

In case you missed it this week, it was the Winter Solstice – yes, take heart, from this point on we are heading towards more hours of sunshine (or at least daylight), an increase in temperatures, and of course, toward Christmas!! There is something heartening about the promise of all of these things, yet in the Church Year we have just begun what is called “Ordinary Time”. In this next 5 months we draw upon the great Story of God (which unfolds across the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, and Easter) and add our own stories to this, as we allow the events that we have commemorated and celebrated touch and lives and change us.

The *Huffington Post* reported this week on a rare sign of religious unity, as the world’s most prominent religious leaders came together to present a different vision of how faith can work in the world.

In a rare move, major religious leaders — from Pope Francis to the Dalai Lama — issued a joint appeal last week asking people to follow a simple bit of advice: **Make friends with people of other faiths.** “Our advice is to make friends to followers of all religions,” Ayatollah Sayyid Fadhel Al-Milani, one of the U.K.’s most senior Shia Muslim clerics, said in a video recording.

“Personal contact, personal friendship, then we can exchange a deeper level of experience,” the Dalai Lama said. Pope Francis chose to speak about his long friendship with the Argentinian Rabbi Abraham Skorka, who also appeared in the video. “My religious life became richer with his explanations, so much richer,” Francis said of Skorka. “And I guess the same happened for him.”

“Make Friends” is an initiative of the Elijah Interfaith Institute, an interfaith organization with offices in Israel and the United States. In a press release, organizers said the project’s mission is to counter the idea that people view each others’ religions with distrust or disdain — and to potentially even reduce violence conducted in the name of religion. The 22 leaders involved in the appeal represent a wide spectrum of religious beliefs — Sikhism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Each leader contributed a personal statement specifically for the purposes of this project.

Make friends – could it be that simple?

May Cyril, Irenaeus, Peter and Paul, and all the Saints walk with you this week...

Sam