



POPE BENEDICT XVI CHRIST OUR HOPE

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE UNITED STATES 2008

WASHINGTON, DC

Tuesday, April 15 Wednesday, April 16 Thursday,

April 17

NEW YORK CITY

Friday, April 18 Saturday, April 19 Sunday,

April 20

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Press Release

DATE: March 4, 2008
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JEWISH, ISLAMIC, BUDDHIST, JAIN, HINDU LEADERS TO MEET WITH POPE BENEDICT XVI IN WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON—Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, Jain and Hindu communities will meet with Pope Benedict XVI April 17, at the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center during the April 15-20 papal visit to the United States.

The meeting will include a papal address, greetings from inter-faith leaders and the presentation of symbolic gifts by young members of each community.

Bishop Richard Sklba, chair of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, noted that the theme *Religions Working for Peace* will run through the meeting, to which 200 leaders have been invited.

"The cry for peace in our world calls for religious bodies to come together," Bishop Sklba said. "This meeting denotes the Holy Father's belief in the need for religious bodies to stress the goal for peace which lies at the heart of all religions. It "exemplifies what must happen all over the world."

The gifts symbolize the path to peace in the deepest teachings of each group. They include:

A **silver menorah** with seven lights. It symbolizes the perennial validity of God's covenant of peace. Silver is frequently used in the Eastern European Jewish tradition. The menorah recalls the seven branched lamp stand used in the temple in Jerusalem.

A small, **finely crafted edition of the Qur'an**, in green leather and gold leaf edging. The Qur'an is for Muslims the revered word of God, proclaiming God's message of peace. Green is the traditional Islamic color.

A **metallic cube representing the Jain principles** of non-violence and respect for a diversity of viewpoints as a way to peace through self-discipline and dialogue.

The **sacred syllable Om on a brass incense burner**. Om is the primordial sound of creation itself, by which God's liberating peace is made known. Bronze or brass are widely used for Hindu liturgical ornaments. Incense sticks are used in the rituals of the Hindu temples.

A **bronze bell** cast in Korea. In various Buddhist cultures, the sound of the bell demarcates the times of meditation, which leads to inner peace and enlightenment.

Presenters of the gifts include:

David J. Michaels, director of Intercommunal Affairs at B'nai B'rith International, the oldest Jewish humanitarian, advocacy and social action organization. A graduate of Yeshiva University, he trained at the Foreign Ministry of Germany, the Embassy of Israel in Washington, Ha'aretz - International Herald Tribune, the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, the United Nations, and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Saman Hussain, born in Pakistan and a graduate of the University of Virginia where she majored in religious studies and foreign affairs. Saman served as a leader of the Muslim Student Association

and was a coordinator of the Unity Walk in memory of the victims of 9/11, organized by the InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington.

Aditya Vora, a Jain young adult studying at Haverford College in Pennsylvania. He has been active since high school in the Long Island Multi-Faith Forum, dialogues with Holocaust survivors in the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut region, and anti-prejudice, multi-cultural training programs on Long Island, NY. He received the "Student Human Rights Award" from the Smithtown, NY, Anti-Bias Task Force.

Masako Fukata, born in Tokyo, Japan, is an active youth leader of Rissho Kosei-kai, a socially engaged Buddhist organization headquartered in Tokyo with six million members world-wide. Inspired by Pope John Paul II's hosting of the global inter-religious assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace at the Vatican in 1994, Ms. Masako served an internship in the Religions for Peace International Secretariat in New York in 2003. She is a member of the newly developing North American Regional Multi-Religious Youth Network.

Ravi Gupta, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Religion at Centre College, Kentucky. With a doctorate in Religion from University of Oxford, he is the author of *The Caitanya Vaisnava Vedanta of Jiva Gosvami: When Knowledge Meets Devotion*. He participated in a recent USCCB-Hindu consultation and is committed to pursuing interreligious dialogue in both his professional and personal capacities.

Ten participants will personally greet the pope. They include:

Rabbi Gilbert S. Rosenthal

Executive Director, National Council of Synagogues
New York, New York

Imam Hassan Al-Qazwini

Religious Director, Islamic Center of America
Dearborn, Michigan
Member, Midwest Muslim-Catholic Dialogue

Rabbi Joel Myers

Executive Vice President, The Rabbinical Assembly
New York, New York
Consultant, Catholic-Jewish Advisory Committee

Arvind Vora

Chairperson of Interreligious Affairs, Federation of Jain Associations in North America (JAINA)
Getzville, NY

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Executive Vice President of Orthodox Union
New York, New York
Member, USCCB-Orthodox-Union Dialogue

Reverend Bishop Jongmae K. Park, Ph.D.

Korean Buddhist Taego Order
Los Angeles, California

Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed

National Director, The Islamic Society of North America
Washington
Co-Chair, Midwest Muslim-Catholic Dialogue

Eido Shimano Roshi

Abbot, Zendo Shobo-Ji and Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-Ji
New York

Dr. Muzammil H. Siddiqi

Chairman, Fiqh (Islamic Law) Council of North America
Garden Grove, California.
Co-Chair, West Coast Muslim-Catholic Dialogue

Uma Mayasekhara, M.D.

Sri Maha Vallabha Ganapati Devasthanam
Director, The Hindu Temple Society of North America
Flushing, New York

