

Lux Center News



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Healing Requires Action beyond Prayer

Recently, terms such as “divided” and “fractured” have been used to describe our country and our world. Regardless of personal ideologies, most of us can likely agree upon the need to seek a cure for what ails us. How can we heal the fragile fault lines that run across political parties, racial and ethnic groups and different religious faiths so as to uplift individuals when in need?

While it may be the responsibility of the Divine to ultimately heal our world, both Jews and Christians are called upon to emulate God’s holiness, righteousness, grace and mercy to act as God’s partner to better our world. This type of healing requires action beyond prayer. Judaism and Catholicism both purport that it is through acts of social justice that we can work in concert to better serve the common good.

Acts of Mercy

In the Catholic Church, the seven corporal acts of mercy are considered to be an obligation of all faithful. They are based on Christ’s prediction of the last judgment (Matthew 25:41) and include feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, visiting the imprisoned (or ransoming the captive), and burying the dead. Pope Francis suggested that “care for creation” be added as a new work of mercy in his 2016 World Day of Prayer for Creation address. Simply, these are daily gestures of peace and love. In a larger context, they seek contemplation of the world. These personal and social dimensions of mercy call upon humankind to struggle against extreme and manifest evils (e.g. racism, poverty, tyranny) that degrade the human person.

***Tikkun Olam*—Repair of the World.**

Simply stated, the concept of *tikkun olam* can be defined by acts of kindness performed to perfect or repair the world. This phrase is found in the Mishnah, a body of rabbinic teachings compiled in the 3rd century. Generally, it is a term that refers to the impulse and commitment to perfect the world in accordance with God’s will through our own behavior, attitude and action. It is also referred to in Jewish mystical

teachings that explain that humans must be involved in the world's reparation in order to restore the balance between good and evil intended by God. The phrase is also referred to in the *Aleinu*, a liturgical prayer.

The most modern view of the concept of *tikkun olam* implies that each person has a hand in working toward the betterment of his or her own existence as well as the lives of future generations. It is important to strive to repair the world by participating in justice and righteousness through charitable giving (*tzedakah*) and acts of loving-kindness (*g'milut hasadim*). The Jewish people are obligated to work toward the prevention of hunger, homelessness, disease, ignorance, abuse and oppression as well as working toward preserving the health of the global ecosystem upon which all life depends.

A Remedy

Whether through the call for Catholics to engage in works of mercy or the Jewish participation in *tikkun olam*, these acts of charity and kindness recognize the sacredness of human life and the obligation to love one's neighbor. Clearly, both religions emphasize that we must be compelled to act as God's partners in perfecting the world. As stated in the *Pirke Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers, 2:21), "You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it."

Striving for Understanding Through Interreligious Dialogue

Are there other practical ways to learn to "love your neighbor" in today's world? According to Fr. John Crossin, "we get to know others by reaching out to them, listening to them, and thus building a relationship with them." Rabbi Yehiel Poupko agrees and adds, "In order to respect someone, one has to know them in their otherness and in their difference."

Both of these eminent theologians will speak about "Building Bridges of Understanding: Interreligious Dialogue in Our Multi-Faith World" at a free public lecture at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology on **Tuesday, March 28th at 7 p.m.** The lectures by Crossin and Poupko, as part of the Lux Center Symposium on Interreligious Dialogue, will be moderated by TV journalist Mark Siegrist.

Fr. Crossin, is the former executive director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. In this capacity, he has worked with theologians and other experts in ecumenical, interreligious and Jewish dialogues as well as coordinating dialogues with Orthodox Christians, Anglicans, Lutherans, United Methodists, Jews, Muslims and Sikhs. Rabbi Poupko is Rabbinic Scholar at the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago. He is

responsible for the Chicago Jewish community's interfaith relations with Christian seminaries, churches, institutions, and denominations. He is also the founder and co-convenor of the National Evangelical-Jewish Conversation.

These theologians will also speak to seminarians, faculty, staff and invited guests at the spring Dehon lecture on Wednesday, March 28th. Other noted scholars and experts will also conduct sessions related to conceptual and practical aspects of interreligious dialogue.

A promotional banner for a public lecture. On the left is a stylized globe showing the Americas. To the right of the globe, the text reads: "Public Lecture" in large white font, followed by "Building Bridges through Interreligious Dialogue in our Multi-Faith World" in smaller white font. On the far right, there are two small, square, black and white portrait photographs of men, one above the other, both wearing glasses and suits.

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