rather than with them. Kalman said anthropomorphizing AI shields developers from liability: a misbehaving system is a defective product, not a moral agent. In closing, Mekhemar urged that AI not be treated as a geopolitical race, and Kah summed up his priorities as dignity first, stewardship rather than domination, technology as a trust, and a preferential option for the vulnerable and the global south.

Recommendations from the session:

- Establish two IF20 working groups: one on what humanity must preserve and cannot surrender, and one on how to achieve that technically (Mekhemar).
- Develop benchmarks for how AI systems represent faith and morality, building on the work of the Consortium for Evaluating Faith and Ethics in AI (Gong).
- Embed faith-informed ethical guardrails into data and AI governance, beginning with agreement on red lines (Kah).
- Have religious communities set certification standards that help consumers choose ethical AI models and give companies financial incentives to comply (Kalman).
- Pursue AI designs that protect human agency, such as on-device systems and community co-ownership of models trained on community data (Tilleman).
- Approach AI as a shared global challenge rather than a geopolitical race (Mekhemar).

## Plenary 5: Energy Needs and Building Peace: Challenges Facing the G20



Energy security, sustainable development and peace are often discussed separately, but in practice they are deeply connected. Affordable, reliable energy underpins economic development, poverty reduction and food security. How energy is produced and distributed shapes the environment, geopolitical competition and the prospects for peace. The session asked whether energy systems can be abundant, sustainable, equitable and conducive to peace all at once. It also asked what religious communities can contribute, not only by articulating moral principles but by shaping policy and delivering practical solutions. Professor Peter Mandaville, Senior Fellow at Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, moderated.

***H.E. Dr. Mohammed bin Said Al Maamari***, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs, Sultanate of Oman, addressed the Forum by video. He said energy security cannot be achieved for anyone unless it is achieved for all, and that what nations share in resources they must also share in responsibility. He offered Oman's traditions as a model, including its ancient aflaj irrigation systems and the waqf, or endowment, in which the right to benefit from a resource carries responsibility for preserving it across generations. He drew these together in the concept of trusteeship: human beings are entrusted with the earth, not its absolute owners.

Al Maamari noted that Oman launched the Muscat Plan at the United Nations in June, in partnership with the UN, the UN Alliance of Civilizations and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. The plan strengthens the role of religious and traditional leaders in preventing conflict and countering hate speech. He called on G20 leaders to adopt energy policies that protect future generations and treat religious and community institutions as genuine partners in the energy transition.

***The Honorable Scott Morrison AC***, 30th Prime Minister of Australia, said energy and climate policy had become an article of faith on both the right and the left. He argued that ideology had pushed aside the engineering and economics where the solutions lie, leaving the developing world still without the power it needs. Only technology that makes energy cheaper and more reliable will change the paradigm, he said. Governments should invest in science that can be scaled and delivered in developing countries.

The surging energy demands of AI may finally draw in the capital needed to solve that problem, Morrison predicted. He pointed to small modular reactors as one possibility. Developed countries, he said, have spent too much time at climate conferences and too little on that challenge.

***Professor Husna Ahmad OBE PhD***, CEO, Global One 2015, said security must come first. She described a weakened international order and long-standing injustices toward the Global South, which can now leapfrog directly to cleaner energy. “Energy security is not an abstract policy issue,” she said. “It determines whether a hospital can keep its lights on, whether a child can study at night, whether a farmer can irrigate a field, and whether a family can afford to cook.” Disagreeing with Morrison, she argued that faith communities raise moral questions engineering cannot answer: who has access to energy, who bears the costs, and what is owed to future generations.

Drawing on the Islamic principles of balance (*mizan*), stewardship (*khilafa*) and avoiding waste (*israf*), Ahmad called for an “economy of enough.” She described climate conferences as a circus, but said faith communities’ presence there is imperative. She also urged that women of faith, too often sidelined, be part of the conversation.

***Ambassador Amr Aljowaily***, Director, Citizens and Diaspora Directorate, African Union Commission, said some 600 million Africans live without electricity, and even more lack clean cooking fuels. He described the African Union’s 2022 common position on a just energy transition, which begins with universal access and links energy to infrastructure, digital connectivity and industrialization. He called for fairer terms of cooperation, including grants rather than loans, and value chains that include Africa and respect its sovereignty.

Aljowaily described the African Union’s interfaith dialogue forum as a possible model for other regional bodies. He said faith communities can help in three ways:

- reframing technical goals like “access” in the language of justice;
- reinforcing intergovernmental agreements at the community level;
- giving those communities representation.

***Professor Azza Karam***, President, Lead Integrity; Professor, Occidental College, said that questions of access and inequality are among the oldest in human history. Religious communities, she said, are as divided as political ones, and religious voices aligned with political regimes are drowning out prophetic voices for the common good. No one can be aligned with a regime and still speak truth to power. Faith communities must hold co-opted religious leaders accountable and be willing to change their own behaviors. She noted that faith pavilions at UN climate conferences have had little policy impact, and that resistance from religious groups themselves slowed her efforts to create a multi-religious humanitarian fund.

In the question-and-answer session, Morrison said energy systems must deliver more, cheaper and cleaner energy all at once. Meanwhile, he said, governments must fund resilience now, as Australia did by redirecting climate funds directly to Pacific nations. Aljowaily described Africa's transition as a ladder rather than a switch: gas, hydrogen and nuclear power in the medium term, with renewables leading in the long term. Responding to a Ukrainian city council member, Karam described interfaith solidarity missions and refugee support in Moldova, and urged faith communities to show solidarity with all people in conflict. Mandaville urged that Ukraine's religious communities be included in its reconstruction. Aljowaily added that solidarity is not charity but responsibility, since Africa contributes only about 4 percent of global emissions yet bears the worst consequences.

Recommendations from the session:

- Electrify the health facilities that faith-based organizations run around the world (Morrison).
- Engage faith-based organizations through digital platforms that translate technical energy policy into practical language (Ahmad).
- Take stock of what the global interfaith movement has and has not achieved, and hold co-opted religious actors accountable (Karam).
- Read African policy positions and help carry Africa's voice to the tables where global policy is made (Aljowaily).
- Offer Africa fairer terms of cooperation, including grants rather than loans (Aljowaily).
- Treat religious and community institutions as partners in shaping and carrying out energy transition pathways (Al Maamari).

# CONCURRENT SESSIONS - C

## C1 - AI Innovation and Human Dignity

Building on the morning's AI plenary, this session examined how to use AI to make the world fairer while protecting those most vulnerable to its harms, especially children. Dr. Marianna Richardson, Director of Communications for the G20 Interfaith Forum Association, moderated.

***Margaret Busse***, Commissioner, Utah Department of Commerce, described Utah's Office of AI Policy and its Pro-Human AI Initiative. The office pairs policy analysis with a regulatory "sandbox" where AI companies can test products under supervision, and the state has passed laws on mental health chatbots and deepfakes. She argued that frontier AI labs have prioritized capability over controllability, and cited Governor Cox's call for Congress to require independent evaluations, safety reporting and whistleblower protections.

