

# Voices together

A decorative black silhouette of an olive branch with several olives, positioned to the right of the word 'together'.

Pioneers in Modern  
Jewish-Christian Dialogue

STUDY GUIDE



## Pioneers in Modern Jewish-Christian Dialogue

"In the decades since the Holocaust, ... Christianity has changed dramatically. An increasing number of official Church bodies, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, have made public statements of their remorse about Christian mistreatment of Jews and Judaism... that Christian teaching and preaching can and must be reformed so that they acknowledge God's enduring covenant with the Jewish people and celebrate the contribution of Judaism to world civilization and to Christian faith itself ... We believe it is time for Jews to learn about the efforts of Christians to honour Judaism."

National Jewish Scholars Project, "Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity," 2002

"We Jews and Christians have more in common than what divides us: the ethical monotheism of Abraham; the relationship with the One Creator of Heaven and Earth, Who loves and cares for all of us; Jewish Sacred Scriptures; a belief in a binding tradition; and the values of life, family, compassionate righteousness, justice, inalienable freedom, universal love and ultimate world peace ... We seek to do the will of our Father in Heaven by accepting the hand offered to us by our Christian brothers and sisters. Jews and Christians must work together as partners."

An International Group of Orthodox Rabbis, "To Do The Will of Our Father In Heaven: Toward A Partnership Between Jews and Christians," 2015

“There is no doubt that the sufferings endured by the Jews are also for the Catholic Church a motive of sincere sorrow, especially when one thinks of the indifference and, sometimes, the resentment which, in particular historical circumstances, have divided Jews and Christians. Indeed, this evokes in us still firmer resolutions to cooperate for justice and true peace.”

Pope John Paul II, Letter to Archbishop John May, 1987

“The readiness of Christians to listen to the witness of Jews, to learn from their experience of faith and life, and thus to become aware of new aspects of the biblical tradition, is an indispensable precondition of our encounter. Jews and Christians have much to say to each other in this encounter, and can together rediscover God’s reality. Such encounters ... must not only consist of words, but must prove themselves in our practical dealings with each other.”

European Lutheran Commission on The Church and The Jewish People, 1990

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**ABOUT OUR LOGO:** Rooted in the imagery of Paul’s New Testament letter to the Romans (chapters 9 to 11), the olive branch has become a potent symbol in the modern Jewish-Christian relationship. Since ancient times, the olive has been an important staple food, common to many cultures in the areas

where Judaism and Christianity both arose and flourished. The Second Vatican Council’s declaration *Nostra Aetate* drew upon this biblical imagery, to remind Christians of their fundamental rootedness in Judaism, and to express the organic relationship of Judaism and Christianity, which continues to evolve in our time, in positive and life-giving ways.

# Christian-Jewish Relations

## *A Transformed Relationship*

Beginning in the wake of the Second World War and the Shoah (Holocaust), Christians around the world have been engaged in a dramatic re-thinking of their relationship to Judaism and the Jewish people. The result has been a wonderful flourishing of dialogue and interfaith activity between these two ancient faith traditions, on the local, national and international levels. This transformation was inspired in large part by the Second Vatican Council's 1965 document *Nostra Aetate* (On the Church's Relationship to Non-Christian Religions), and the many powerful statements, helpful guidelines and historic events that have flowed from it over the past half-century.

Around the world, many, many people have played important roles in helping to shape a new and different kind of relationship between Jews and Christians. The enclosed video biographies offer a brief overview of the life and work of four individuals who have played significant roles in advancing Jewish-Christian dialogue:

- Victor Goldbloom
- Charlotte Klein, NDS
- Edward Kessler
- Mary Boys, SNJM



There are, of course, many others who have been engaged in similar work around the globe. We have highlighted the stories of many of them in “capsule biographies,” which are available in the resources section of the website of the Congregation of Our Lady of Sion, **[notredamedesion.org/en](http://notredamedesion.org/en)** under ‘Jewish Christian Dialogue’. These biographies can be read online, or can be freely downloaded and printed for educational use.

Scarboro Missions is pleased that it has been able to develop and share these resources in Jewish-Christian relations, for the use of students, educators and faith discussion groups in both the Jewish and Christian communities. We hope that they will help to make this progress better known, and to promote relationships of friendship, respect and mutuality which can build upon and deepen this dialogue.

