

**A BLESSING
TO ONE ANOTHER**)
POPE JOHN PAUL II &
THE JEWISH PEOPLE

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**LANDMARK EXHIBIT TO HONOR
POPE JOHN PAUL II'S RELATIONSHIP
WITH THE JEWISH PEOPLE**

*First Commemorative Exhibit to Late Pontiff
Will Premiere at Cincinnati's Xavier University*

CINCINNATI — The first commemorative tribute to Pope John Paul II will celebrate his extraordinary legacy of improved dialogue between the Catholics and Jews, opening on what would have been the pontiff's 85th birthday in May.

“A Blessing to One Another” is a landmark exhibition celebrating the extraordinary life and legacy of the late pontiff. Premiering at Xavier University in Cincinnati on May 18, “A Blessing to One Another: Pope John Paul II and the Jewish People” chronicles the pope's associations with the Jewish community from the time of his childhood and illustrates how these lifelong associations shaped his papacy, the Catholic Church and the future of Jewish-Catholic relations.

Pope John Paul II has broken the chain of 2,000 years of painful history between Catholics and Jews. He was the first pope to enter a synagogue in 2,000 years, as well as the first pope to establish diplomatic relations with and officially visit the State of Israel. Pope John Paul II also spoke of repentance for past treatment of the Jewish people. “A Blessing to One Another: Pope John Paul II and the Jewish People” opens during the 40th anniversary of the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate*, a declaration on the relationship of the Catholic Church to non-Christian religions and a turning point in Catholic-Jewish relations.

“It gives us great pride, as a Jesuit and Catholic institution, to be the first tribute to the legacy and achievements of Pope John Paul II,” said Michael J. Graham, S.J., Xavier University president. “His outreach to the Jewish people is one of the epoch-making

accomplishments of his papacy; one which will be remembered long into the future, for it has changed forever the tenor of the relationship between Catholics and Jews.”

Gloria Haffer, president of The Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati, which is the lead financial sponsor of the exhibit, said, “The positive changes in Catholic-Jewish relations initiated by Pope John XXIII truly have been furthered by the ministry of Pope John Paul II. His pronouncements and actions have favorably impacted the long and positive relationships between Cincinnati's Catholic and Jewish communities. Together, we have actively promoted religious tolerance, civil liberties, and civil rights.”

A unique collection of photographs and artifacts

The 1,500 square-foot exhibition takes its name from the pope's 1993 commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. On that anniversary, he said “As Christians and Jews, following the example of the faith of Abraham, we are called to be a blessing to the world (cf. Gen. 12:2 ff.). This is the common task awaiting us. It is therefore necessary for us, Christians and Jews, to be first a blessing to one another.”

Eight foot high replicas of vintage photographs and postcards will serve as the exhibit walls. These photographs, along with artifacts and videos, will take visitors back in time to pre-war Wadowice, the Krakow ghetto during World War II, and his ministry in Krakow and Rome. As visitors walk through the exhibit, symbolically retracing the pope's steps, they will see the church in Wadowice as the pope saw it from his own bedroom window; they will learn about Jewish life in World War II after walking through a re-creation of the gate of the Krakow ghetto. At the exhibit's end, visitors will be able to write prayers and place them in a replica of the Western Wall in Jerusalem, just as the pope did during his visit to Israel in 2000. These prayers will be transferred to Jerusalem after the exhibit closes.

Photographs and artifacts are being loaned from museums in the United States, Poland, Italy and Israel. Some of the artifacts include:

- Reproductions of the pope's baptismal certificate and high school and college transcripts, on loan from the City of Wadowice Museum.
- An official license plate, bearing the swastika symbol, from one of five Nazi-owned vehicles used in Wadowice, loaned by the City of Wadowice Museum.
- Shoes worn by Jewish prisoners at Auschwitz and a can of Zyklon-B, the chemical used by Nazis to kill Jews in gas chambers. These items have been loaned by the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Poland.
- The biretta that the future pope received when named a cardinal in 1967 and vestments he wore at an interreligious prayer service in Assisi, loaned by the John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, D.C.

Born Karol Wojtyla, Pope John Paul II lived in Wadowice, Poland, a town where a quarter of his classmates were Jewish. He was especially close to Jerzy Kluger, the son of the president of Wadowice's Jewish community. Kluger lives in Rome today and remained a close friend of the pontiff until John Paul II's death.

The idea for the exhibition developed while Dr. Yaffa Eliach, a Holocaust survivor, was a visiting professor at Xavier University. Eliach, who is a co-director of the exhibit and president and founder of The Shtetl Foundation, had become fascinated with the pope's ties to the Jewish community. Those ties include growing up in a largely Jewish apartment building and his close childhood friendship with Kluger. Eliach said this was a story that needed to be told. "I felt it would be wonderful to make an exhibit because I believe so much in togetherness," she says.

Dr. James Buchanan, director of Xavier's Edward B. Brueggeman Center for Dialogue, believes that what is being celebrated is much more than just an exhibit. "Our hope is that it will be an experience that has a spiritual dimension to it as well as stimulating people to begin to think more deeply about and engage more actively in interreligious dialogue."

Rabbi Abie Ingber, the executive director the Hillel Jewish Student Center in Cincinnati and one of the exhibit's co-directors, lost his grandparents and two uncles in the Holocaust. He met with Pope John Paul II on two separate occasions. He sees the exhibition as near miraculous. "We literally have gone from my grandparents' understanding of what the church represented in their lives to their grandson meeting with the pope and celebrating the building of an exhibit that recognizes and honors this incredible, unique and changed relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish community. That is [nothing] less than a miracle, and I place the positive responsibility for that sea change in the peaceful hands and blessings of John Paul II."

"A Blessing to One Another" received the blessing of Pope John Paul II, who received Eliach, Buchanan, Ingber and Dr. William Madges, chair of Xavier University's department of theology, during an October 27, 2004, audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. They presented the pope with a leather-bound overview of the project. "Our trip to Rome was enormously successful," said Madges, a co-director of the exhibit. "The spirit of affirmation and support for the goals of this project was palpable."

The lead financial sponsor of "A Blessing to One Another" is The Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati, with major support from Xavier University of Cincinnati and in partnership with the John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, D.C. The exhibit is being created and produced by the Xavier University, the Hillel Jewish Student Center of Cincinnati, and The Shtetl Foundation of New York.

"A Blessing to One Another" will stay at Xavier until mid-July 2005, and then move to the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, D.C., near the campus of Catholic University, for an opening in mid-September.