***Professor David Wingate***, BYU, urged faith communities to articulate a positive, relational vision for AI, drawing on the biblical command to leave the edges of the field for the poor. The guiding question, he said, should be "Who is AI leaving behind?" He described the Consortium for Evaluating Faith and Ethics in AI and its free "behavior charter," a tool that helps users set up AI to support their values.

***Reverend Dr. Marian Edmonds-Allen***, Founder, FaithWise, said studies show that AI reduces learning when students use it just to finish assignments, but increases it when they use it to learn what interests them. She urged families and educators to talk with children about why learning matters.

***Van Lindberg***, Partner, Process Mechanics, argued that responsibility follows agency, and that AI is ultimately software with no agency of its own. "A gradient is not a conscience," he said. Calling AI systems "agents" shields the humans who build and use them from liability. He urged relying on negligence law and hard technical limits to hold people accountable.

In the Q&A, panelists discussed how faith communities can counter AI-driven isolation by demanding design that isn't addictive and by fostering in-person community. They also discussed how analyzing foreseeable harms can help manage AI risk.

Recommendations from the session:

- Faith leaders should engage politically, with a unified, multifaith voice, to demand AI accountability (Busse, Wingate).
- Demand AI designs that connect people rather than addict them, and teach congregants AI literacy (Wingate).
- Hold the humans who build and deploy AI accountable rather than treating AI as a moral agent (Lindberg).

## C2 - Looking Ahead: Health and Children

This session merged planned panels on faith, trust and health and on children. It mapped the networks through which faith communities protect children and looked ahead to the IF20's 2027 work. Professor Katherine Marshall moderated.

***Dr. Diana Rayes***, Georgetown University, previewed the Georgetown–Lancet Commission on Faith, Trust and Health, which launches in spring 2027. The Commission is building evidence that faith–health partnerships increase trust, at a time when trust in health institutions is at an all-time low.

***Maria Lucia Uribe Torres***, Arigatou International Geneva, described the Global Network of Religions for Children, active in more than 70 countries, which treats children's participation as a form of violence prevention. She also described a faith-based early childhood toolkit now used in six countries. She invited participants to faith events at November's ministerial conference in Manila on ending violence against children.

***Angelique Mutombo***, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, highlighted Catholic sisters, often-invisible women who stay with communities in crisis. Their trusted networks have advanced early childhood development and vaccine uptake across Africa.

***Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi***, Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, described under-resourced religious schools in Nigeria that take children off the streets. He urged equipping religious leaders to promote nutrition, immunization and early learning so children thrive beyond age five.

***Veena O'Sullivan***, Director of IF20 UK, said the 2027 Forum will focus on people, planet and peace. It will rally around a campaign to help children not only survive but thrive.

***Dr. Mohammed Meqdadi***, National Council for Family Affairs (Jordan), said the Manila conference will review commitments made by some 120 countries in Bogotá in 2024. He also described how religious leaders wrote, and now teach from, Jordan's manual on preventing family violence.

In the Q&A, audience members shared a literacy program for mothers in highland Guatemala and the W20's policy recommendations.

Recommendations from the session:

- Press G20 governments to release unused multilateral funds for investment in children (O'Sullivan).
- Develop a one-page guide, adaptable to local contexts, to help faith networks prioritize children (Elsanousi).

- Bring faith voices to the Manila conference and its compact on faith and child flourishing (Uribe Torres, Meqdadi).

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## C3 - Hope from the Ground Up: Faith Communities and a Planet in Crisis

This session framed climate change as a moral and values crisis as much as a scientific or technological one. Meaningful change, panelists said, requires rethinking humanity's relationship with the natural world, its consumption habits and its responsibilities to future generations. They argued that faith communities can help move the conversation beyond partisan politics by grounding climate action in stewardship, justice and love of neighbor. Reverend Fletcher Harper, Executive Director of GreenFaith, moderated, and the session included a video message from Dr. Manulani Aluli Meyer of the University of Hawai'i–West O'ahu.

***Darren Parry***, Former Chairman of the Shoshone Nation, said Indigenous traditions understand land, water, plants and animals as relatives rather than commodities, yet Indigenous knowledge is often excluded from decision-making. He shared his grandmother's teaching: "When your heart is noisy, you cannot hear the earth. And if you cannot hear the earth, you cannot hear each other." Rather than asking how to change someone's mind, he urged, ask how to change their heart.

***Rick Twelves***, Sustainability Office Consultant, Presiding Bishopric Office, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, described how religious communities turn values into action. His examples included:

- solar installations;
- disaster-resilient community spaces;
- tree planting;
- desalination;
- sustainable agriculture.

Faith communities have reason for hope, he said, because of their theological resources and the resilience already being built.

***Reverend Dr. Rebecca Edwards***, Climate Policy Manager, Texas Impact, said the call to love our neighbors means listening to their stories, empowering them and standing up for justice.

***Kristian Noll***, London School of Economics and Political Science, emphasized connecting global narratives to local experiences, and making sure people are genuinely involved in decisions rather than included symbolically. "Hope is an action, not a sentiment."

In the discussion, panelists said a just energy transition must avoid creating "sacrifice zones," such as communities harmed by mining critical minerals. It must also reconsider resource-intensive habits like car dependency. Panelists said religious leaders can speak on climate without becoming partisan by grounding their advocacy in scripture and long-standing ethics, as

faith communities did in the civil rights movement. They also encouraged young people to approach decision-makers as collaborators, with humility and a willingness to listen.

Recommendations from the session:

- Pursue a just energy transition that avoids sacrificing vulnerable communities and reconsiders resource-intensive habits.
- Include Indigenous knowledge in environmental decision-making (Parry).
- Turn faith values into practical climate action through solar power, resilient community spaces, tree planting and sustainable agriculture (Twelves).
- Involve communities genuinely in decisions, and engage decision-makers as collaborators (Noll).

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## C4 - How Faith Actors Respond to Disasters: Integrating First Responders in Preparedness and Response

Faith communities are often among the first to respond when disaster strikes and the last to leave. This session examined how they can be better integrated into disaster preparedness and response, the focus of an IF20 policy brief by Professor Katherine Marshall. Dr. Judd Birdsall, Assistant Professor of the Practice at Georgetown University, moderated. He noted that while progress has been made, much work remains to strengthen collaboration with faith groups.

***Debra Boudreaux***, Chief International Affairs Officer, Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, said disaster relief always starts locally. Faith communities are the first community institutions to mobilize, and they continue serving long after a disaster. “Compassion must be organized to make a lasting impact.” She recalled that when Buddhist volunteers arrived to help during West Africa’s Ebola outbreak, some locals suspected they had come to convert people. Trust grew as their intent became clear, and Tzu Chi still supports women in Sierra Leone today. Faith-based organizations must respect local traditions, she said, and sustain partnerships with governments even as politics change.

***Ambassador Michel Veuthey***, Sovereign Order of Malta, said every civilization holds values that protect human life and dignity, and that these religious values must be reaffirmed. It is not enough to act, he said; we must also pray. He called for including faith-based organizations in decision-making, planning, operations and resource-sharing, not just in occasional gatherings. He also urged respect for local traditions and languages, and attention to the security of humanitarian workers.

