

Assisi 2012: 'Where We Dwell in Common'

Pathways for Dialogue in the 21st Century

An Ecumenical Gathering organised by
The Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network
www.ei-research.net www.assisi2012.com

Venue: Domus Pacis, Assisi, Italy 17th – 20th April 2012

An Invitation

I write on behalf of the Assisi 2012 Organizing Committee to cordially invite you to take part in this large-scale international and ecumenical gathering exploring the theme of dialogue from the perspectives of the past, present and future. It seeks to encourage ecumenical **'thinking outside the box'** and to gather together a richly diverse array of voices in order to help make this happen. We sincerely believe that your voice can be one of those that will make a real difference if present at the table of discussion – so we would be delighted if you would take part.

The overall aim of this gathering is to discern and explore new ways, means and methods of advancing the ecumenical cause in the wake of the 'ecumenical winter' and with renewed energy for a new century. It is intended to be not so much a conference, as the beginning of a process or series of ongoing processes. This gathering will seek to identify, share and shape, as well as to put into practice, productive pathways for dialogue in these times.

We do not only wish to encourage innovation, but also to learn from the best of the past. Therefore, at this gathering, we will seek to revisit, learn from, renew and adapt some of the methodologies employed to great effect in ecumenical conversations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as those visibly dialogical and therefore successful ecclesial gatherings such as Vatican II and bi-lateral and multi-lateral ecumenical assemblies and working parties during the second half of the twentieth century. We will also seek to learn from more recent successful ecumenical ventures and different ways of approaching dialogue from both within and without the ecumenical movement. Where particular pathways for dialogue have proved innovative and successful, despite the challenges faced in ensuring genuine conversation takes place, we will seek to learn from these stories.

In all, we hope to discuss, to enhance and to promote the **'science of bridge-building'** for our contemporary communities and for their shared tomorrows. Naturally the challenge of dialogue today spreads far beyond the intra-Christian world and so inter-faith and still wider dialogue amongst faith communities and the wider 'world' will naturally also feature at our gathering as important themes. We will also seek to learn from those with experience in **peace-building** and **conflict resolution** and to discern how the methods, strategies and sheer resilience of such initiatives might be adaptable to the ecumenical and inter-faith situations we seek to address.

The venue of **Assisi** has been chosen because of its long and instinctive association with openness, charity, dialogue, peace, harmony and communion – with the particular charisms of the orders founded by **Francis** and **Clare** alike having helped inspire countless ventures in promoting dialogue and openness amongst peoples.

Program

The gathering will take place across **four days**, including three full days, each with a specific theme, subdivided into other thematic sections. The program is therefore divided into an introductory day and three days grouped around a particular question/theme/area of concern/aspiration:

So the Program for our gathering in broad general outline will be as follows:

Day 1: ‘Thinking Outside the Ecumenical Box’: The Quest for Dialogue in the Twenty-First Century

Day 2: What Remains Divisive?

Day 3: Where We Dwell in Common

Day 4: Re-energising the Ecumenical Cause

Following the Full Plenary Sessions from Day 2 onwards, our discussions, conversations and reflections for each day will be divided into three thematic strands:

Three Thematic Strands

- A. Intra/Inter-Church Issues
- B. Inter-faith Issues
- C. Faith and World/Culture

In the early evenings, prior to dinner, we will also be organizing more informal discussions, ‘presentations’ and interactive conversations, based around two further broad thematic clusters:

‘Food for Ecumenical Thought’

- D. Historical Perspectives
- E. Global and Context-specific Perspectives

It should be emphasised that, although there will be full plenary sessions and then a threefold division into ‘parallel plenary sessions’, there will be no hierarchy at all in the order of importance of participants in this gathering. We have full plenary sessions around general themes pertaining to each particular day in the program purely to offer some inspiration and energy to all of us for the coming day. We have parallel plenary sessions around intra/inter-church issues, inter-faith issues and then faith and world issues because this is the best and most time-efficient way to ensure some of the most important questions can get onto the gathering’s floor and to allow some time for their discussion. We have the ‘outside the box’ ‘Food for Ecumenical Thought’ parallel plenary sessions because we wish to tap into some alternative methods from earlier fruitful gatherings such as the early ecumenical dialogues and Vatican II where some of the most important and enlightening breakthroughs took place in such informal session. But the afternoon parallel papers and posters are every bit as important as any other session and each contribution will be every bit as important as any other single contribution

Outcomes: Our Vision for Assisi 2012

We wish this event to be something very different to a traditional conference. We do not wish this to be simply yet another interesting or pleasant conference that people forget about within months of attending, aside from the publications which might follow. We wish this gathering, instead, to be something truly transformative of the perspectives, methods and approaches to dialogue that every participant holds.

