Launched in 2006, the Centre’s major objective is to make a sustained intellectual contribution to interreligious dialogue from the perspective of the Catholic tradition, while fostering similar intellectual enquiry in other faith traditions.

In keeping with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), which was established in 1964, the Centre’s goals are to further mutual knowledge, respect and collaboration among Catholics and members of other religions; to encourage and coordinate the study of these religions; and to promote the training of people destined for interreligious dialogue.

APCID Director Professor Raymond Canning draws attention to Pope Benedict XVI’s insistence that “interreligious and intercultural research and dialogue are not an option but a vital need for our time”, and to the Pope’s repeated commitment to “a dialogue to be intensified with Islam”.

“Examine God’s mystery in the light of our respective religious traditions and wisdom so as to discern the values likely to illumine the men and women of all the peoples on earth, whatever their culture and religion,” the Pope recently exhorted members of the Foundation for Inter-religious and Intercultural Research and Dialogue. “Our respective religious traditions all insist on the sacred character of the life and dignity of the human person … Together with all people of good will, we aspire to peace.”

Pope Benedict XVI’s continuing support for interreligious dialogue upholds the following groundbreaking statements from Vatican Council II’s Nostra Aetate, dating from 28 October 1965.

“The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in [other] religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.

ACU National’s Asia-Pacific Centre for Inter-religious Dialogue (APCID) integrates and promotes the University’s interfaith expertise and activities and enhances national and international links with leading researchers in the field.
“Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.”

ACU National honorary doctorate recipient Archbishop Michael Miller, formerly Secretary of the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education, in describing Nostra Aetate as a “watershed, a key point of reference in the church’s life”, insists that interreligious dialogue goes to the heart of what it means to be a Catholic university.

“Interreligious dialogue,” Archbishop Miller says, “belongs properly to an intellectual institution engaged in the pursuit of truth, because it’s part of that search for truth. Catholic identity is ensured not just because we have Mass and teach St Thomas, but by introducing students to a knowledge of other faiths, by promoting research by professors and rewarding it appropriately, and so on … Authentic interreligious dialogue reinforces our identity by strengthening our self-awareness.”

Among the associates, visitors and distinguished visiting research fellows of APCID are US Jewish scholar Professor Amy-Jill Levine; Reverend Dr John Dupuche of the Archdiocese of Melbourne and Dr Anita Ray, both of whom specialise in Hinduism and Sanskrit; Islamic law authority Dr Ismail Acar from Bard College, New York; and Trinity College Dublin Irish School of Ecumenics Professor John May, whose expertise centres on Christian–Buddhist dialogue.

Adjunct Professors include Christian–Muslim dialogue specialist Professor Daniel Madigan of Georgetown University, and Jewish interfaith pioneer Rabbi John Levi, emeritus rabbi of Temple Beth Israel, who describes recent changing relationships between Jews and Catholics as “part of a revolution”. “I am delighted to have seen it happen,” said Rabbi Levi, pictured above left.

ACU National's inaugural Fethullah Gülen Chair in the Study of Islam and Muslim–Catholic Relations Professor Ismail Albayrak is equally enthusiastic about interfaith dialogue. “Today what we are experiencing is not a clash of civilisations but a clash of ignorance,” Professor Albayrak said. “So the question of how we overcome this ignorance is very crucial.”

He describes the person in whose honour the Chair is named as “a Turkish Muslim scholar, a very prolific and influential author, leader of a global Muslim civic and educational movement who has spent more than 40 years advocating for dialogue, peace and harmony in society”.

“By active engagement we overcome xenophobia, racism, ignorance, ghettoisation and hatred,” Professor Albayrak said.

From Semester 1 2009, Professor Albayrak will lead the University’s new non-award Certificate in the Study of Islam course at the Melbourne Campus. Visit www.acu.edu.au/futurestudents for more information on this and other courses.

ACU National also offers a Graduate Certificate in Interfaith Dialogue, in conjunction with the Young Catholic Women’s Interfaith Fellowship Program coordinated by the Council for Australian Catholic Women. Fellowship applications close on 19 September. Visit www.opw.catholic.org.au for details.

In partnership with the Catenian Association, ACU National is presenting public forums in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra on the topic Our One God in a Divided World featuring Jewish, Catholic and Muslim speakers.


“By active engagement we overcome xenophobia, racism, ignorance, ghettoisation and hatred”