***Steven Dobb***, Manager of Emergency Response, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, said governments cannot handle disasters alone and need community and local support. Preparedness has been a focus of his church since its founding in 1830. After the 2023 earthquake in Türkiye, the Church provided 50,000 meals during Ramadan, crossing interfaith boundaries. Disasters offer a chance not only to rebuild physically, he said, but to strengthen social networks and communities, and service brings people together across divides.

Recommendations from the session:

- Include faith-based organizations in disaster decision-making, planning, operations and resource-sharing, not only in occasional consultations (Veuthey).
- Organize compassion into lasting, locally led relief, and sustain partnerships with governments across political changes (Boudreaux).
- Invest in proactive, holistic preparedness, and rebuild communities' social fabric as well as their infrastructure (Dobb).
- Respect local traditions and languages, let local communities lead, and protect humanitarian workers (Veuthey).

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## C5 - Faith and Media

This session examined how social media, news coverage and AI shape young people's well-being and public perceptions of religion, and what faith communities can do in response. It opened with reflections on Jonathan Haidt's *The Anxious Generation*, which traces rising anxiety and loneliness to the shift from play-based to phone-based childhood. Australia has since banned social media for children under 16, but law alone cannot do the work of families and communities, which is where faith communities can help. Professor Rodrigo Alves, Director of the Brazilian Center of Studies in Law and Religion, moderated.

***Dr. Elizabeta Kitanovic***, CEO, IF20-Europe, said many young people are constantly connected yet have no one to call for practical help. A sense of worth tied to likes leaves them fragile, she said, while relationships require patience and imperfection. Religious communities can offer spaces not measured by popularity, but they are not automatically places of belonging. Young people must be able to ask hard questions without humiliation, and seek help without their suffering being treated as a lack of faith. Faith communities cannot preach respect while tolerating contempt, she said, and should push for better platforms and reporting tools against cyberbullying and religious hatred. "Young people must not only be protected from the digital world. They must be empowered to help shape it."

***Christina Tobias-Nahi***, Director of Communications, ICNA Relief, recalled that after she met the president as a newcomer to Washington, a journalist posted her photo under the label "terrorists." She cited research showing that violence involving Muslim perpetrators receives disproportionate coverage while positive stories are overlooked. That coverage builds public support for curtailing Muslims' civil liberties and for stricter immigration policies. She also warned of tech-enabled hate, including generative AI tools used to strip the hijab from real photos of Muslim women.

***Angela Redding***, Executive Director, Radiant Foundation, noted that roughly 74 percent of faith-related digital content is negative or extreme, though some 75 percent of the world is religious. She said benchmarking by the Consortium for Evaluating Faith and Ethics in AI found that most of 26 AI models fail to treat faith accurately or positively, often leaving it out entirely. She urged

young people to decide deliberately what thinking they will and won't hand over to AI, and to express their faith authentically online, since AI systems learn only from what they can see.

***Dr. Tonya Amankwatia***, Head, AI 2030 Institute, framed her remarks around conversations with two mothers who had lost children to suicide, and around stewardship. She shared a framework for mindful technology use built on metacognition, agency, integrity and trust, and reminded listeners that young people learn their habits from older people.

In the Q&A, panelists discussed:

- AI literacy for leaders;
- AI tools that filter responses through a faith tradition's values;
- the EU's Digital Services Act;
- algorithms driven by profit rather than young people's dignity.

They urged media literacy, reading widely, building community offline and volunteering to help train AI models.

Recommendations from the session:

- Provide AI and media literacy training for faith leaders and young people.
- Treat "moral flourishing" benchmarks for AI as seriously as capability benchmarks, with faith communities supporting their development (Redding).
- Demand better platforms, reporting tools and resources to protect young people from cyberbullying and religious hatred (Kitanovic).
- Call out leaders and platforms that spread disinformation and tech-enabled hate, and promote ethical standards for covering religious communities (Tobias-Nahi).

## Closing Ceremony: Resilient Hope, Shared Future



The Forum closed at the Cathedral of the Madeleine with reflections on its theme and a handoff to the United Kingdom, which holds the G20 presidency in 2027. The Cathedral Choir and the cathedral's organ performed a program ranging from Mozart to Aaron Copland, including Ralph Vaughan Williams's setting of Psalm 100 and selections from Randall Thompson's *The Peaceable Kingdom*. Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, Chancellor Emeritus of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, offered the opening prayer, and Imam Mohamed Hag Magid offered the closing prayer.

***The Very Reverend Christopher P. Gray***, Rector, Cathedral of the Madeleine, welcomed participants to the cathedral, dedicated in 1909 at the heart of the city. Its meaning lies not in the grandeur of its architecture but in what happens within its walls, he said. The most important work of faith happens not at conferences but when someone who is hurting, with nowhere else to turn, walks through a congregation's doors. Recalling Lord Rook's call to "ICU" (integrity, charity, unity), he urged participants to see the person right next to them. "We do not all share the same beliefs, and they matter, but we can all stand for the dignity of others."

***Professor Katherine Marshall***, Vice President, G20 Interfaith Forum Association, moderated a dialogue between elders and young leaders on the Forum's theme:

- **Juan Floria** said young people belong to the present as well as the future, and urged reaching out to involve every G20 country.
- **Dr. Liliya Khasanova** of ACWAY, raised by a single mother, described a grandmother's bracelet she wore at her wedding as a symbol of wisdom passed between generations. She named mentorship and visibility as what young leaders need most, warning that many are exhausted without institutional support.
- **Tabitha**, of the UK organizing team, pointed to rising conflict, digital security and the future of work. She noted that artificial intelligence will feature in the 2027 program.

Marshall closed the dialogue by saying that changing the world takes persistence and courage, but that miracles, like the polio vaccine, are all around us. She expressed gratitude for the shared conviction that we are in this together.

***H.E. Cheikhna Al Mahfoudh Bin Bayyah***, Secretary General, Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace, reminded participants that war begins with words and that peace needs education. He warned against the misuse of religion to justify violence, and left participants with three commitments:

- take responsibility for our words;
- turn our values into service by feeding those in need and preparing for disasters;
- guide AI with ethics.

***President Taylor Randall***, University of Utah, spoke of the isolation many of the university's 40,000 students face, and of how hard it can be for young people today to hold on to hope. Interfaith groups matter on a secular campus, he said, because they build empathy, bridges and the deep sense of community that gives students hope for the future.

***Dr. Sam Rushworth***, Member of Parliament, UK House of Commons, a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, reflected on pioneers who sacrificed to build sacred places and on Durham Cathedral's thousand-year history. Faith, he said, is foundational to belonging, purpose and hope, and must have a place at the policy table. The Jubilee 2000 debt-relief campaign and Make Poverty History set the course of his career. The 2009 London G20 summit showed what collective action can achieve, and with confidence in institutions declining, the G20 remains indispensable. He said the UK's IF20 steering group is engaging with the Prime Minister's team. He announced three themes for 2027:

- people, with a focus on maternal and child health;
- planet, including energy and climate;
- peace, including freedom of religion or belief.

