



Franciscan Fr James Puglisi introduces the 50th anniversary celebrations at the Centro Pro Unione

CHURCH ECUMENISM ANNIVERSARY SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

# Centro Pro Unione marks half century of ecumenical encounters

The centre for research, formation and dialogue, in the heart of the Eternal City, is celebrating the 50th anniversary of its foundation in the wake of the Second Vatican Council

By Philippa Hitchen

You will only really know your own Church community if you begin to see it through the eyes of other Christian traditions. That was the message of Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rome's Centro Pro Unione.

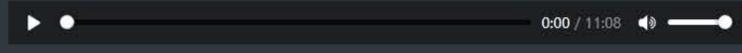
The centre, which began its activities of hospitality and welcome in the years before the Second Vatican Council, was officially inaugurated in 1968 under the direction of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement.

## Encounter, exchanges, enrichment

In his message to mark the event, Cardinal Koch noted that the "painful divisions" of the Christian Church today were caused by "divergent cultural developments" as well as by theological differences. Such divisions, he said, must be overcome through "encounter, exchanges and mutual enrichment". Both Popes John XXIII and Paul VI, he continued, saw the rapprochement of divided Christians as one of the "principle objectives" of the Second Vatican Council.

The current director of the Centro Pro Unione is Franciscan Fr James Puglisi, a professor of ecumenism and former member of several international dialogue commissions.

## Listen and download the interview with Fr James Puglisi



Fr James says the anniversary is celebrating a change of mentality which took place in the Church during the Second Vatican Council, as Catholics began "to walk a path together" with other Christians. The Centre was founded to be a place of research, formation and encounter, he explains, where people could "meet one another, talk about their experiences and maybe even come to some interesting conclusions."

## Housed in former seminary

The Centro Pro Unione is housed in a former seminary overlooking Rome's historic Piazza Navona. The building belongs to the Doria Pamphili family who have a strong interest in ecumenical relations and offered it in the 1950s to the three organisations that gave birth to the new Centre: Unitas, begun by Jesuit Father Carlo Boyer, a Dutch order of nuns known as the Ladies of Bethany, and the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement.

## New understanding of ecumenism

The Centre started by organising and hosting conferences, as well as offering opportunities for more informal ecumenical encounters. In the 1950s the future Pope Paul VI, then Archbishop Montini, realised the need to offer a place of welcome for non-Catholics coming to Rome.

During the Council, it became a place of residence for the ecumenical observers, as well as a meeting place for informal discussions and debates about the documents under discussion in the Vatican. It also pioneered a new understanding of ecumenism, moving from an earlier vision of 'a return to Rome' to a shared vision of journeying together towards Christian unity.

## Online videos and resources

Today, Fr James says, the centre continues to focus on formation but it has adopted new methods of doing that in order to keep pace with rapid technological developments. It has opened a web TV, produces short videos featuring '120 seconds of ecumenism' from different experts, as well as offering an online bulletin and plenty of downloadable resources on the different dialogues between Catholics and other Christian Churches.

The Centro is also reaching out to young people with its "Budding ecumenism" programme, aimed at school age children, to teach the values embodied in ecumenical relations. Fr James acknowledges that this work can be extremely delicate as it often involves gently challenging prejudices which may already exist in the young people and their families.

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23 May 2018, 16:56

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