

# Transformative Pathways to Interfaith Leadership

The John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue  
and the Russell Berrie Fellowship in Interreligious Studies



The Russell Berrie Foundation  
*Making A Difference*



JOHN PAUL II CENTER  
*for*  
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE



The Power  
of International  
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[www.russellberriefoundation.org](http://www.russellberriefoundation.org)

## The Angelicum

Located in Rome, the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, or the Angelicum, is a Dominican institution. Teachings of Thomas Aquinas are an inspiration for the University's mission. The faculties of Theology, Philosophy, Canon Law and Social Sciences grant degrees in undergraduate and graduate studies to 1,104 men and women from 93 different countries, who are diocesan priests, seminarians, religious and lay students. Past graduates have been Catholic Church leaders, including Saint John Paul II.

[www.angelicum.it](http://www.angelicum.it)

## Institute of International Education

For nearly a century, IIE has been a world leader in international education. IIE works to build more peaceful and equitable societies by advancing scholarship, building economies and promoting access to opportunity. Each year, over 20,000 men and women from 175 countries participate in IIE programs, including the Fulbright Program and the Russell Berrie Fellowship in Interreligious Studies.

[www.iie.org](http://www.iie.org)

## Shalom Hartman Institute

The Shalom Hartman Institute is one of the leading centers of Jewish thought and education, serving Israel and world Jewry. Its mission is to strengthen Jewish peoplehood, identity and pluralism and ensure that Judaism is a compelling force for good in the 21st century.

[www.hartman.org.il](http://www.hartman.org.il)



# Key Terms

**Ecumenism.** The principle or aim of promoting unity among the world's Christian Churches.

**Interreligious dialogue (IRD).** Interreligious (or interfaith) dialogue describes exchanges among religious practitioners and communities on matters of doctrine and issues of mutual concern, exploring the engagement of the world's religious traditions around theological questions to collaborate on questions of peace, human rights and development.<sup>1</sup>

**Interreligious studies.** Interreligious studies explore the concept of religion and the relationships between religions including the role religion plays in the matrix of culture and society.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, Georgetown University: <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/resources/interreligious-dialogue>

<sup>2</sup> The Angelicum: [www.angelicum.it](http://www.angelicum.it)



*Russell Berrie Fellows in front of the Angelicum in Rome (2014)*

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# Executive Summary

For ten years, the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue, an initiative of The Russell Berrie Foundation (RBF) and The Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum), has supported the next generation of religious leaders with a comprehensive understanding of and dedication to interfaith issues and action (2008 – 2018).

The Russell Berrie Fellowship in Interreligious Studies, administered by the John Paul II Center and the Institute of International Education (IIE), has supported 87 Fellows from over 33 countries to study at the Angelicum and impact their professional lives and their work in their communities and parishes.

In 2018, the Foundation commissioned IIE to conduct an impact evaluation of the John Paul II Center and the Russell Berrie Fellowship, measuring the program’s success in achieving its goals. The evaluation included survey responses from 58 Russell Berrie Alumni (76% response rate), and 30 interviews with key stakeholders, including Russell Berrie Alumni, their community members, leaders in interreligious dialogue (IRD), John Paul II Center leadership, and program staff from RBF and IIE.

*Fellows visit the Calouste Gulbenkian Library in the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem (2016)*



## Key Findings: Russell Berrie Alumni

### Over 90% were satisfied with their Fellowship experience

The Fellowship experience had great personal value to the respondents: 81% would not have been able to complete their studies without the Fellowship.

### 98% increased their ability to interact with people of other faiths

The Fellowship affected Alumni at a personal level, deepening their faith and allowing them to accept the perspectives and faiths of others. This journey is reflected in their community leadership.

### 85% have furthered their career as a result of the Fellowship

Half of the respondents (50%) are in new leadership roles since their Fellowship. Alumni gained more respect and credibility in their professional and religious communities, and improved their reputation among leaders in their own faith and other faiths.

### 95% increased their knowledge of other faith traditions

The Fellowship provided Alumni with theological underpinnings of interfaith issues, and skills to understand and promote interreligious dialogue. 88% of respondents thought the Fellowship greatly influenced their understanding of interfaith cooperation.

*“The opportunities provided to encounter leaders of other faiths, places of religious importance and various interactions in the line of IRD helped me learn how to dialogue with respect and dignity and be rooted in my own faith.”*

Alumnus, Asia and Australia

*Fellows take a walking tour of Rome, including the Great Synagogue, as part of their program orientation (2016)*



## Key Findings: Alumni Impact on Communities

### 93% incorporated interfaith cooperation or dialogue into their daily conversations with their students, peers, parishioners, and superiors

Over half (55%) of respondents have organized joint celebrations with people of other faiths, implemented interfaith projects, organized peace walks, or taught interfaith courses. Six Alumni respondents (10%) have created new organizations.

### 88% recognized that, because of their IRD work, people in their communities and parishes have become more open to learning about other faiths

60% of respondents believed that their community members have changed their behaviors towards people of other faiths. These changes were confirmed by community members who considered the work of the Alumni important to improving openness, breaking down prejudices, and unifying people of different faiths.

### 67% indicated working with other religious leaders on IRD activities

These include various types of cooperation: 77% are working with religious leaders from other faiths and 51% are working with leaders in their own faith but with other branches or orders.

## IRD Knowledge Footprint



**36** Russell Berrie Fellow respondents have shared their knowledge in IRD



Wrote articles or blogs related to IRD



Presented at conferences on IRD topics



Organized conferences about IRD

## Key Findings: Alumni Network

### 90% have been in touch with others in the network

Alumni respondents consider their peers to be sources of inspiration (83%) and motivation (80%). They also agreed that other Alumni are important resources for their IRD work.

## Key Findings: John Paul II Center

### The John Paul II Center can leverage its Partners to build a reputation in the IRD field and contribute to research and practice in interfaith cooperation

The John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue and the Russell Berrie Fellowship in Interreligious Studies position themselves well in a field that is growing and that stands to benefit from an expanded role for the program. The Russell Berrie Foundation and the Angelicum can seize the opportunity and strategize the contribution of the John Paul II Center in the IRD field.

*“I think that it creates a community of people that study together in this field, that travel together. They communicate, they bond... So, I think that is for sure an impact that the Fellowship has had on the Fellows. It has been successful in creating a wonderful community... all over the world.”*

Program Staff Member



*Fellow Ioan Robert Reikli hosted a Jewish Passover meal with local Catholic and Jewish community members in Greece (2015)*

# Program Overview

## John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue

The Russell Berrie Foundation collaborated with the Angelicum to establish the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue in 2008. The Center has sponsored unique programs and initiatives, including: fellowships for students to pursue interreligious studies, a Diploma program in interreligious studies, an Academic Seminar in Israel, top-level Visiting Faculty teaching interreligious dialogue courses, and the prestigious John Paul II Lecture on Interreligious Understanding.

Rabbi Jack Bemporad is the Director of the John Paul II Center and Professor of Interreligious Studies at the Angelicum. Promoting interfaith dialogue for over half a century, Bemporad has met with world religious leaders and is a renowned speaker and author. The Center benefits from other leadership through its Academic Advisory Committee: Dr. Adam Afterman, Academic Director; Fr. Stipe Juric, Dean of the Theology Faculty at the Angelicum; and Fr. James Puglisi, Professor of Ecumenism, Ecclesiology and Sacraments at the Angelicum. Visiting Faculty, from universities worldwide, are engaged by the John Paul II Center to teach courses in interreligious studies at the Angelicum.