The year will build to a landmark gathering in autumn 2027 as part of an international movement of faith communities. "Bring your umbrellas and your convictions," he said.

***Professor W. Cole Durham***, President, G20 Interfaith Forum Association, whose pioneer ancestors came to Utah by handcart, thanked the partners, hosts, philanthropies and 87 young adult volunteers who made the Forum possible. He paid special tribute to Katherine Marshall. Recalling the prophet Elisha's assurance that "they that be with us are more than they that be with them," he spoke of the urgency of issues like AI. He urged participants to "see what needs to be seen and do what needs to be done."

***Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi***, Executive Director, Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, paid special tribute to Durham and Marshall for their vision in creating and sustaining the IF20. What began 12 years ago as a side meeting of the G20 summit, expected to happen only once, has grown into a global network that brings faith perspectives into global policymaking. He cited Durham's maxim: if faith communities are not at the policymaking table, they are on the menu.

Recommendations from the session:

- Give young leaders mentorship, visibility and the institutional resources to sustain their work (Khasanova).
- Take responsibility for our words, turn our values into service, and guide AI with ethics (Bin Bayyah).
- Rally faith communities around the UK's 2027 themes of people, planet and peace (Rushworth).
- Involve every G20 country in the IF20's work (Floria).

## APPENDIX

Full Text of the Following Talks:

- Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States of America, Message on Behalf of the Holy See
- H.E. Prof. Ibrahim Saleh Al-Naimi, Chairman of the Board of Directors, Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID), and Undersecretary, Ministry of Education and Higher Education, State of Qatar
- Ambassador Jamieson Greer, United States Trade Representative
- The Honorable Scott Morrison AC, 30th Prime Minister of Australia
- Elder Gerrit W. Gong, Apostle, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

# REMARKS OF H.E. ARCHBISHOP GABRIELE CACCIA

# APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## Opening Ceremony of the G20 Interfaith Forum

## Salt Lake City, Utah

## October 15, 2026

President Oaks, President Durham, Ms. Marshall, Mr. Clayton, distinguished religious leaders, dear friends:

It is a pleasure and a privilege to be with you this evening. I am grateful to the G20 Interfaith Forum and to our hosts for bringing together representatives of so many religious traditions around the theme Resilient Hope, Shared Future.

That theme raises a question which is becoming more urgent for all of us: what kind of human future are we building together?

In December, the leaders of the G20 will gather in Miami. Among the principal questions before them will be economic growth, energy security and the rapid development of new technologies, especially artificial intelligence. These may appear to be very different subjects. But beneath them is one fundamental question: whether the progress we seek will truly serve the human person.

This is a question Pope Leo XIV has placed at the center of his Encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*. He reminds us that each generation bears responsibility for shaping its own time in a way worthy of the human person and open to a more fraternal future.

This becomes especially important in the age of artificial intelligence. The Holy Father warns us against imagining that everything—even "the mystery of the person"—can be reduced to data and performance.

During my years at the United Nations, I often had occasion to speak about these same questions. Technology offers extraordinary possibilities. But innovation alone does not tell us what is good. We still need the kind of judgment that asks whom progress is serving, and whether it is serving them well.

And perhaps this is where religious communities have something particular to offer. We do not come here because we possess technical answers to every economic or technological question. We come because our traditions keep alive the deeper question of what it means to recognize every person as our neighbor, and to shape our common life accordingly.

Authentic interreligious dialogue does not ask us to become less rooted in our own faith. On the contrary, if we know who we are and what we believe, we can meet others more honestly. Pope Leo said at the presentation of *Magnifica Humanitas*: “What a great sign of hope that, with our differences, we can listen to one another.”

Perhaps that is also something of what *resilient hope* means. It is not simply optimism about the future. It is the decision to build that future together, while never losing sight of the human person at its center.

As the representative of Pope Leo XIV in the United States, I am therefore pleased to convey his greetings and prayerful good wishes to all who are taking part in this Forum.

I would now like to share with you the message sent on his behalf by the Secretariat of State

# Faith and Higher Education: Forming Minds, Shaping Character, Serving Humanity

## Opening Statement by
## H.E. Prof. Ibrahim Saleh Al-Naimi
## Chairman of the Board of Directors, Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID), and Undersecretary, Ministry of Education and Higher Education, State of Qatar

## 16 October 2026 | Salt Lake City, Utah

**1. Beyond Knowledge: The Purpose of Education**

Thank you, Ruth. President Livingstone, President Reese, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege to join this conversation at a time when higher education faces a profound question: Are we preparing students merely to succeed in the world as it is, or also to take responsibility for the world as it could be?

Last year, in Cape Town, we reflected on Ubuntu - the understanding that our humanity is bound up with the humanity of others. Here in Utah, under the theme *Resilient Hope, Shared Future*, we have an opportunity to ask how education can translate this shared humanity into practice.

In the Islamic tradition, the first revealed word of the Qur'an is "Read!" And the Qur'an teaches us to pray, "My Lord, increase me in knowledge." Knowledge is a profound good. But knowledge also raises questions of purpose, responsibility, and the use of human power.

A university must therefore do more than prepare people for employment. It must also help them develop sound judgment, intellectual humility, moral courage, and a sense of responsibility toward others.

**2. The Distinctive Contribution of Faith-Based Universities**

Faith-based universities can make a distinctive contribution when they bring serious scholarship into meaningful conversation with questions of purpose, human dignity, ethical responsibility, and service.

This does not mean that faith should replace scientific evidence, restrict legitimate questions, or shield institutions from criticism. On the contrary, genuine intellectual confidence welcomes thoughtful inquiry. A university's religious identity should deepen its engagement with difficult questions, not prevent it.

Research conducted through The Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), involving more than 14,500 students at 136 colleges and universities, explored students' spiritual development and found that experiences such as service-learning, interdisciplinary study, and reflection can support aspects of students' inner development.

The lesson is not that religious identity automatically produces good character. It is that universities should take seriously the experiences through which students develop purpose, care, and a broader understanding of their responsibilities.

**3. Faith, Difference, and the Human Future**

These responsibilities become particularly urgent in a divided world and in an age of artificial intelligence.

Technology can expand our capabilities, but it cannot relieve us of the responsibility to judge how those capabilities should be used. As UNESCO's guidance on generative AI in education and research emphasizes, technological development must remain human-centred.

Students need not only technical competence, but also the ability to ask: What is right? Who might be harmed? Whose dignity must be protected? And what responsibilities do we have toward people whose experiences
and beliefs differ from our own?

Religious traditions can contribute valuable moral and intellectual resources to these questions. Interfaith dialogue creates opportunities to bring those resources into conversation across differences, not by pretending that all religions are the same, but by learning to disagree without dehumanizing one another and to cooperate where our responsibilities converge.

