

When Ramadhan and lent meet in faith

Not a coincidence? As Ramadhan and Lent begin in a rare convergence, faith leaders and believers are reminded of a shared spiritual path.

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Since 2009, when we first became friends under the auspices of the Nile Dialogue Platform, Hajj Issa Kiralira and I have exchanged special greetings during our respective religious feasts and holy seasons. This time, we are delighted to observe the beginning of Ramadhan and Lent on the same day—a phenomenon that occurs roughly once every 32 years.

First and foremost, we need to understand that what we call coincidence from our human perspective is not so from the divine perspective. According to Thomas Aquinas, something appears lucky or chance-like only when compared

to inferior causes. When compared to a higher cause, the event is seen as directly intended. Relative to God, who directs everything according to His divine plan, nothing occurs by chance. Proverbs 19:21 reminds us that God's administration of the universe is not based on serendipity; His purposes will prevail, and He remains in control of even the most random events.

Unity is important

In other words, when we see God's hand moving beautifully in our lives in moments such as this, we should recognise it and praise Him. He uses all circumstances to make us more like Him. Each time we attribute events merely to "coincidence" or "luck," we risk weakening our

TIP

Pope Francis in his historic visit to the UAE in 2019. He observed that in an era marked by the temptation toward discord between Christian and Islamic cultures—we must give a decisive sign that encounter, respect, and dialogue are possible.

Constant connection to God is important during Ramadan. PHOTO/FREEPIK

conviction that God has a plan. God continually calls believers to make the same pilgrimage back to Him, and this is best nurtured through interfaith dialogue. Interfaith dialogue is about what unites us rather than what divides us.

Shared themes

Ramadhan and Lent converge on themes of fasting, prayer, charity, and self-reflection. Both seasons aim at inner transformation, repentance, and strengthening one's relationship with God, often involving voluntary deprivation to foster empathy for the less fortunate and greater mindfulness.

I wish to enhance my contribution to this dialogue by recalling remarks made by Pope Francis during his historic visit to the United Arab Emirates in 2019. He observed that in an era marked by the temptation toward discord between Christian and Islamic cultures—and the tendency to see religions as sources of conflict—we must give a clear and decisive sign that encounter, respect, and dialogue are indeed possible.

He emphasised that mere tolerance is not enough. Human fraternity builds relationships and helps them grow.

Religious believers and faith-based organisations are, and must remain, important channels of brotherhood across barriers of separation. Religions are called to help us understand that the centre of each person lies beyond oneself—that we are oriented toward the Most High and toward our neighbour.

Humanity, therefore, needs religion if it is to reach its goal; religion is a compass that directs us toward good and steers us away from evil, which is always crouching at the door of the human heart.

Interfaith dialogue

During that visit, Pope Francis signed the historic document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together with Ahmed el-Tayeb of Al-Azhar.

The document promotes peace; interreligious dialogue, and mutual respect, marking a significant milestone in Catholic-Muslim relations. Interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative, constructive, and positive interaction among people of different religious traditions.

It has three key goals: to know oneself more profoundly and deepen appreciation of one's own faith; to know the other authentically and understand them as they truly are, not as caricatures; and to live more fully in accordance with these insights, establishing a stronger foundation for shared community life and action among people of various traditions.

No religion has monopoly

God wants us to appreciate that no single religion has a monopoly over Him. Religion-based wars, fundamentalism, and extremism misrepresent His nature.

The Muslim tradition of inviting people of other faiths to *Iftar*, the meal eaten after sunset during Ramadan, is highly commendable.

Here in Uganda, the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda continues its mission to promote dialogue, harmonious coexistence among all faith groups, and the non-violent resolution of conflicts.

We would do well, therefore, to use every available opportunity to engage more intentionally in interfaith dialogue.