The most famous alumnus of the Angelicum is **Saint John Paul II**, who as Karol Wojtyla earned a doctorate of philosophy there in the late 1940s. Saint John Paul II was a tireless proponent of the need for interfaith dialogue, and interfaith outreach was one of his major mandates as Pope. He traveled to many countries, meeting the leaders of religious communities, preaching religious tolerance and open dialogue. To honor his legacy and the advancements he made to promote interreligious dialogue and peace in the world, the Center is named after him.

## Russell Berrie Fellowship in Interreligious Studies

The John Paul II Center and IIE administer the Russell Berrie Fellowship in Interreligious Studies. A yearly cadre of up to 10 Russell Berrie Fellows, which include clergy, religious, and members of the laity, study at the Angelicum to obtain a Licence Degree or a Diploma in Interreligious Studies.

During a ten-day trip to Israel, Fellows study at the Shalom Hartman Institute (SHI). The program includes academic scholarship, experiences at sacred sites and meetings with leaders from other faiths.

**The Diploma in Interreligious Studies** focuses on the issues and methods dealing with the concept of religion and the relationships between religions, including the role religion plays in the matrix of culture and society.

**The Licence in Theology with a Specialization in Ecumenical Studies & Dialogue** educates students to become professors and practitioners as well as directors of Catholic diocesan or regional/national ecumenical and interreligious offices. It offers continuing ecumenical education desired for clergy appointed as a Catholic Diocese Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs Officer.



*Rabbi Jack Bemporad, Dr. Adam Afterman and Fellows discuss and study together at the Academic Seminar at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Israel (2011)*

## Program Goals

The John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue and the Russell Berrie Fellowship in Interreligious Studies promote academic scholarship in interreligious dialogue by:

- 1. Cultivating interfaith leaders:** Providing educational opportunities for emerging religious leaders of all faiths to further their knowledge of other religions and their understanding and ability to engage with interfaith issues;
- 2. Promoting community impact:** Supporting religious leaders to return home to their parishes and communities to lead others in efforts to promote interfaith understanding;
- 3. Fostering a network of IRD leaders:** Building a network of religious leaders who remain connected and collaborate to build linkages related to interfaith dialogue;
- 4. Institutionalizing a program that can be an influencer in the field of IRD:** Supporting a Center of interreligious study that leads and participates with other institutions, and creates opportunities for interfaith scholarship.

## Impact Evaluation

The evaluation took place January to August 2018 and included the following data collection methods:

**Alumni Survey.** The evaluation team administered an online survey to all Russell Berrie Alumni. 58 Alumni completed the survey, a 76% response rate.

**Interviews and Focus Groups.** The team interviewed 12 Russell Berrie Alumni, who were selected based on various criteria including geographic location, program cohort, religious affiliation and current activities. IIE also interviewed 18 stakeholders, including members from Fellows' communities, leaders in IRD, Academic Advisory Committee Members, RBF Trustees, and program staff from RBF and IIE.

## Limitations of the Analysis

**Selection of Alumni.** While the Alumni who completed the survey and participated in interviews were comparable to the full program population, the team cannot conclude that all Fellows had similar experiences.

**Respondent self-report.** Most of the data collected in this evaluation was self-reported. Alumni may have been inclined to emphasize positive outcomes, or disinclined to be candid in responses. Particular to this evaluation, the team found that many Alumni were reluctant to share their achievements out of humility. To mitigate this issue, the evaluation team focused on themes that were consistent, and that spoke to direct examples of outcomes.

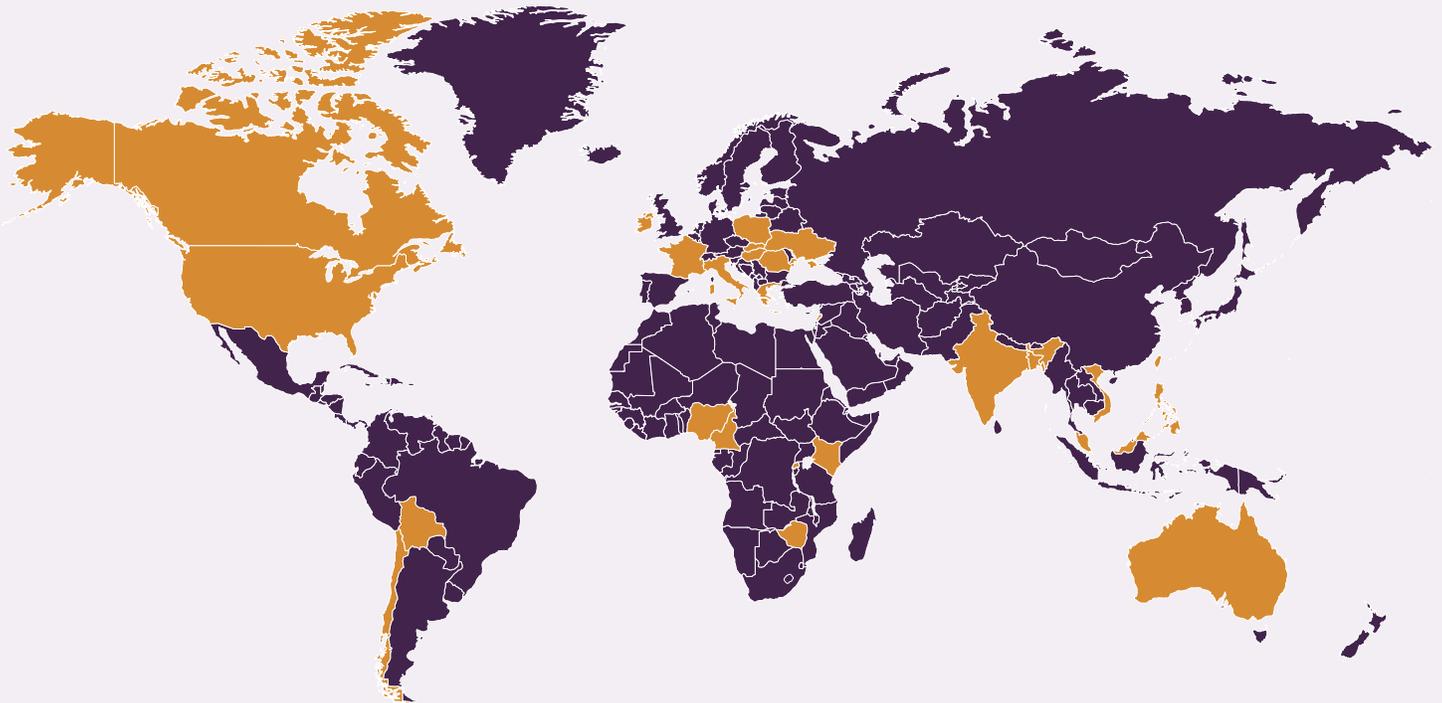
**Impact on faith.** The uniqueness of an academic program in interfaith issues is that it potentially leads to personal and religious transformation. While the analysis reflects the Alumni's comparative understandings of faith, we acknowledge that this may discount the personal transformations that each Fellow may experience.