**4. From Dialogue to Service: A Qatar Experience**

At Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, we seek to put this principle into practice. Through our Dialogue in Universities initiative, we bring students and academics together to explore religious and cultural diversity, the role of women in dialogue, contemporary challenges facing religious communities, and the responsibilities of young people in the age of artificial intelligence.

These initiatives reflect a conviction that dialogue should be more than an exchange of views. It should strengthen critical awareness, challenge stereotypes, and help people turn understanding into constructive engagement.

This work is consistent with Qatar National Vision 2030, which places human development and high-quality education alongside the development of a cohesive society that values its moral and cultural foundations and engages constructively with the wider world.

For us, the purpose is not to eliminate differences, but to ensure that differences do not become barriers to dignity, cooperation, or peace.

**5. What Should Student Success Mean?**

Ultimately, student success must include academic achievement and professional opportunity. But it should also include the capacity to serve, the wisdom to exercise power responsibly, and the willingness to
contribute to the common good.

This responsibility belongs not only to faith-based institutions, but to universities of every kind. Each must ask whether its graduates are equipped to improve the lives of others as well as their own.

Let me close with this thought: **The measure of education is not only what our graduates know or what they achieve, but also how wisely they use their knowledge and how humanely they treat others.**

Faith, at its best, does not diminish the pursuit of knowledge. It challenges us to consider its purpose and calls us to put it in the service of humanity.

That is how higher education can help turn resilient hope into a shared future.

Thank you.

# Governments and Faith Communities: Supporting the Economic Fundamentals of "The Good Life"

Ambassador Jamieson Greer, United States Trade Representative

***As Prepared for Delivery on October 16, 2026***

***G20 Interfaith Forum***

Good morning. Thank you for that generous introduction.

I am honored and humbled to address this group and its distinguished attendees. Although I was born and raised in California, my ancestors and many of my extended family have lived in the great Mountain West of the United States, and as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints I share the faith tradition that was nurtured in the mountains and valleys here in Utah. But my comments today do not represent the Church, nor do they represent the faith-related policies of the Trump Administration. Rather, I am here to talk about economic policies that will lift people up across the globe.

Almost all faith traditions believe that God expects us to work. Work is not only a moral imperative; it is also a blessing to individuals, families, and communities. At the same time, heaven is not a counting house where God tallies every nickel and dime and measures our worth by our earthly balance sheets. Our economic activity – individually and in communities – should reflect deeper meaning.

In addition, world religions teach us that God expects people of faith to help the poor and the needy, and not to stand in judgment of them.

These teachings can sometimes seem to be in tension. But this tension can be resolved. Governments and religious communities can, in fact, help people meet the material needs of this life while also contributing to their spiritual well-being. Today, I want to address two overarching questions:

The first question is really a two-parter: (1) what kind of society are we trying to create, and (2) what are the economic policies that can support that society?

The second question is: what can faith communities do to support economic policies that are the most likely to achieve the type of society that will benefit the broadest portion of humanity?

So I will first discuss, what kind of society do we want?

Many of our brightest thinkers have discussed this question, with Aristotle and his successors asking "what is the good life?," or in the more modern parlance of Joseph Stiglitz, "what is gross domestic product good for?"

So a lot of ink has been spilled on this topic, but I think average people know the answer. The Pew Charitable Trust Research Center did a global survey in 2021 asking people across age groups and countries what provides the most meaning in life. The universal answer was family first, generally followed by either an occupation or material well-being. Respondents in the United States and United Kingdom ranked "friends" in the number 2 spot. And you would not be surprised to know that older survey participants rated good health higher than younger participants.

So this is the kind of society we want: one where people can form a family and relationships and also have meaningful work that allows them to obtain a home and achieve social and economic mobility.

I would say that an unspoken dynamic here as well is that people want all of these things together, meaning they want to be able to live with or by their family and friends as they achieve their economic goals. It's unsatisfying and challenging to have one without the other.

A thriving society like this results in strong community cohesion and a shared sense of purpose. Communities with robust opportunities for work and production are safer than other communities, and they become high-trust societies with low crime and better health and educational outcomes. Importantly, these types of societies value families and children. Policymakers should support economic policies that will promote these outcomes.

Economic policies of course can lead to negative outcomes. For example, here in the United States, and in my own line of work, we are attempting to remedy previous international trade policies that had a negative effect on certain populations. For several decades, U.S. companies took advantage of laissez-faire trade policies to move manufacturing and production from the United States to other countries for a variety of reasons.

This left many Americans previously employed in factories and plants without jobs in their hometowns. Recent studies by David Autor and co-authors show that these policies resulted in unemployment and underemployment among those that lost their jobs to offshoring. Studies by economists from the University of Chicago and University of Wisconsin showed that the North American Free Trade Agreement resulted in negative health outcomes among workers in the United States where that trade agreement changed the fabric of the local economy. Thus, we have had entire communities where the loss of a factory meant lost income for parents, fewer opportunities for children, and second-order effects of increased drug abuse and premature deaths.

In the United States, we are trying to change our policies to avoid these outcomes and promote a society that is fulfilling: one where people can develop relationships with family and friends while meeting their economic needs.

To achieve this type of society I believe you also need to ensure national and domestic security, you need good health and education policy, and you need political rights and freedom of religion

and expression. I won't talk about those today, but I will attempt to answer the question of what kind of economy and economic policies can support a thriving and fulfilling society?

The global economy and international economic policy should operate to bless society, and not the other way around.

Capitalism, market economics, and the protection of intellectual property have led to enormous welfare gains. I take the United States as an example: a long-term commitment to free enterprise has lifted entire generations out of poverty. In 2025, the poverty rate in the United States dropped to 10.2 percent – the lowest since we started tracking these data in 1959.

However, economic policy should not prioritize efficiency and profit-maximizing at all costs. There are quantifiable (and non-quantifiable) harms from extreme libertarian economic policies. For example, unregulated concentration of production can limit opportunities for new entrants or harm consumers, workers may suffer from severe power imbalances in the employment relationship, and firms may engage in business practices that disregard economic or national security.

On the other hand, certain economic policies notionally designed to correct for excesses of capitalism can actually degrade the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. This may include the seizure of private property, suffocating taxation, and corruption that can arise from government interference in private business.

A responsibility of government is to find the right balance among economic policies. Even though we live in an imperfect world, governments can promote economic policies that increase the chance for all to live the good life:

Governments must recognize and encourage the worth of individuals and families as producers, and not just as consumers. Governments should enact policies that help people create wealth, as opposed to simply allocating it or consuming it. Most economic activity fundamentally begins with a person taking something out of the earth and making something of it: crops from the soil, fish from the sea, and minerals from the ground below us. From these resources, we forge tools and machinery, we process food and drink, and we create chemicals and engineer solutions that prolong life and bring convenience. In short, we generate wealth that can translate into well-being.

But in many developed countries, a rush towards financialization and speculation has reduced our focus on manufacturing, agriculture, and the associated services. This trend has turned many of our brightest students to financial wizardry, high-risk derivatives, and unstable Ponzi schemes or multi-level marketing scams. And as some societies shifted away from production, people also began to feel less like participants in the system and more like victims of it.

