

# European Council of Religious Leaders



## ECRL News Update – January 2026

### Message from our President

Dear members of ECRL, Dear sisters and brothers, peace and grace be with you all.

We are entering a new year at a time when the language of power is loud. Too often it is spoken through weapons, through threats, through the clenched fist. In such a world, hope is sometimes dismissed as naïve, and faith as private, even irrelevant. Yet history tells a different story.

Svetlana Tsikhanouskaja, leader of the opposition in Belarus and speaking from the experience of life under an authoritarian regime, once said: *“People of faith are dangerous for all authoritarian systems. Dangerous not because they seek conflict, but because they are driven by something beyond themselves. Because they refuse to let fear have the final word. Because their loyalty is not absolute to any ruler, ideology, or state, but to a truth that transcends power.”*



The apostle Paul expresses it in another way in the Book of Hebrews: *“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* Faith teaches us to see what is not yet visible. It gives substance to hope when circumstances argue against it. And that is why hope is a powerful resource in times like ours.

At the heart of the Christian story stands an image that challenges every authoritarian imagination of power: a child laid in a manger. God does not enter the world with an army, but with vulnerability. Power is revealed not in a clenched fist, but in a hand that gently touches a wounded face. Not in bombs that explode, but in hearts that keep beating.

And the Christian story does not end there. Hope flows from the empty tomb as well. From a grave that could not hold love captive. From a resurrection that proclaims that violence, injustice, and death do not have the last word. Hope is not escapism. It is resistance. It is courage shaped by compassion.

For us, as religious leaders, hope is not a soft alternative to “real” politics. It is its moral foundation. Hope changes how we speak, how we negotiate, how we decide. It reminds us that human dignity is not granted by states but recognized by them. It calls us to protect the vulnerable, to listen to the silenced, and to act when cynicism seems easier.

Hope becomes especially powerful when it is embodied. When people of faith do not stand alone, but act together. When prayer leads to practice, and conviction to cooperation. When communities refuse to mirror the violence they oppose.

May we all have hope in our hearts and courage in our thoughts, so we dare to imagine more than the world as it is. And may our faith, whatever tradition we come from, continue to make us “dangerous” to despair, to injustice, and to every system that denies the humanity of God’s children.

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May 2026 be a year filled with hope, love and faith, and may you all be blessed with courage and strength in your work.

Pax et bonum,  
Peace and good,  
Bishop Kari.

Bishop Kari Mangrud Alvsvåg

**President - European Council of Religious Leaders**

## Council and Members' Activities

In order to keep members regularly updated, we are asking, if possible, for members to join the **ECRL WhatsApp group** and to share their activities directly with the rest of the Council through this medium (please email your contact number to Mark if you are happy to do so). There have been some excellent updates throughout the year from members, thank you to everyone who has contributed. Some brief examples of activities include:

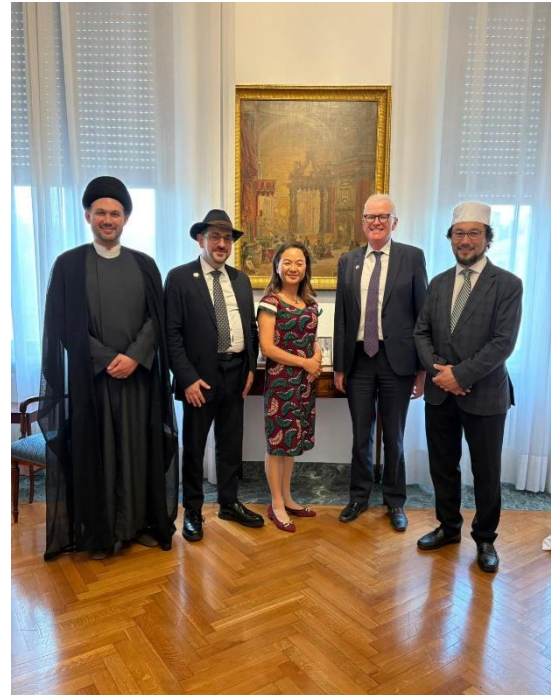
- ECRL members representing the Council at the funeral of Pope Francis after his sad passing in April, and meeting with Pope Leo to congratulate him on his appointment.
- ECRL members attending and contributing to discussions on Interfaith Dialogue at the second Inter-Parliamentary Union conference in the Italian parliament.
- A delegation of our religious leaders participating in the 6<sup>th</sup> European Policy Dialogue Forum, in Genva: an annual event we host in partnership with KAICIID.
- A delegation of ECRL members attending the General Audience with the Pope on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nostra Aetate.
- Bishop Kari's keynote speech at the high-level roundtable on Religion and Diplomacy in Rome, December 2025.
- And importantly our annual 'in-person' full Council meeting in September. Deep gratitude to Rabbi Dayan and the Jewish community in Thessaloniki for their warm hospitality and exceptional kindness.





