

## Young Catholics are Ready to Build Bridges Between Religions.

### [Translation of Vatican News article:](#)

The Russell Berrie Interdepartmental Curriculum graduates talk about what prompted them to take part in this unusual learning, how it affected their outlook and how they use their knowledge and skills in their work.

Svetlana Dukhovich - Vatican City

John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue, which is the fruit of the collaboration of the Russell Berrie Foundation and the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas "Angelicum" (Rome), marks the 10th anniversary of its foundation this year. Each year the Center supports representatives of different religions from all over the world to participate in an interreligious educational program, during which they are introduced to the largest religions in the world, and in particular to Judaism, in order to return to their countries, to their places of work, where they could build bridges between religions.

Two graduates of this program came to our studio - Lida Batig, from Ukraine, and Elena Dini, from Italy. Lida Batig, a journalist from Lviv, talked about how this education is taking place and who participates in it.

Lida Batig discusses the interreligious educational program: (<https://youtu.be/lfEz6WDofiw>)

To be honest The Russell Berrie program in interfaith dialogue or fellowship has changed my life. Before I became a student of the Russell Berrie program I had some knowledge of interfaith dialogue but it was not a deep knowledge. And, of course, before I came and started my studies in Rome I had a lot of different stereotypes. Maybe it was hard to work on that level but the program changed me. First of all, I got a really great course in introduction to Judaism. I learned a lot about Islam, and I got different contacts with different people who became my friends, my classmates, and teachers who actually taught me a lot and shared with me their own experiences so I could develop myself.

The Russell Berrie fellowship in interreligious dialogue is actually a remarkable program. Every year, thanks to the cooperation of the John Paul II Center of Interreligious Dialogue and the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, also the Russell Berrie Foundation, 10 students from different countries are chosen to study interreligious dialogue in Rome. These people are future priests, nuns, lay people and especially lay women from different countries of the world. They are studying together interfaith dialogue. They study how to build peace between different religions and how to develop their leadership skills. So after the program finishes, they can travel back home and do different projects, implement different grants so they can help to build ecumenical and also interfaith peace in the world. This generation of young leaders is really hopeful for the whole of interfaith dialogue.

How can a young journalist realize the knowledge about different religions and skills to build a dialogue between them?

After I finished the program I came back to the Ukraine to live I started my own project that is called The School of Inter-religious Journalism. The project got an intercultural Achievement Award from the Austrian government last September.

I was really happy that all this knowledge I could implement this in real life. I could share it. I could get in contact with people with whom we can cooperate together on different initiatives because this communication it's more important than Academical Studies. It is living communication and living dialogue.

To what extent are interreligious dialogue issues relevant to modern Ukrainian society?

<https://youtu.be/oP-CTblUrgk>

Somehow always when I think about our Russell Berrie program I remember the words of Angelica Berrie, the president of the Russell Berrie Foundation. She said that to be religious is actually to be inter-religious. For me, this quote describes almost all of my path in interfaith dialogue and almost all of my way, because it's so important to be tolerant to people, to understand the problems they're coming to you with and the reality they're living with.

In Ukraine, interfaith dialogue is really important now because society doesn't trust political leaders. They trust, people trust religious leaders. And we have a lot of Jews and Muslims who are ready to cooperate and work for making our life better our country better. But somehow they are feeling themselves beyond the process. So projects who can unite us not necessarily theological but social projects, social initiatives can show that we can work as one team. And with this help, we can overcome different stereotypes that still exist in our society, hate, and unacceptance. So the process of integration, the process of inclusion can be really really developed in Ukrainian society and in our way of life.

According to Lida, one of the results of participation in the interreligious educational program was the overcoming of certain stereotypes in relation to representatives of different religions.

