

## International Day for Tolerance

Since 1996 the United Nations has invited member nations to observe today, the 16<sup>th</sup> of November, as the International Day for Tolerance. To quote the UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay: "Tolerance is an act of humanity, which we must nurture and enact each in our own lives every day, to rejoice in the diversity that makes us strong and the values that bring us together."

And to quote the official UN website: "The United Nations is committed to strengthening tolerance by fostering mutual understanding among cultures and peoples. This imperative lies at the core of the United Nations Charter, as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and is more important than ever in this era of rising and violent extremism and widening conflicts that are characterized by a fundamental disregard for human life."

The United Nations has launched a new campaign to promote tolerance, respect and dignity across the world. TOGETHER is a global campaign that aims to reduce negative perceptions and attitudes towards refugees and migrants, and to strengthen the social contract between host countries and communities, and refugees and migrants." End of quote.

At its face value tolerance can be misunderstood in a fairly passive, even grudging way. We may not like something or someone but we tolerate them. But such a half-hearted response is not what is called for by the United Nations. Something much more positive and proactive is required.

That is quite explicit in the message I quoted from the UNESCO Director-General. And it is mirrored in the third aim of the Community of the Cross of Nails, in which we are not only to learn to live with difference but beyond that to celebrate diversity. Yes, difference and diversity are not to be resisted or feared but celebrated.

This is also reflected in our reading just now from St Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome (Romans 15.4-7, 12-13) in which he calls on them to live in harmony with one another and to welcome one another.

That is a message not only for Christians but for the whole of humanity in a world where there is sadly much conflict, intolerance, prejudice and bigotry. Such negative views need to be challenged and the better way of tolerance in its deepest sense proclaimed.

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