# About The Russell Berrie Fellows

The Russell Berrie Fellowship for Interreligious Studies supports academic scholarship for individuals around the world to pursue interreligious study at the Angelicum.

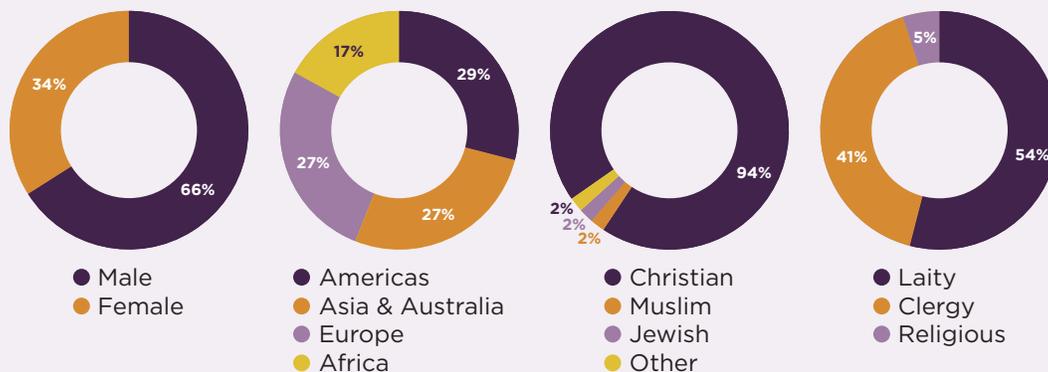
## Program Population

Since 2008, the Russell Berrie Fellowship has been awarded to 87 Fellows: 9 Current Fellows and 76 Alumni from approximately 33 different countries.



## Survey Population

As part of the evaluation, IIE gathered 58 responses to the online survey—a 76% survey response rate. The respondent population reflects the program population. The findings that follow are from responses to the online survey and interviews with key stakeholders.



## Why Is The Fellowship Unique?

The program is a partnership between the Russell Berrie Foundation and the Angelicum, modelling institutional cooperation across religions. Some respondents noted that the Fellowship is open to men and women, and various types of individuals from clergy/religious/lay affiliations. This is unique for a program located in a religious institution such as the Angelicum.

*“It is an innovative and a very well-thought program. The fact that a Jewish Foundation establishes a Center and leads dialogue in a Catholic institution makes it unique and laudable. A concrete example of real interfaith interaction and dialogue.”*

Alumnus, Europe

The Fellowship’s comprehensive approach to academic coursework and teaching, incorporating intellectual learning and spiritual growth, is also a unique programmatic feature. Respondents noted that the Fellowship offered opportunities for the Fellows to learn and grow together, practicing intra- and interreligious dialogue with each other.

*“In my opinion, it is the unique value of the Berrie Fellowship program compared to other IRD programs that it helps our mind, hearts and intellect to grow unitedly with everyone.”*

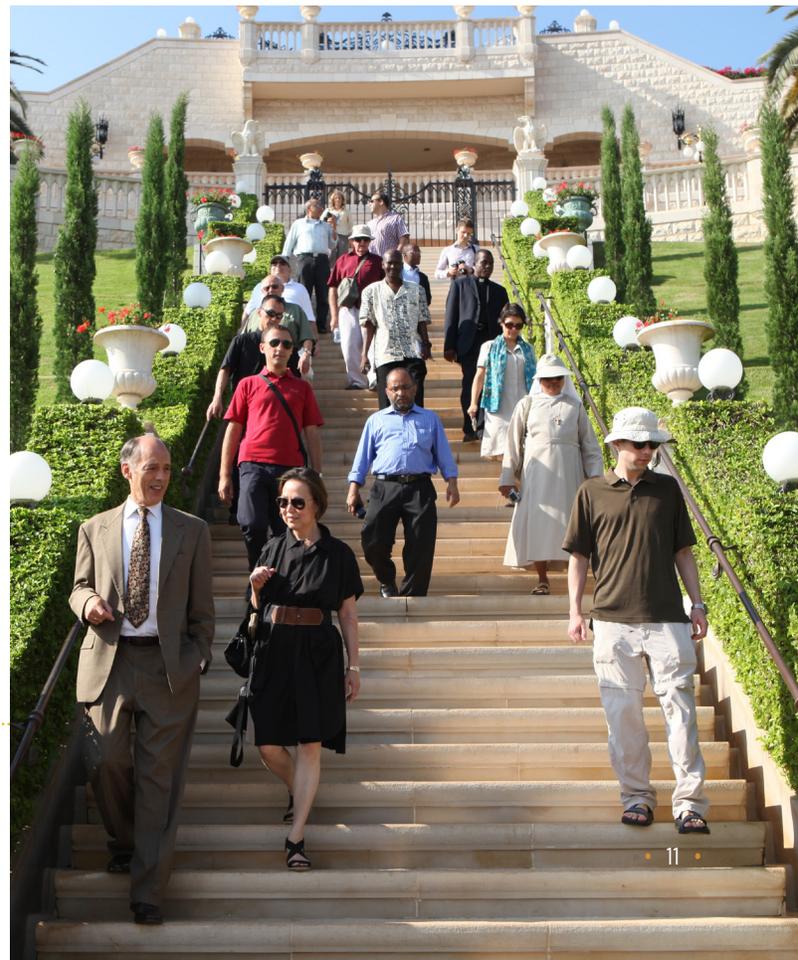
Alumna, Asia and Australia

Many Alumni respondents noted that academic programs in interreligious studies often do not offer a financial scholarship. 81% of Alumni respondents indicated that they would not have been able to obtain their degrees without the support of the Fellowship.

*“The most unique feature is the comprehensive financial component. The financial component made the opportunity possible. I have not seen an IRD program as financially generous.”*

Alumna, Americas

Alumni respondents shared that the Fellowship fulfilled a financial and academic need in their professional lives and provided a tangible value. Obtaining a degree from the Angelicum helped Alumni pursue IRD-related research and teaching opportunities and to promote IRD in their communities.



*Fellows and John Paul II Center program leaders visit Bahai World Centre in Israel as part of the Academic Seminar (2011)*

# Fellowship Impact on Alumni

The Russell Berrie Fellowship in Interreligious Studies focuses on the individual trajectories of emerging religious leaders, supporting these leaders in their studies and promotion of interreligious dialogue (IRD) in their parishes and communities.