We hope this gathering can truly help re-energise the ecumenical cause and be the start of an ongoing series of processes that promote and enhance dialogue on global and regional levels. One of the ways in which the fruits of the gathering itself and the ongoing discussions and conversations that result from it can be best disseminated is via a new planned series of volumes that is planned ‘Pathways for Dialogue’. The initial volumes of this series will contain as many of the papers from the Assisi gathering as merit inclusion. Future volumes will include historical, contemporary and methodological studies, monographs and collaborative volumes and collections of thematic edited collections and proceedings of important and ground-breaking future conversations, dialogical processes and events. We also hope that, through the work of the Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network, the momentum generated in Assisi will be maintained long into the future.

Support

We are seeking as wide a range of voices to be present as possible. Our target is to have a minimum of one third of those present coming from outside Europe and North America and at least one quarter of those present being new and emerging scholars – tomorrow’s generation of ecumenists.

This will mean that we need to fund the travel, accommodation and meals costs, in addition to visa fees where necessary for a very substantial number of those attending. Therefore significant sums will be involved to pay for the travel, accommodation and meals for those participants who cannot rely on any funding from their home institutions or without the personal means to contribute. ***We will offer full bursaries and partial bursaries.***

So, in turn, we are also seeking as wide a range of *supporting institutions and organizations* and *private individual donors* as possible. Therefore, ***we ask all institutions in a position to help to consider helping us to bring other voices to the table in a variety of ways.*** If your institution or organization could consider helping to support the participation of scholars who would otherwise not be able to participate, that would be a wonderful act of ecumenical solidarity.

Including travel and the full conference and accommodation costs etc., it will require between \$1500 and \$2000 to bring participants to the table from outside of Europe. In particular, we would hope that institutions and organizations will seek to sponsor the participation of up to five participants. Even if the funds to sponsor one, two or three participants can be offered, with enough such donations this will ensure the important voices that need to be present will be heard.

We are also asking institutions to help further support the event by funding the participation ***of their own faculty members and graduate students*** who wish to take part. Therefore all donations, however small or large, will contribute towards bringing these voices together and therefore furthering the cause of dialogue for our times.

We would gratefully list those institutions offering substantial support as a co-sponsor of the event in the main publicity surrounding the entire gathering, including online publicity, as well as in a series of subsequent publications that will help carry the legacy of ***Assisi 2012*** forward into the future.

Given these challenges, we are also asking all participants, including plenary and parallel plenary session speakers to waive stipends and also ***draw upon institutional travel support*** where possible as well. All of this will help us bring the diverse voices to the table that are necessary to ensure the event is as inclusive and informed as possible. Another way that an institution could offer support is through sponsoring participants from particular countries, regions, religious orders, churches or organizations.

All of this having been said, first and foremost we have invited you to come to this event and so if you personally require support from the event in order to be present, please do not hesitate to let us know and we will do our best to ensure you can be present.

Call for Papers

Although we issue this invitation to you personally and hereby invite a specific contribution to the program from yourself, we would also be very grateful if you could encourage colleagues and friends to take part in this gathering as well and circulate the call details which follow below - ***Full details, as well as those concerning registration, are available at www.assisi2012.com***

We invite proposals for short papers (15 minutes max.) and poster sessions. Group and joint proposals, as well as proposals for sessions and themes are welcome (max 3 papers per session). Papers, posters and presentations will be acceptable in English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. We ask that all proposals are submitted to assisi2012@gmail.com Conference Registration is now open and can be accessed here: http://www.assisi2012.com/?page_id=47

We very much look forward to your involvement in this unique event. *Wishing you every peace and blessing, and on behalf of the Assisi 2012 Organizing Committee,*

Gerard Mannion

**Professor Gerard Mannion, DPhil.
Chair, Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network
and of the Organizing Committee for Assisi 2012**

**Professor of Theology and Religious Studies,
Director, Frances G. Harpst Center for Catholic Thought and Culture
Maher Hall 253,
University of San Diego
5998 Alcala Park
San Diego, CA 92110
USA**

+1 619 260 7447
Email: gmjmannion@san Diego.edu
www.sandiego.edu/cctc