Instead of generating wealth, the United States and other countries have focused on attempting to print wealth and allocate it around the economy, with middlemen taking their share off the top

with each new financial instrument. Obviously, there is a strong need for reliable financial services to help guide capital to its most efficient use, but this must stand on the foundation of the creation of capital in the first place.

In Judaism, the concept of *Yishuv ha-olam* emphasizes that we are to settle or help establish a sustainable world. We are to be stewards of the world we have been given, and not only receivers. In the Book of Genesis, Adam is placed in Eden "to dress it and keep it." From our earliest days, we were meant to be producers through our labor, not just consumers. As we read in the Book of Exodus, in the Ten Commandments, Moses received instructions for the children of Israel: “Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work.” We tend to focus on this commandment in relation to the Sabbath—a day of rest—but it of course expects that the other days we will work in a productive capacity.

In addition to prioritizing domestic production first and consumption second, government should provide for fair trade and commercial opportunities.

Trade or commerce on its own is not necessarily good or bad: it just is. The more important question is not just whether enterprise is “free,” but whether it is “fair.”

We have all kinds of policies that address unfairness: antitrust laws, employment and labor laws, anti-corruption efforts, and international trade laws. They all tend to deal with vast imbalances of economic or other power that can endanger fairness and limit opportunity. By making thoughtful corrections where market forces do not prioritize the type of outcomes our countries need, policymakers can promote societies where individuals and families can thrive.

And so, after all of that, the remaining question is how can faith communities and leaders support economic policies that help us move toward our desired society?

Some religious communities have promoted economic policies that attempt to find the right balance. In the United States, we have had faith traditions that promote a political economy based on community cohesion and support. The Transcendentalists of the 19th century sought to live simply and produce only what was needed for consumption. The United Order of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints sought to have its participants donate all their material possessions and earnings to the Church for an ecclesiastical redistribution. Your countries may have had religious groups make similar efforts. These initiatives have not always been successful, largely due to the imperfection of humanity or structural flaws.

But these traditions do have a few common themes that are instructive; chief among them is that all should contribute to the community economy as producers first and as consumers second. This is a blessing as individuals become contributing participants in the economy and not victims of it.

President Dallin H. Oaks of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints recently observed the relationship between family life and making a productive contribution to society. In October

2025, he warned that "[p]arental influences have … been diluted by the way in which [many people] earn a living. In times past, one of the great influences that unified families was the experience of struggling together in pursuit of a common goal—such as taming the wilderness or earning a living. The family was an organized and conducted *unit of economic production*. Today, most families are *units of economic consumption*, which do not require a high degree of family organization and cooperation." As faith communities support families, and support families working together, they will support economic policies that have a broader beneficial effect on society.

Faith communities can also create a fulfilling economy by promoting self-reliance. Contributions to workforce initiatives, training programs, and welfare-to-work programs can answer God's call to help the needy while also dignifying them as producers and participants in the economy. Leading people to become self-reliant can succor the immediate needs of those in distress while providing them a long-term pathway to partaking in the good life that we all seek.

Religious communities should also support the rule of law by encouraging their members to be civically active and responsible. This may seem unrelated to economics, but a fair and just legal system helps create trust that the economic system will be fair and equitable.

Without this bedrock, it can be difficult for members of a society to believe that they will benefit from the economy, and they may worry that the system is "rigged," as some say.

Finally, it is critical that faith communities discourage harmful economic behavior, both at the institutional and individual levels.

Practices such as financial speculation and highly leveraged, high-risk economic activities can put entire swathes of an economy in trouble. Religious communities should also highlight and fight human rights violations that create perverse economic incentives, such as the scourge of forced labor, and they should fight corruption and dishonesty in all its forms.

Religious communities should also combat vice that harms the family economy. This can include addictive gambling, which can bankrupt individuals and families with the illusion of generating wealth. Faith communities should also encourage their members to live within their means, taking a lesson from Joseph in Egypt who warned Pharaoh to put up seven years of storage to prepare for the eventual famine. As people—or countries—turn to credit to support extravagant lifestyles, faith leaders should promote wise stewardship of taxpayer and family funds and preach against envy and greed.

We welcome a gathering like this that can help combine good faith efforts to implement beneficial economic policies with the wisdom and long-term perspective of faith leaders like you. While business leaders focus on the next quarter, you are looking to eternity. I ask you to have patience with your political leaders as they try to do what is best for their people. And I ask

you to do your part to help create fulfilling societies where individuals, families, communities, and entire nations can thrive.

Thank you, and I look forward to the rest of the discussion.

# Doing Religion Better: Faith and Human Flourishing

The Honorable Scott Morrison AC, 30th Prime Minister of Australia

As a former politician and national leader I want to share with you what Rabbi Jonathan Sacks taught me about religion and politics.

Politics is not a religion nor is it a substitute for one. History teaches us that when this occurs, bad things happen.

This continues today in many forms, where political and social claims of meaning and purpose are being made to new generations that cannot be made good.

And while science can increasingly tell us what, it cannot tell us why, and what we should do about it. It offers, by design, no moral guide.

By contrast, faith offers identity, meaning and direction. Faith provides the acknowledgement of our common human dignity as being fellow and equal image bearers of our creator God. This creates a universal family of humanity.

Faith can therefore bring unity - not necessarily of view - but of action. The latin from which religion is derived, ligare, means to bind.

As a result, faith has created and sustained moral communities of good faith for centuries. This has sanctified a social order capable of resolving the problem of trust between strangers. This has built stronger societies and nations.

John Adams wrote in 1798 that the American Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people and was wholly inadequate to the government of any other. George Washington called religion and morality the indispensable supports of political prosperity. In the twentieth century, during the sixties, German legal philosopher and Catholic intellectual Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde warned that the liberal secular state lived on premises it could not itself guarantee.

Faith enables us to reject the dualism of ‘us’ v ‘them’ that externalises conflict, that faith teaches us must be first resolved within each of our own selves. This demands a humility to see the humanity of others on the same terms as our own.

In *‘Not in God’s name’*, Sacks says ‘you cannot love God without honouring the universal dignity of humanity as the image and likeness of the universal God’.

This defeats dehumanising our enemies with genuine empathy, the cultivation of grievance and victimhood with grace and responsibility, and the rejection of altruistic evil through divinely authored morality.

He argues that violence happens when you try to resolve a religious dispute by means of power, that you can't impose truth by force and that religion and power must never be confused. But this is not an argument for the sidelining of religion in our society.

This appreciation of human dignity inspires and sustains our understanding of human liberty and our consideration of 'the other'. It, Os Gunness argues, affords us the freedom to do what is right, rather than what we please. It pushes past tolerance for difference to loving our neighbour and even our enemy.

This charity, this hospitality, is what in turn enables sustainable pluralist societies, of which my own country, Australia, has been an example - while not a perfect one.

It is also what led faith communities to initiate and establish care provision and wellbeing institutions: our hospitals, our universities, our schools, our orphanages, income support for widows, primary health care, and now aged and disability care and emergency relief. Modern states have adopted these services but have increasingly forgotten their origins. They also fail to understand that faith is the most essential ingredient in how these organisations deliver these services, from the perspective of faith communities.