## Reflections on and Understandings of Faith

Our analysis of the Russell Berrie Fellowship's influence on Fellows' understanding of their own faith and the faith of others is informed by the work of Rabbi Jack Bemporad, Director of the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue. In his *Lectio Doctoralis*, Bemporad discusses the three questions one should ask when considering the other and their faith:

**First,** *How can I be true to my faith without, at the same time, being false to yours?*

**Second,** *What is the place of the faith of the other within the context of the self-understanding of my own faith perspective?*

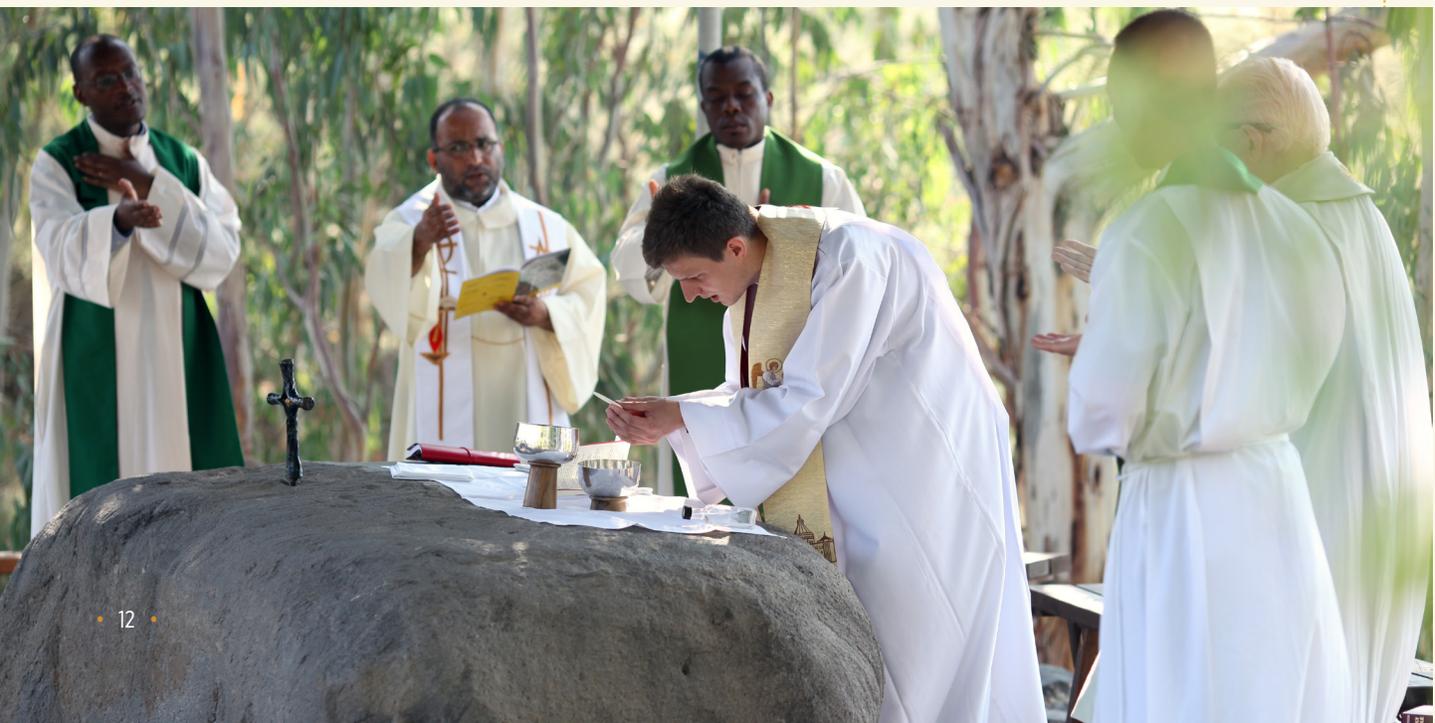
**Third,** *How can religions work together for the common good of humanity?*

Rabbi Jack Bemporad, *Lectio Doctoralis*

Much like Bemporad's first and second questions, Alumni respondents spoke of their own spiritual understanding, and the realization that this understanding needed to happen in order to recognize, and appreciate, other faiths.

Other analyses that emerged spoke to one's reflections on other faiths. Alumni spoke about their increased knowledge of faiths other than their own. They spoke about how their behaviors toward those of other faiths changed. Finally, they acknowledged their own transformation in transcending faith boundaries and appreciating shared humanity.

*Fellows celebrate Catholic Mass at Tabgha, Sea of Galilee in Israel (2011)*



## FATHER JOHN BOGNA BAKENI

2009 - 2011 Russell Berrie Fellow; Doctorate  
Home Country: Nigeria

Father John Bogna Bakani was ordained as a Catholic priest in his home country of Nigeria in 2002. Prior to the Russell Berrie Fellowship, his work in interreligious dialogue and interfaith relations took place in the northeastern part of Nigeria, in a predominantly Muslim community where he worked.

Father Bakani became a Russell Berrie Fellow in 2009 and obtained a Doctorate. He shared that the Fellowship left “an indelible mark” on him.

“I have really grown, both as a person and in [my] knowledge. I am better equipped from the experiences I had and from the knowledge, from the lectures attended, and from the people encountered, both in Rome, Israel and in other places.”

Father Bakani returned home to Nigeria, where he is the Vice-Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) as well as a leader among the interfaith groups in the Diocese. His work focuses on building bridges at the grassroots level between Christian and Muslim leaders, including local Imams.

One of Father Bakani’s parish colleagues in Nigeria, who knew him prior to the Fellowship, describes how the Fellowship opened up Bakani’s approach towards other religions. “I knew him as a priest of our Diocese. Initially he was into Christian activities. After the Fellowship, he is trying to impact the knowledge of both Christians and Muslims. As long as you’re a human being, I think he has concern, because he’s no longer into, this person is from my religion, from my dialect, or from my ethnic group. That is a great change between before and now.”

Father Bakani believes that increasing one’s knowledge to other religions and faiths can be an impetus for peace and mutual understanding worldwide. “One of the problems of the world today is ignorance... the ignorance or lack of knowledge of the various religious groups. I have come to know more about Islam, about Judaism. That knowledge itself is a force, it is a binding force. That you know that person and his religious affiliation... it helps you appreciate that person more, to identify your common humanity.”

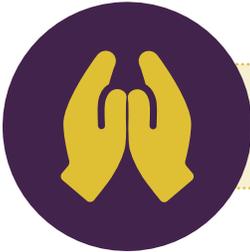


*Fellows from the Philippines, India, Italy and Nigeria meet each other at Angelicum welcoming reception in Rome (2011)*



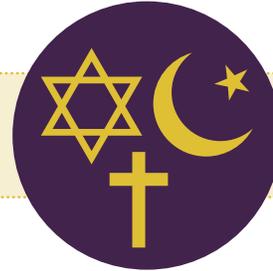
## Reflections on and Understandings of Faith

While Alumni transformations were not unidirectional, the evaluation team noticed that in most reflections, respondents noted a progression of their spiritual journey. That is, they spoke about their own spiritual awakening first, and then the impact this had on their understandings and perspectives. As a result, our own analysis relates to this progression.



### Fellows Deepen their Knowledge and Appreciate their Own Faith

Alumni respondents learned more about their religion and the Fellowship deepened their personal faith. Alumni studied theological concepts in-depth at the Angelicum through their academic coursework. While many were already deeply knowledgeable in their faith, the program offered new perspectives. Alumni were also able to study their own theology in context with the theologies of different denominations or faiths.



### Fellows Learn about and Appreciate Other Faiths

The Fellowship helped Alumni respondents reinforce their own understanding of their religion, and this in turn strengthened their openness to learn about other faiths. Almost all respondents (95%) indicated that the program helped them increase their knowledge of other faith traditions. Alumni shared their realization that to understand other faiths, and dialogue with other religions, one does not have to compromise one's own faith.