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 Religions for Peace



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We are currently considering possible events and activities for 2026. Some ideas which were suggested at the Annual meeting include:

- 'Ask us anything' – online multifaith discussion forum with religious leaders.
- Event and development of resource on 'The role of religions in dialogue, mediation and diplomacy'.
- Training course for media on antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred.
- Dialogue forum on post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation in Ukraine.

***If you are interested in helping organise, or participating in, any of these events please do let the Secretariat know.***

## Council Meetings

The full Council met twice online in 2025, and once in person at our annual meeting in Thessaloniki. The meetings were well attended, and we are very grateful to all members who were able to attend and contribute to the important discussions.

Council meetings are vital for sustaining the relationships within the Council, for sharing news, and for future planning. If at all possible, please do attend online and in person meetings. ***The Council will meet on the following dates in 2026:***

- Friday 27th March 9:00 – 13:00. Full Council Meeting Online
- Wednesday 16th September 9:00 – 13:00. Full Council Meeting Online
- 7th-10th December (provisional dates). Annual in person Council meeting, Oslo.

Reminders and invitations will be sent out in advance.

The President and Vice Presidents (Bishop Kari, Mufti Grabus, Rabbi Dayan, and Ron Eichhorn) also meet regularly to discuss any issues raised by members, or ongoing matters. The next meetings of the Presidium are:

- Monday February 2nd 12:00 – 14:00.
- Thursday 11th June 13:00 – 15:00

Please remember if you have any topics you would like the Presidium to discuss, please do let the Secretariat know, or contact the President or Vice President's directly.

## Council Statements

The Council has historically produced statements or declarations commenting on contemporary events, and emphasising the responsibilities of religious leaders and communities in addressing issues and building peace. You can find more information on past statements here:

<https://rfpeurope.org/european-council-of-religious-leaders/>



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In 2025 the Council authored:

- Council Update, February 2025.
- 'The Passing of His Holiness Pope Francis', April 2025.
- 'The Importance of Sustaining Interfaith Relations in Europe Today', June 2025.
- 'What Unites us as a Community of Faiths is More Important than What Divides Us': Interfaith Dialogue and Multifaith Action in Times of Division and Conflict, October 2025.

***The statements are important declarations of the Council's shared beliefs, so please do distribute as widely as possible, and disseminate to your communities and networks.*** The secretariat would also appreciate any contacts with media outlets through which we can share statements.



***Annual Council Meeting, Thessaloniki 2026***

## Funding to Support the ECRL

We are extremely pleased to report that the Church of Norway has retrospectively granted the ECRL funding to subsidise our meeting in Thessaloniki, as well as budgeting to offer some financial support for ECRL activities in 2026. The Church of Finland and EKD also donated again in 2025 and have done so for several years. ***Without these annual donations the ECRL could not continue, so much gratitude must go to the Churches of Norway, Finland, and EKD.***

It was agreed in Thessaloniki that as a Council we want to be more active in 2026. In order to do this, we require funding. ***If any Council member knows of funding opportunities, or is willing to support fund raising activities, please contact the Secretariat for further discussions. Thank you!***