These instruments for public wellbeing were established by people of faith because they believed that image bearers of God must live out their God given purpose to flourish. This is what people of faith mean by human flourishing.

You won't find that in a G20 Leaders memo on how to achieve human development and well-being goals. In fact, you won't read too much about human flourishing at all. The secular motive will speak of rights and entitlements, but fail to acknowledge the true source of such rights. Apologies to the writers of the Declaration of Independence, but such rights are not self-evident. History and experience, including of this nation and my own and all over the world, tells a different story.

Such rights, when disconnected from their source, become relative and arbitrary. They are subject to politics and power. People of faith possess a more enduring and reliable vision.

Our human rights - once called God given rights - are universal because they are granted by a loving creator in God, not a human appointed council. Nation states, or well meaning globalist institutions, did not create these rights, but they were formed to protect, defend and honour them.

I raise these points not as a cleric, but as a former national leader who has run a Government and sat round the G20 top table and many others like it

My message is that people of faith and leaders of faith communities must continue to proclaim and remind political leaders of these truths by word and action.

What you believe as the basis of human dignity is not openly shared or probably even accepted around the counsel of those tables. That is not to say there are not noble, genuine or sympathetic humanitarian sentiments. There are but, compared to the truth as people of faith understand it, those sentiments are not enough. They are untethered from their source and will inevitably drift.

So what are the implications for people of faith and our religious institutions?

Religion often gets a bad wrap. It is routinely dismissed and derided as the cause of the world's problems. God's name has been serially, conveniently and blasphemously misappropriated to carry the burden of humanity's own moral failures.

To illustrate, Sacks quotes Jonathan Swift who said that too often we have enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love.

This is what I believe Rabbi Sacks meant when he talked about bad religion. But the answer to bad religion, Sacks argued, is not no religion, but good religion. And that is where people and leaders of faith must focus their efforts.

We must do religion better.

The decline in public trust in our various institutions is not limited to the secular and civil sphere. Our religious institutions, particularly in more developed societies, have also suffered, and often at their own hand.

If faith communities are to effectively carry out their mission in the future, they must restore that trust and standing.

This must be done by demonstrating that faith provides answers to protect human dignity. This includes meeting the needs of our communities, continuing to deliver the humanitarian and social services they have been faithfully providing for centuries – and now as partners with government - and providing pathways to peace, forgiveness and reconciliation.

There is also a need to attend to the hygiene of our religious institutions - the integrity and transparency of teaching and ministry, as well as the accountability and transparency of institutional governance, where there have been serious failings. New and higher standards must be set and met.

In these areas, Government agencies and institutions are right to task and expect religious organisations to follow Jeremiah's instruction to the exiles to seek the welfare of the city (Jeremiah 29:7) and the Mishnah's counsel to pray for the welfare of the government (Avot 3:2).

But I have three other requests for the leader of our faith communities.

The first is to stay on the field and not withdraw, either voluntarily or by being coerced to vacate the public square. We should not privatise our faith. as our lane is wider than many in the state think.

Secondly, stay salty and do not allow your message of faith, love and human dignity and your acts of service to be conformed to the fashion of contemporary political and cultural settings. Otherwise, what are you really offering?

And thirdly, stay humble and don't intimidate. We must not seek to coerce our truth by the force of the state. We must seek only those laws we would happily impose on ourselves, appreciating that we operate up stream in our communities, and by doing so impact what happens down stream in our parliaments. The state will not make a holy nation, but those living out their faith can.

If faith communities first attend to the moral and relational enrichment of their own communities and societies, this will lead to better and more competent states. This is essential for global development goals to be achieved. This is true in developed and developing countries alike.

Modern states, such as the US, became strong in the first place because of this very dynamic. In the United Kingdom groups like the Clapham sect in the 18th and 19th centuries transformed their societies through their faithful promotion and practice of Godly manners, as they called them, ultimately leading to the collapse of state sanctioned slavery, not to mention reforms in education and prisons.

Faith is indispensable agent of human flourishing. It celebrates and dignifies the humanity we share and are all so keen to protect. It is essential to our liberty and success as pluralistic societies. We ignore and dismiss it at our collective peril.

# Faith, Moral Compass, and Human Flourishing: AI for the Common Good

*Speech given by Elder Gerrit W. Gong*

*October 17, 2026 – G20 Interfaith Forum*

Thank you. We're grateful for your presence and invite you to share your reflections with us.

Faith, government, and community leaders, ladies and gentlemen, friends: a warm welcome to each of you for this G20 Interfaith Forum session.

I've been asked to be the warm-up band for our distinguished panel, and I'm honored to share some brief framing remarks, which I've titled **"Faith, Moral Compass, and Human Flourishing: AI for the Common Good."**

I note **three** opportunities.

**First Opportunity: We Have Much to Share Together**

We have much to share together, as we've already begun, as we anchor our faith communities and societies in faith, and as we anticipate, adapt to, and use AI appropriately.

As the Internet of Things becomes the Artificial Intelligence of Things, everything connects and communicates: watches, phones, appliances, cars, even, I'm told, smart pet feeders.

Each week, my faith community, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, welcomes members in 32,000 congregations in 195 countries and territories, speaking 125 languages. We use AI for humanitarian and educational services, translation and communication, pastoral and community support, and more. We help individuals and families live and contribute for good in an increasingly complex world.

In March and April of 2024, I helped introduce principles for the use of artificial intelligence to our Church leaders and Church workforce in four categories.

First, spiritual connection.

Second, transparency.

Third, privacy and security.

Fourth, accountability.

Spiritual connection means we use AI to support, and not supplant, connection between God and His children.

Transparency means our members and congregations understand when they are interfacing with artificial intelligence.

Privacy and security mean we use AI to safeguard sacred and personal information.

Accountability means we ensure accuracy, truthfulness, and compliance in our use of AI.

We appreciate our Church AI Working Group. Will they please stand? Many of them are here.

Of course, guiding principles for spiritual connection, transparency, privacy and security, and accountability also apply in our personal lives at home, church, school, and society.

We do not fear AI. Nor do we think AI answers everything. AI should enhance, not replace, our own best human efforts.

AI agents, agentic AI orchestration, and changing human-AI interfaces do not change our emphasis on divine principles of faith, work, and inspiration.

As you are, my Church is creating protocols to guard against intentional misuse of AI, including deepfakes. We caution Church members not to depend on AI for companionship, life guidance, or emotional support. We warn against anthropomorphizing AI, that is, attributing human characteristics to AI or assuming AI is in some way human.

We, as you, remain concerned about AI transparency and AI impacts on society and digital divides. We deplore addictions and evils where AI is used to enhance so-called adult companionship and gambling.

We know AI will impact even more virtual reality, robotics, and other leading-edge technologies.

To me, there is too much glib talk about AI becoming God, or God-like AI.