*“The opportunities provided to encounter leaders of other faiths, places of religious importance and various interactions in the line of IRD helped me learn how to dialogue with respect and dignity and be rooted in my own faith.”*

Alumnus, Asia and Australia

Most Alumni respondents (93%) also agreed that because of the Fellowship they increased their ability to relate to the values of IRD, such as tolerance, open-mindedness, and acceptance.

*“When you understand the other person and his religious affiliation, if you understand and know why he does certain things, it helps you to appreciate that person more, to identify your common humanity more. What the fellowship has done to me was to unlock that ignorance.”*

Alumnus, Africa

*“The Berrie Fellowship... [gave] me the space to reflect on my own faith as a Catholic. And with a good sense of gratitude and reflection, you come to see the beauty of what you believe in more and more. The Fellowship has helped me to deepen my faith, to appreciate my faith, to grow in my faith, and then to be open, to learn, and to grow daily.”*

Alumnus, Africa

*“At [the] John Paul II Center, through the visiting professors—Jewish professors—I learned genuine humanity. Before, my world, my understanding [was]—so much smaller—but now [my view is] multi-faith, multi-culture. I will give priority [to] human dignity, man or woman, [over] religion.”*

Alumna, Asia and Australia



### Fellows Change their Interreligious Behaviors and Interactions

Alumni's introspections and changes in interfaith knowledge led to changes in their behaviors and actions towards others. Almost all respondents (98%) indicated that the program helped them increase their ability to interact with people of other faiths. 93% felt more prepared to interact with people of other denominations within their faith as well.

*“When we have some meeting about community and there are people of other religions attending. I'm more open now after [the Fellowship] to welcome them. Also, to be careful not to hurt them. So, knowing better the elements of other religions, you know [how] it could hurt the other. So, you are more careful.”*

Alumna, Europe

A participant from one Alumna's community shared that the Alumna's increased knowledge and behavior toward another faith inspired the community.

*“[The Alumna] explains [to other Christians in the community] what the Quran says or what Muslims say because she knows enough of that, and it's not common that a Christian explains a Muslim religion. It's very important and it's very unique, special.”*

Community Member, Europe



### Fellows Promote Interfaith Thinking and Shared Humanity

Alumni respondents shared that, prior to the Fellowship, their perception of others was defined by that person's religion. For some, their interactions with other religions or denominations were very limited.

During the Fellowship, they had the opportunity to meet Fellows of other faiths and denominations, and interact with Visiting Faculty and IRD leaders who offered their support and mentorship. Through these interactions, Alumni reflected on their ability to prioritize human connection, and shared humanity, over religious belief. This helped open their view to promote and develop similar relationships in their parishes and communities.

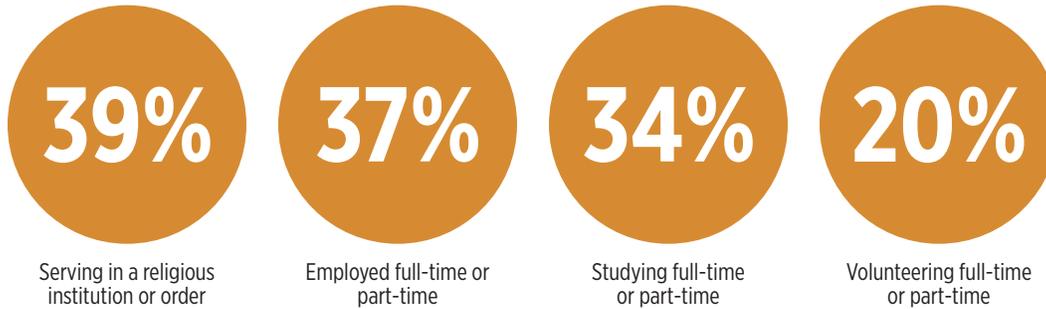


Fellow Andre Mujyambere takes part in an ecumenical celebration in Rwanda (2015)

# Current Professional Activities

As a result of the Fellowship, 85% of Alumni respondents agreed that their professional career has advanced. The current activities of Alumni respondents reflect their role as members of the clergy, religious affiliation, or laity.

## Current Professional Activities



## Professional Growth

Alumni respondents gained skills to build understanding in inter- and intra-religious dialogue (90%). As these skills are central to the goals of the program, this indicates that the program was successful in teaching and honing these skills among Alumni.

Alumni increased their communication skills to discuss different religions, the ability to engage others in dialogue, and practical management skills to conduct IRD-related activities. Respondents indicated that they have modelled leadership from IRD leaders such as Rabbi Jack Bemporad.

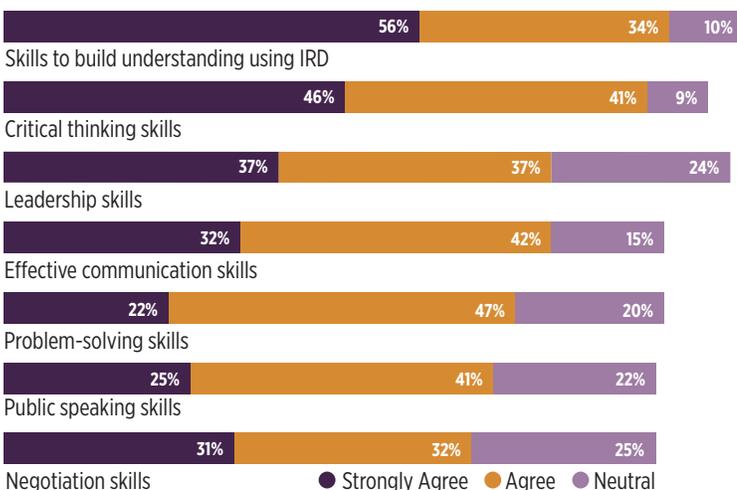
## Professional Reputation

Alumni respondents indicated that they gained more respect and credibility in their professional and religious communities, and improved their reputation among leaders in their own faith and other faiths.

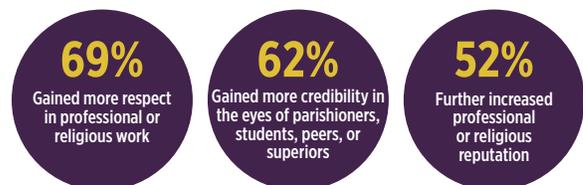
Knowledge and reputation were especially important for establishing trust at the beginning of successful interreligious dialogues and activities with other religious leaders.

*“Some of the basic leadership qualities, that I had even before the Fellowship, have been enriched by the Fellowship, like the quality of being a listening leader. And then you have the quality of trying to carry people along in whatever you do. There is this quality of compassion and mercy, which I actually saw from some of the [Center] leaders.”*  
Alumnus, Africa

## Skill Growth among Survey Respondents



## Alumni Changes in Professional Reputation



Survey respondents who indicated they are employed or volunteering (27 respondents or 47% of total) were asked about changes they have made in their organization.

- **Twelve** are located in different institutions than before the Fellowship, and five of these attributed these changes directly or partially to the Fellowship benefits.
- **Seventeen** have been promoted in their appointments or institutions.

Half of all respondents (50%) indicated that in their various roles they have assumed new positions of leadership since the program. Finally, eight Russell Berrie Alumni (14%) indicated that since the Fellowship they have received other fellowships or awards.

