

Vatican expresses solidarity with Muslims during Ramadan fast

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By Hannah Brockhaus

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The Vatican has expressed its solidarity with Muslims participating in the Ramadan fast, noting that Catholics also fast and do penance during the season of Lent and inviting greater dialogue and friendship between people of the two religions.

“Our world is thirsting for fraternity and genuine dialogue,” a March 7 message from the Vatican’s Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue said. “Together, Muslims and Christians can bear witness to this hope in the conviction that friendship is possible despite the burden of history and ideologies that promote exclusion.”

“Hope,” it continued, “is no mere optimism: It is a virtue rooted in faith in God, the Merciful, our Creator.”

In 2025, Ramadan runs from approximately Feb. 28 to March 29. It concludes with the three-day celebration of Eid al-Fitr.

The Christian season of Lent began on March 5 and will end on April 17 with the three days known as the Triduum — Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday — followed by Easter Sunday.

“This year, Ramadan largely coincides with Lent, which for Christians is a period of fasting, supplication (prayer), and conversion to Christ,” the dicastery said. “This proximity in the spiritual calendar offers us a unique opportunity to walk side by side, Christians and Muslims, in a common process of purification, prayer, and charity.”

The Vatican’s annual message for Ramadan was signed by the dicastery’s new prefect, Cardinal George Jacob Koovakad, and its secretary, Father Indunil Janakaratne Kodithuwakku Kankanamalage.

Pope Francis appointed Koovakad prefect of the dicastery at the end of January, filling the vacancy left by Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, who died in late 2024.

An Indian from the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, Koovakad was previously responsible for the organization of papal trips.

In its message, the interreligious dicastery noted similarities between the Muslim observance of Ramadan and the Catholic observance of Lent.

“By abstaining from food and drink, Muslims learn to control their desires and turn to what is essential. This time of spiritual discipline is an invitation to cultivate piety, the virtue that brings one closer to God and opens the heart to others,” it said.

“In the Christian tradition, the holy season of Lent invites us to follow a similar path: Through fasting, prayer, and almsgiving we seek to purify our hearts and refocus on the One who guides and directs our lives,” it went on. “These spiritual practices, though expressed differently, remind us that faith is not merely about outward expressions but a path of inner conversion.”

The dicastery said it wanted to reflect on how Christians and Muslims can become “genuine brothers and sisters, bearing common witness to God’s friendship with all humanity.”

“Our trust in God,” Koovakad’s message underlined, “is a treasure that unites us, far beyond our differences. It reminds us that we are all spiritual, incarnate, beloved creatures, called to live in dignity and mutual respect.”

“What is more, we desire to become guardians of this sacred dignity by rejecting all forms of violence, discrimination, and exclusion,” the dicastery continued. “This year, as our two spiritual traditions converge in celebrating Ramadan and Lent, we have a unique opportunity to show the world that faith transforms people and societies and that it is a force for unity and reconciliation.”

Hannah Brockhaus is Catholic News Agency’s senior Vatican correspondent. After growing up in Omaha, Nebraska, she earned a degree in English from Truman State University in Missouri. In 2016, she moved to Rome, Italy, where in her spare time she enjoys reading and going on adventures with her husband and son.

Dicastery: An official Congregation or Department of the Roman Curia (Church government) in charge of the administration of the Church.