*Shalom!*

THE STAFF OF SCARBORO MISSIONS  
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Victor Goldbloom

### **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

- Sometimes old, negative stereotypes or prejudices from the past seem to be re-surfacing today. When you experience harmful ideas like these, what do you think is the most constructive way to address them?
- Learning about other religions from books and online sources is obviously important and helpful. But what do you think the role of face-to-face human interaction is, in improving interreligious understanding? What advantages does it have?
- How many languages do you know? How does knowing other languages—and experiencing other cultures—help you to think differently about others?
- Victor Goldbloom was in his early 90s when he died in 2016. If you could look 90 years into the future, what kinds of progress would you ideally like to see, in terms of how Jews and Christians think about each other, act toward each other, and work together for the betterment of our society?



**Charlotte Klein, NDS**

**Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

- How do our life experiences impact the way we think about—and act toward—people of different religions and cultures? How can they cause “blind spots” in our views of others? How can they enrich our perspectives?
- Sister Charlotte was born into a Jewish family and converted to Christianity later on in her life. How might that have been an asset in her work? How might it have been a drawback? What issues might Jewish communities have around this aspect of Sister Charlotte’s life being publicized?
- When we encounter xenophobia, discrimination, prejudice or violence toward others, what kinds of religious responses should society expect?
- What are some of the places that you are aware of, where Jews, Christians (and others) come together to get to know each other as people, and to learn about each other’s religions and cultures? What are some helpful, practical ways to learn about diversity and difference?



**Edward Kessler**

### **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

- Education is a vital component of interreligious dialogue today. How helpful has your own education been in learning about Judaism (if you are a Christian) or Christianity (if you are Jewish)? Are there some “gaps” in terms of what you know about the other religion, that you would like to learn more about?
- Dr. Kessler’s work was originally in Jewish-Christian relations, but it later expanded to include Islam as well. How do you think that enriched the conversation? How might it complicate things?
- How much do you know about the ways other religions read and interpret the Bible? Have you ever explored the sacred writings of a faith different from your own? If so, what sorts of discoveries did you make? If not, what religion would you like to learn more about?
- During some of his studies, Dr. Kessler was the only Jewish student in a Christian theology school. How well would you say majority religions do, in listening sensitively to the experiences of minorities? How can we ensure that the voices of smaller religious groups get heard and respected (and are not ignored or dismissed)?





Mary Boys, SNJM

### **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

- Why kinds of stereotypes have you encountered of other religions? How widespread do you think they are in today's world?
- Do you think many people still believe that only members of certain religions can make it to heaven? Who do you think gets in to heaven?
- In places where there are few (or no) Jews, what might be some creative ways to promote better understanding and respect between Judaism and Christianity?
- How can the arts make an important contribution to healthy Jewish-Christian relations? What interfaith messages do we want to communicate artistically?



*"No responsible person could dispute that more progress has been made in [Christian]-Jewish relations in the last fifty years than was made in the previous two millennia."*

Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie, President of the Union for Reform Judaism, speaking in the year 2000

The history of relations between Christians and Jews has often been bitter, harsh and violent—a relationship of distance rather than of nearness. In the decades since the Second World War, however, and especially since the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, a dramatic transformation has been taking place in the Jewish-Christian encounter, which is virtually unparalleled in religious history. As Pope Francis said in 2015, *"Our fragmented humanity, mistrust and pride have been overcome ... in such a way that trust and fraternity between us have continued to grow. We are strangers no more, but friends, and brothers and sisters."*

Through these videos, we invite you to explore the lives and stories of four individuals whose efforts have helped to bring about that historic transformation, which is continuing in our own lifetime.

**LEFT PHOTO:** Pope Francis embraces Argentinian Rabbi Abraham Skorka after praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem May 26. Looking on is Omar Abboud, Muslim leader from Argentina. "We did it," Rabbi Skorka said he told the pope and Abboud. The pope's message contained the text of the Our Father and of the 122nd Psalm, traditionally prayed by Jewish pilgrims who travel to Jerusalem. (CNS photo/Paul Haring) (May 26, 2014) Used with permission.



**ABOVE PHOTO:** Pope Benedict XVI talks with Rabbi Riccardo Di Segni, the chief rabbi of Rome, during a visit to Rome's main synagogue Jan. 17. At right is Rabbi Shear-Yashuv Cohen, the chief rabbi of Haifa, Israel. (CNS photo/Paul Haring) (Jan. 17, 2010) Used with permission.

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## PRODUCTION TEAM

**PRODUCTION TEAM:** Dr. Murray Watson (researcher, writer and narration), Deacon Pedro Guevara-Mann (Producer) and Richard Valenti (Editor)

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