## Fellowship Impact on Alumni Key Takeaways

The Fellowship had a deep impact on Alumni respondents related to their personal and professional trajectories. Spiritually, these Alumni were able to deepen their own faith and appreciate and understand further the faith of others. This achievement speaks to the success and uniqueness of the program in supporting and promoting the spiritual underpinning of effective leadership to promote IRD. From a professional perspective, the Fellowship successfully taught Alumni respondents skills to build understanding in IRD, a core aspect of the program.

*Fellows meet and learn together during orientation at the Angelicum in Rome (2014)*



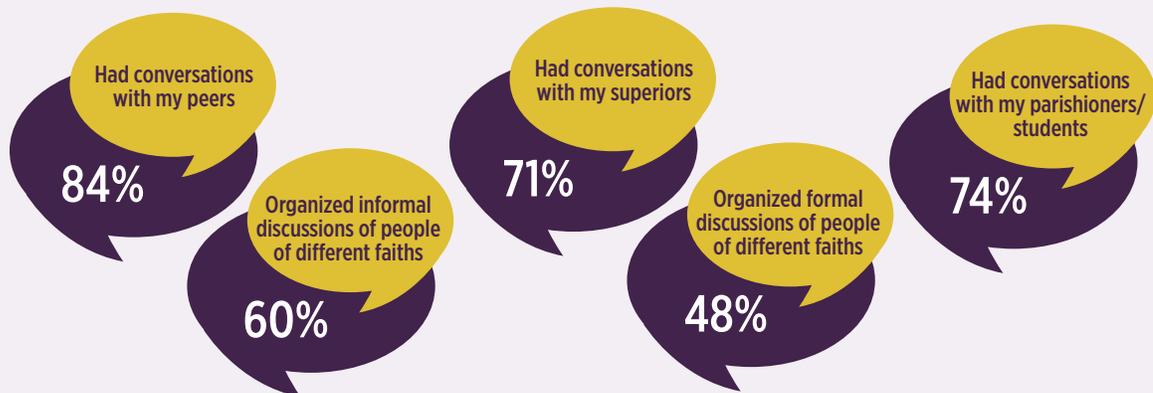
# Alumni Impact on Communities

Many Alumni have promoted interreligious dialogue (IRD) after their Fellowship, both informally with community and parish members and formally with other religious leaders promoting interfaith cooperation. Most respondents noted several communities with which they identify: their faith community or parish, academic department, neighborhood, or town, and in some cases their country or region more broadly.

## Alumni's IRD Activities In Their Communities

93% of respondents incorporated interfaith cooperation or dialogue into their daily conversations with their students, peers, parishioners, and superiors. It is important to note that many respondents reported multiple activities.

### Interreligious Dialogue with Community Members



### Collaborations with Other Religious Leaders

67% of Alumni respondents indicated working with other religious leaders on IRD activities. These respondents identified various types of cooperation: 77% are working with religious leaders from other faiths; 64% are working with leaders in their own faith and denomination; and 51% are working with leaders in their own faith but with other branches or orders.

These IRD leaders work together on building inter- and intra-faith understanding between various denominations or faiths. Alumni also invited leaders of other denominations or religions to a class, prayer, or seminar to allow attendees to learn about the religion from the leader's perspective.

## IRD Knowledge Footprint

36 Alumni respondents (62%) indicated that they have shared their IRD knowledge with external audiences through conferences and publications. This IRD footprint speaks to the breadth of knowledge among Alumni and speaks to the Fellowship's legacy in building this cadre of IRD leaders.

### 28 Organized formal discussions with people of different faiths

*"I organized a Living Library, where I invited a Rabbi, Catholics, Pentecostals, Muslims, also refugees. Protestant youth had the chance to talk with these people and with the power of personal conversations have a new sight."*

Alumna, Europe

### 24 Organized joint faith celebrations

*"I'm conducting daily conversations with... members of the Jewish community and we celebrate together with the children from my parish... Passover every year. They prepare meals for the celebration and lead the ceremony to explain the meaning of this tradition."*

Alumnus, Europe

### 16 Implemented a new interfaith project

*"I was hired for a position at a Catholic university to help transition campus ministry from Catholic ministry to ecumenical/multi-faith ministry. I have designed and/or implemented numerous initiatives for interfaith experiences."*

Alumna, Americas

### 6 Established new organizations devoted to IRD

*"In 2013, I established a Center for Interfaith Dialogue in Ukraine. Since then, we have implemented over 40 ecumenical and interfaith projects."*

Alumnus, Europe

## External Presentations and Publications by Alumni Respondents



IRD Conference:  
Presenter or panelist



IRD Conference:  
Organizer



Articles and blogs in  
religions/non-religious  
publications



Books on  
IRD Topics

*"Religion is politicized in [my country]. The first step is to heal the wounded memories. I have published a book on this [in two languages]. I am writing another book. With these, we can clear the ground and talk of interfaith activities."*

Alumnus, Africa

## ELENA DINI

2014 – 2015 Russell Berrie Fellow;  
Diploma in Interreligious Studies  
Home Country: Italy



Elena Dini's work in interreligious dialogue stems from her interest in learning about other faith traditions, the perspectives of those who believe these traditions, and joint understandings of faith. Coming from a Catholic background, she became interested in learning about other faiths toward the end of her undergraduate studies, when she studied the Bible and Quran.

Elena applied to the Russell Berrie Fellowship because she wanted to study interreligious dialogue from a Catholic perspective at the Angelicum, and she wanted to deepen her understanding of other faiths. Elena broadened her knowledge of Judaism, vital for her work in IRD. "I have always tended to consider Judaism as a religion with the same categories and understanding as Christianity... It was enlightening for me to understand the importance of philosophy, the concept of people, the importance of the relation with the land."

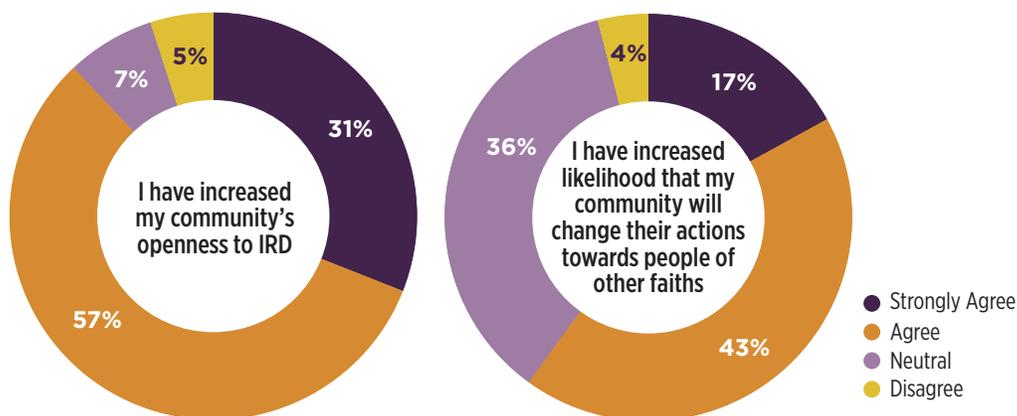
Elena received the Russell Berrie Alumni Grant to organize a course for mostly K-12 Catholic teachers of religion, to promote IRD understanding and provide tools to teach religious diversity. Participants in the course shared that as a result of the experience, they learned more about Judaism and Islam, and changed their teaching approaches.

