

Impact of Pope's message to Muslims for end of Ramadan



(Vatican Radio, 9 August 2013) Muslims around the world have been marking the end of their holy month of Ramadan which concluded with the feast of Eid al-Fitr on Thursday. Pope Francis sent a personal message marking this special feast day, expressing his “esteem and friendship for all Muslims, especially those who are religious leaders.”

Focusing on the theme ‘Promoting mutual respect through education’, the message stresses the importance of thinking, speaking and writing respectfully about others and always avoiding unfair criticism or defamation. Families, schools, religious teaching and the media, it says, all have a role to play in achieving this goal.

Underlining the importance of positive interreligious relations, the Pope says Christians and Muslims are called to respect the teachings, symbols, values and especially the leaders and places of worship of the other religion.

To find out more about the impact of this papal message on Christian-Muslim dialogue, Philippa Hitchen spoke to Archbishop Kevin McDonald, head of the English and Welsh bishops’ office for interfaith relations:

"I think it's very significant because Pope Francis has emerged as an international figure, people are talking about him and he's very much part of the landscape so I think the fact that he is sending a message in person has been very well received....

At the Bishops Conference we circulate it to all dioceses and send it to a long list of Muslim contacts, but we also encourage priests at the local level to take it round to their mosques....so it has quite a wide circulation....

I think there is a lot of goodwill in England....we had this awful event of the killing of Lee Rigby and shortly after that, I and other religious leaders were invited to the local mosque and we had a very good meeting....I felt there was a very real sense that we need to do something together...I think there's an increasing number of people in this country who do have a sense that they need to nurture their young people in a different kind of way and to take steps to counteract any danger of radicalisation - the picture is mixed but there are a lot of positive signs....."