What are these stereotypes about? <https://youtu.be/zGt8xZAeHHQ>

The most, I think, difficult question in interfaith dialogue that we studied and I learned a lot during our program is why do religious and inter-religious stereotypes exist. And I still think that it is a lack of knowledge of others. It's a fear of others. When I started to work in interfaith dialogue I also thought that people of other religions, of other traditions, from different heritage, they have, you know, other problems of life but then you get to know them on an everyday basis, on everyday life basis, and you see they live with the same problems, questions, purposes that we do and this unites us. This is a human face, despite belonging to different religions. You see how people respect their religious traditions. So you start to respect people. You start to get knowledge about these people, of how they live, of what they want, of what they dream about. In this case, you cannot have any stereotypes and any hate. I can say the Russell Berrie program doesn't only prevent me of stereotypes, doesn't only make me a better person, but it also teaches me a lot. It teaches me how to not be afraid to ask questions. I'm mostly involved in Jewish Christian dialogue and I got to know that people from Jewish religious tradition, from Jewish philosophical thought they are

incredible people, especially youth because they are never afraid to ask the questions. They are always interested in this object. So I think that personally I, and people like me, I became more brave in a way that I became a better journalist. I learned how to get this communication of the first level of people, how to introduce myself, how to get contacts, how to ask questions, how to not be afraid to develop myself in Media skills, in communicative skills. That's why I think this program is great. It breaks the wall between people and it's really built the bridges. I also want to quote our great Rabbi Jack Bemporad who said that unity is in diversity. And I think that is the most way to overcome all stereotypes between representatives of different religions and build a real friendship by keeping our identities

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue, on May 7, 2019, the Pontifical University of the St. Thomas Aquinas will host a conference on "Education for Action: The Urgency of Interreligious Leaders for the Global Good.

<https://youtu.be/EDsl6tcqdg8>

This year the Russell Berrie program is celebrating our 10th anniversary and this 10th anniversary of specifically the John Paul II Center for Intelligence Dialogue is a great chance to meet again and to see what our achievements are during last 10 years. We have 95 students from around 33 countries of the world and all the students and alumni are really involved in interfaith dialogue in their home places so they are very active. Our program achieved a lot during these years. We have students from different religious traditions, Christians, Jews, Muslims who are really really active. They are future leaders and this new generation who is already working making the world a better place. And during our conference, we will have different projects shown to participants. We will have the marketplace of ideas where different organization, specifically interfaith organizations, can show their influence on interfaith dialogue and their initiatives can share so it will be a great day. Our first celebration was also in Jerusalem at Shalom Hartman University. Now we will celebrate on May 7th at the Angelicum University and all our teachers, students, alumni, presenters from different interfaith organizations will gather together and will show how really much we achieve in our countries and in the world — how many awards we have for our work. It's a special moment because we are also searching for new students, for new people who will be ready to share their ideas and who will be ready to work in interfaith dialogue. It's not the easiest field of work but it's really a great chance to change the world. Maybe it's difficult to speak about theological initiatives and roundtables but we are ready to work in different social projects and we are ready to be as a one team and support each other and give advice and show the smallest steps with the help of those steps we can make some tremendous changes in the world. in human minds. overcome religious wars, overcome different stereotypes and build peace. So I hope that a lot of people will come and a lot of people, our friends, will share their experience and will be a part of our big interfaith family.

Italian journalist Elena Dini, who also received a scholarship from the Russell Berrie Foundation, noted that there were two reasons she had to participate in the interreligious educational program: first, it was an opportunity to study different religions from the perspective of her own religious tradition, that is, the Roman Catholic Church, because the

studies take place at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas; and secondly, she was attracted by the opportunity to deepen her knowledge of Judaism.

Speaking about how she now applies the knowledge gained during her studies, Elena noted that her contribution, as a Catholic Italian woman, in promoting interreligious dialogue is important, and is of particular significance, distinct from activities carried out at the institutional level. "This contribution," she stressed, "is not something completely different, but is an indication of the desire to be an active part of the life of the Church, in its various manifestations, and in my case, in the field of interreligious dialogue."