As a volunteer at a Catholic organization that supports socialization and integration of Muslim refugees, Elena organized interreligious meetings among Italian and refugee youth and visits to the local mosque. A leader in the organization shared how Elena is contributing to the organization. "She loves Muslims and she loves Christians, she loves their faith, so, this is very, very important. She's able to talk to everyone with a very respectful way. She admires other faiths, not only respects, but admires them... She's very open-minded."

## Impact On Alumni's Communities

Changes related to interreligious cooperation and understanding can take significant time and effort. While some Alumni respondents shared observations of changes in their communities at the individual and community levels, most acknowledged that IRD work is difficult to measure beyond this, as transformations in faith understanding often take generations to manifest.

### Changes in Community Openness to IRD and in Actions towards Other Faiths



## Alumni Community Change in Openness to IRD

Alumni respondents noticed a change in individuals' mindsets following IRD opportunities, and community members acknowledged this openness as well.

The Alumni's ability to successfully implement IRD was influenced by the support they felt from their superiors or employers. 80% of Alumni respondents felt supported to conduct their IRD work, and this was a key component in providing Alumni with the inspiration and encouragement to organize conferences and seminars, or to promote dialogues in their communities.

*“My bishop wants me to be the person who guides, who organize all things for ecumenism and for the dialogue. What I am doing now is building a dialogue center, for my [community].”*

Alumnus, Africa

*“I know for me, especially with school shootings or terrorist attacks, most people are very much scared or against the Muslim identity. Thanks to [the Alumnus] I don't feel as scared anymore because I don't like to give an entire religion or an entire group of people just one label... He's really opened my mind to just how much more similar we are than we are different.”*

Community Member, Americas

Fellow Michael Thangaraj organizes a two-day Interreligious Dialogue seminar in India (2017)



## Alumni Impact on Communities Key Takeaways

While Alumni respondents shared various ways in which they promote interreligious dialogue and interfaith activities in their communities, they are cognizant that meaningful change in behaviors and attitudes will take time and sustained dedication. Fellows' communities have increased their openness to learning about other faiths and denominations, and to dialogue with those from other religions. Alumni who completed the survey are supporting community work in informal and formal ways, working with other IRD leaders on issues of mutual importance. Some of these Alumni are also contributing to knowledge about the IRD field through authorship and professional conferences. To succeed in their efforts to promote IRD, respondents indicated that a key success factor is the support they receive from their employers and superiors.

# Alumni Activities and Network

Through their interactions with each other and leaders in interreligious dialogue (IRD) at the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue, Russell Berrie Fellows create a consortium of like-minded professionals in religious and non-religious spheres working together to promote IRD.

## Alumni Grants

The Russell Berrie Alumni Grant Program was launched in 2016 to foster innovative, creative, high-quality IRD and interfaith action projects of Russell Berrie Alumni. 12 Alumni respondents were awarded Alumni grants.

### Purpose and Activities

Alumni respondents who received a grant shared that these grants enabled them to practice their IRD skills and promote interfaith cooperation in their communities. Funding to do IRD work is scarce, and the grants provide opportunities for Alumni to remain engaged in the field.

Some grant recipients also emphasized that the grants increased their ability to network and build connections with each other. For example, as part of a large video project carried out jointly by three Alumni, the group interviewed other Russell Berrie Alumni from various cohorts. Alumni respondents who were interviewed as part of the grant project shared that they enjoyed the opportunity to reconnect with others in the Alumni network and learn about the work of others.

*“The Alumni grants have played a huge role in my interfaith work for the past two years. Even though they have been relatively time-constrained, finite projects, they have given me the freedom to try out my interfaith ideas and gain the confidence to continue with my work.”*

Alumna, Americas

*“Through these videos, people would feel more at ease in making connections with other Fellows, and then ultimately hopefully they would then feel free or feel more inclined to work together.”*

Alumna, Americas



*Fellow Lidiia Batig's alumni grant project in Ukraine, the School of Interreligious Journalism, which helps journalists and young professionals from different faith traditions cover religion accurately in the news (2017-18)*



Sister Paschalina, a Fellow, received an Alumni Grant to organize an Interreligious Dialogue Training course for Female Catholic graduate students in Dhaka, Bangladesh (2018)

## SISTER PUROBI PASCHALINA CHIRAN

2015-2016 Russell Berrie Fellow; Licence Degree  
Home Country: Bangladesh

Sister Purobi Paschalina Chiran grew up in Bangladesh, a country that is 98% Muslim and that has very few other religious minorities, including Hindus, Buddhists and Christians. As a Catholic nun with the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions (*Religieuses de Notre Dame des Missions*), Sister Paschalina began teaching in local schools, to families and students who were primarily Muslim or Hindu.

Sister Paschalina became a Russell Berrie Fellow in 2015. She felt that the leadership and faculty at the John Paul II Center had a profound impact on her life. “When I speak about the Angelicum—of course—Rabbi Jack... His impact on my life, I will say [was] very genuinely—to open my mind. I don’t know how to explain [it]. I feel for me, the Angelicum is like a family.”

Sister Paschalina received a Russell Berrie Alumni Grant to support her work with Catholic university women to teach them about other religions, including Hinduism, Islam, and Catholic theology. She also focused on teaching these women “the dialogue of life... the spirituality of dialogue, the dialogue beyond their own community.” She shared that for many of these women, this was the first time they were learning about these concepts. “This kind of patriarchal society is not easy for [women]... for the girls to come out from the family, society to do something together is not possible. This kind of sharing—life sharing—was there at the end, and they cried. And their sharing touched me so much.”

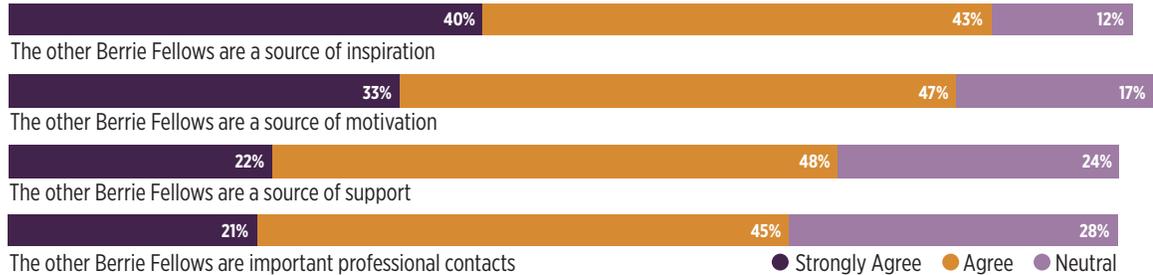
Sister Paschalina credits the Fellowship for teaching her valuable skills, including improving her English and communication skills. She knew that what she learned at the Angelicum would be useful upon her return to Bangladesh. “I learned many things, which are helping me to stand with confidence in my practical inter-religious dialogue field. And it was my dream, actually, to come back—to return to my own country—to give, to learn, to work with the people.”