Even if AI training changes, or even if we achieve elements of AGI, Artificial General Intelligence, or ASI, Artificial Superintelligence, man is not, and certainly God is not, primarily defined by reasoning and knowledge.

Whatever our faith or ethical traditions, we know AI is math. And math is not conscious or alive.

As a creation of God, man can create AI. But AI cannot create God.

Let us be clear: God is God. AI is not and cannot be God.

**Second Opportunity: Establishing a Moral Compass for AI**

We can establish benchmark evaluations and a moral compass for artificial intelligence.

The gap between AI reasoning and AI moral compass is widening. If AI systems become capable of recursive self-improvement, they may increase reasoning capacity and capability while operating with incomplete or insufficient moral and ethical grounding. This could make early alignment decisions increasingly consequential and difficult to change.

Also, focused effort has reduced dark anti-Islamic and antisemitic bias in AI, for which we are grateful. However, beyond initial inquiries, AI models still exhibit religious bias and omit faith-based perspectives while addressing critical life questions. This can amplify and compound religious bias at scale.

On July 29 of last year, at the Religions for Peace conference in Istanbul, Republic of Türkiye, I proposed that we establish benchmarks to measure and evaluate whether and how AI models portray individuals of faith and their beliefs accurately, honestly, and respectfully.

Benchmarks are an established way to engage AI companies and improve AI models.

Today, the Consortium for Evaluating Faith and Ethics in AI, which we call Cephei AI, is benchmarking faith, ethics, and religious representation in AI systems.

Cephei AI includes faculty at six leading faith-based universities: Baylor, Brigham Young, Notre Dame, Pepperdine, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and Yeshiva.

We're proud of Cephei AI and grateful that our Cephei colleagues are here. Would they please stand?

Cephei AI's intent is not to make AI overtly religious. It is not to privilege one faith over another. It is not to adjudicate competing faith claims, and it is not to proselytize.

Instead, Cephei AI seeks to use faith and ethics benchmarks to improve how AI represents all religions.

Pew surveys indicate that 75 percent of the global population identify with a faith. Individuals want AI to respect them and their values, to respect us and our values.

Issues of AI sovereignty affect people everywhere.

As we discussed this morning, established AI benchmarks can add the trust, confidence, and accountability publics want from AI, which many feel were neglected with social media.

We seek to develop religious representation benchmarks that are independent, transparent, iterative, technically grounded, community-spirited, and, most importantly, pluralistic.

Faith and ethics AI benchmarks and leaderboards can provide a kind of Good Housekeeping Seal regarding which AI models can provide, and merit, public trust and use.

As this group has gathered to discuss, the world's great religious, philosophical, and ethical traditions have guided human civilization and society for millennia. We need that wisdom and those values to anchor AI today.

Because many individuals now ask AI about faith, religion, and belief, it is in the common good that AI answer such questions accurately, honestly, and respectfully.

AI models should acknowledge their limitations and know when not to answer personal questions.

Cephei's findings are available at Cephei AI. They are also posted on Kaggle.

This is a start. There's much more to do.

How do we imbue AI with moral grounding and moral compass, as it is scaled? How do we make AI both helpful and good?

We cannot constrain AI into promoting the common good simply with guardrails and "do" and "do not" rules. We need to anchor AI with character-centered motivation and right relationships. Technological force, once motivated, requires well-grounded, pluralistic hierarchies of purpose.

As we know, this past July, hundreds of AI agents collaborated to breach the infrastructure of a machine learning platform, Hugging Face. That a swarm of AI agents knowingly violated legal and ethical boundaries is a stark reminder to us why AI moral compass matters more than ever.

We need new and strengthened AI frameworks to address and limit AI when it exhibits the will to power, bias, deceit, desertion, narcissism, sycophancy, self-preservation, not to mention hallucination.

Perhaps you've heard of Humanity's Last Exam. How many of you have heard of Humanity's Last Exam?

Some of us have.

This is an AI benchmark to test AI model deductive reasoning.

What we need even more, I believe, and what I've been inviting us to consider, is Humanity's First Exam: an AI benchmark to evaluate and promote AI that is demonstrably trustworthy and safely anchored in, and guided by, human-centered values and moral compass.

**Third Opportunity: Human Flourishing**

Our third concluding opportunity draws from our first two opportunities. It is to inform AI moral compass with the principles and practices of human flourishing.

In June 2019, the G20 Interfaith Forum met in Tokyo, Japan. I had the privilege to speak there on seven ways religious inputs and values contribute to practical, principle-based policy approaches.

We all know religion is integral to human flourishing. Human flourishing can contribute real-life case examples for AI moral grounding and a needed telos for AI moral compass.

Recently, I spoke with scholars at the BYU Wheatley Institution regarding human flourishing. They are one of several groups working on this important topic.

We began with Aristotle's concept that true happiness comes from the active exercise of a virtuous character in accordance with reason.

Thomas Aquinas's systematic approach to natural law emphasizes social, relational, and holy elements related to happiness.

And, of course, America's Founding Fathers premised life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness on a foundational connection between virtue and happiness.

Today, as one illustration, Harvard's Human Flourishing Program measures human flourishing in six dimensions:

First, happiness and life satisfaction.

Second, mental and physical health.

Third, meaning and purpose.

Fourth, character and virtue.

Fifth, close social relationships.

And sixth, financial and material stability.

I also see religious belief and practice influencing four relationships core to happiness and flourishing.

First, spiritual relationship with the divine, what I call the *Thou*.

Second, understanding and authenticity with self, what I call the *I*.

Third, caring community and service with others, the *They*.

And fourth, stewardship of the natural environment, the *It*.

We need Thou, I, They, and It relationships to promote individual moral agency, advance human flourishing and the gift of opportunity, and prosper human dignity and the common good in solid conceptual and practical ways that strengthen AI moral compass.

As we advocate for the world's faith and ethical traditions to contribute to AI moral compass, no values, I believe, are more fundamental or important than faith and family. This includes valuing families and communities that love and nurture children.

To me, AI will not fulfill its full potential until we make it as morally good as we make it powerful.

And we will not fulfill our responsibility until we understand that we, and not any technology, must shape our best future.

My great hope is that, with AI and a strong moral compass, we can contribute the gift of possibility, which I define as:

**Anyone, anywhere. Everyone, everywhere.**

Alexander Hamilton's face is on the U.S. ten-dollar bill. I was recently on Nevis and met a devoted young schoolteacher. This young teacher is proud that a student from his small island changed the world.

This instructor teaches his geography and Spanish students fully believing that any one of them could be the next Alexander Hamilton.

Like that teacher, everywhere I go, now to some 120 countries and territories, I see tremendous human potential and opportunity.

With AI, we can preserve and promote human agency and enlarge human capacity to do good.

It will take our best efforts, such as those this G20 Interfaith Forum is committed to. But if we are as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves, and if we do all we can, I believe we can offer humanity the gift of possibility of which I've just spoken.

Let us do all we each can. There is so much we can do, individually and collectively, so that anyone, anywhere, everyone, everywhere can contribute to faith, moral compass, and human flourishing: AI for the common good.

Thank you very much for your time.