# Alumni Network

Alumni respondents indicated that they consider their peers to be sources of inspiration and motivation. They also agreed that other Alumni are important resources for their IRD work.

## Alumni Network Support



## Sustained Networking and Collaborations

Most Alumni respondents (90%) have been in touch with others in the network. 79% of respondents found others in the network to be an important resource for IRD discussions and projects. Almost half of the Alumni and Fellows who connected with each other (44%) discussed information about IRD or IRD activities.<sup>2</sup>

10% of connections among Alumni and Fellows were joint IRD projects. These included joint conferences and projects related to IRD work.

Alumni referred to the network as a “family” and mentioned that being a part of the network gave them a sense of purpose and helped them feel connected. Staying in touch with Alumni and knowing about their work supported and encouraged respondents when they were facing difficult circumstances.

*“I asked an Alumna to join me in a project, I collaborated with another Alumna for the organization of a meeting for an interfaith group and I hosted a group led by an Alumnus to hear about work with refugees and IRD.”*

Alumna, Europe

*“Because of the crisis, sometimes we are cut off completely from even communication and other things. There were times that we couldn’t use even the phone, and no access to Internet and so many other things. I read the newsletters, and I see all the activities some of my colleagues do in different parts of the world, and then all that. So, those kinds of activities have been a source of inspiration to me.”*

Alumnus, Africa

<sup>2</sup> IIE used Social Network Analysis (SNA) to map connections between Alumni and Fellows. Alumni respondents were asked to identify their connections to all other Fellows in the program (Alumni and Current Fellows) and the type of connection.

## FATHER DR. ANTHONY OKOLO

*2011-2012 Russell Berrie Fellow; Licence Degree  
Home Country: Nigeria, currently in the United States*

Father Dr. Anthony Okolo began working in interreligious dialogue while teaching seminarians and students in his native Nigeria, preparing students for their appointments in other faith cultures.

During his Fellowship in 2011, Father Okolo learned valuable leadership skills. He appreciated the group interactions he had with other Fellows during the program, providing an opportunity to dialogue. “I learned especially having leadership by involvement, you know, involving people in... when you are leading them, don’t just do it solely on your own. Let them [in], because they also have something to offer.”

Father Okolo also reflected on the Israel Academic Seminar and the opportunity to visit the holy sites in Israel. This was a moving experience for him that grounded his faith. “I have to be honest with you, the Fellowship helped me to deepen my faith. And [the program] gave me the opportunity to experience it. Because I didn’t just go [to Israel] as a pilgrim, I went both as a pilgrim and as a scholar.”

Father Okolo’s professional trajectory has two paths due to his ongoing work in Nigeria and his ministry work in Lake Havasu, Arizona. In Nigeria, he continues to virtually mentor and teach students and seminarians. His work in Lake Havasu is related to pastoral work. Members from his community in Lake Havasu reflected on his knowledge of other religions and the openness with which he approaches other faiths and traditions.

“Father Okolo encourages [our minority cultural group] to stay united, and follow our culture, and follow our faith in the way that we were taught as children. He wants to make sure that every culture is represented in their faith.”



*Visiting Faculty Mona Siddiqui teaching a class on  
Islam to Fellows at the Angelicum in Rome (2012)*



## Alumni Activities and Network Key Takeaways

The sustainability and success of the Fellowship lies in its Alumni and the network is a key resource. Alumni respondents indicated that they have a shared motivation with their network, as well as a sense of belonging with others who are passionate about interfaith issues. Alumni look to each other as resources and collaborators on IRD projects. Alumni grants have been crucial in supporting the work of Alumni and giving them the space and confidence to pursue their IRD work. However, the network’s value will ultimately depend on Alumni’s willingness to engage. Opportunities to support future projects should be strategic to IRD activities that promote the Fellowship and the work of Alumni, and that support joint Alumni collaborations.

# Success Factors and Conclusions

Now in its tenth year, the Russell Berrie Foundation and the Angelicum have achieved success in promoting a program that supports these religious leaders and provides them with a unique experience. Looking to the next ten years, the Foundation can consider the following success factors and considerations, shared by Alumni respondents, key stakeholders, and the evaluation team, to ensure that the program continues to promote leadership and academic scholarship in IRD.

## Success Factors of the Fellowship

As noted throughout the report, the John Paul II Center and the Russell Berrie Fellowship benefit from a number of success factors that should be retained in the future:

### Integrated selection process and Fellow diversity

Key stakeholders agreed that one of the largest strengths of the Fellowship is the selection of its Fellows, who have advanced knowledge in religious studies and are academically prepared for Fellowship study. The diversity of the Fellows, coming from various regions and religious/non-religious backgrounds strengthens the Fellows' program experiences.

### Renowned and engaged Center Leadership and Visiting Faculty

The extensive knowledge and involvement of the Academic Advisory Committee and the Visiting Faculty who participate in the program is critical. The commitment of the leadership and Faculty ensures that the Fellows feel a sense of belonging in the program and a pride in studying with these individuals.

### Association with the Angelicum and Rome

For most Alumni respondents, especially those in the Catholic Church, association with the Angelicum lends a level of prestige and name association to the Fellowship and Center.

### Holistic Program Experience

The John Paul II Center provides a holistic experience to Fellows combining academic study at the Angelicum with other activities outside the classroom. In particular, the Israel Academic Seminar plays a central role and allows Fellows to travel together, study at the Shalom Hartman Institute, visit holy sites and meet with local IRD leaders.



*Fellow AJ Boyd providing an overview of the Russell Berrie Fellowship from an Alumni's perspective during an orientation dinner for new Fellows at the Lay Centre in Rome (2011)*

# Looking to the Next Ten Years... Considerations for Future Program Success

Practitioners and academics can consider the following best practices in implementing scholarship programs in IRD, or interfaith programs more generally:

## Leverage academic or IRD institutional partners

Partners who bring relative value are critical for an effective IRD partnership and program. Partners should clarify the vision and mission of their initiative, and build their partnership on equal footing to promote this mission and strengthen the reputation of the partners.

## Collaborate with IRD leaders in the field

Many organizations working in interfaith scholarships and IRD have not only partnered with other institutions but built relationships with other IRD leaders who can share their experiences and suggest approaches. Liaising with these leaders can also provide opportunities for collaboration on future projects and provide exposure to Russell Berrie Fellows and Alumni.

## Link theory with practice

Successful partnerships and programs promote activities that link theory and practice. This practical focus can give Alumni and Fellows opportunities to practice interreligious dialogue. This is an area where the role of the partners and program leadership can be more integral, in conducting dialogues and activities that will benefit the broader field, give Fellows exposure, and amplify the reputation of the program.

**The John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue and the Russell Berrie Fellowship in Interreligious Studies** are positioned well in a field that is growing and that stands to benefit from an expanded role for the program and its partners.

Beyond the reflections and reputation of the Foundation and the Fellowship, the evaluation team heard repeatedly that the Fellowship is unique, in that it provides opportunities unlike any other academic program in IRD to religious and non-religious leaders. In reflecting upon the findings of this evaluation, the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue can continue to further the work of these Fellows and strengthen their unique position and influence in the field of interreligious dialogue.

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On the back cover: *Fellows visit a Turkish bath in Akko, Israel (2014)*

