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A Blessing to One Another: Pope John Paul II and the Jewish People
Opens September 6, 2006
at the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust

New York, NY – As one of the world’s most influential spiritual leaders for over a generation, Pope John Paul II used his papacy to promote tolerance, understanding, and dialogue among the world’s different religions. On September 6, 2006 the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust will celebrate his legacy with the opening of the special exhibition, *A Blessing to One Another: Pope John Paul II and the Jewish People*. The exhibition will be on view through February 23, 2007.

Exclusively for the exhibition’s New York run, the Museum has secured a unique artifact – the note left by Pope John Paul II at the Western Wall in Jerusalem during his historic pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2000. On loan to the Museum from Yad Vashem, the national Holocaust memorial museum in Israel, the pope’s prayer says, in part:

*We are deeply saddened
by the behavior of those
who in the course of history
have caused these children of yours to suffer,
and asking your forgiveness
we wish to commit ourselves
to genuine brotherhood
with the people of the Covenant.*

This exhibition is part of a long tradition of interfaith efforts at the Museum that started with its dedication in 1997 at which John Cardinal O’Connor said, “I pray... that through this Museum, every Jew will be ever prouder to be a Jew and that those of us who call ourselves Christians will become ever prouder of our Jewish heritage.” Since then the Museum has used its educational and public programming to promote interfaith dialogue. A highlight of these efforts is the Museum’s annual symposium for New York Archdiocese teachers on how to incorporate the Holocaust and Jewish tradition into their lesson plans.

“It is important that this exhibition be held at our Museum,” said **Dr. David G. Marwell**, the Director of the Museum. “Cardinal O’Connor’s remarks at the Museum’s dedication set us on a path of understanding, and I believe this exhibition is an important milestone in our efforts to meet the standards he set for us. This inspirational exhibition exemplifies the universal message of our Museum and reminds us all of what we have in common.”

“It is my hope that New Yorkers of every religious persuasion will have the opportunity to experience what promises to be a very special exhibition,” said **Edward Cardinal Egan**, head of the Archdiocese of New York. Our late, beloved Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, had a unique relationship with the Jewish people, and this effort by the Museum of Jewish Heritage - A Living Memorial to the Holocaust will not

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only help people to understand that relationship, but it will also promote Pope John Paul's vision of peace and understanding among all faiths."

"It cannot be denied, neither by Jew nor Christian, that Pope John Paul II reached out with loving sensitivity and compassion to the descendants of Abraham and Sarah as no other occupant of Peter's Throne during nineteen centuries of Western history," said **Dr. Ronald B. Sobel**, Senior Rabbi Emeritus of Temple Emanu-el of New York, and Museum Trustee. "His Holiness sought to begin a process of healing to an all too long story of persecution and hatred. Our Museum rises in reverence before those efforts and thus gratefully presents this exhibition."

About the Exhibition

The 2,000-square-foot exhibition takes its name from the pope's 1993 commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. On that anniversary, he said, "As Christians and Jews, following the example of the faith of Abraham, we are called to be a blessing to the world (cf. Gen. 12:2 ff.). This is the common task awaiting us. It is therefore necessary for us, Christians and Jews, to first be a blessing to one another." The exhibition was created in Cincinnati, Ohio and is a collaboration between Xavier University (Cincinnati), the Hillel Jewish Student Center (Cincinnati), and the Shtetl Foundation.

Born Karol Wojtyla, Pope John Paul II lived in Wadowice, Poland, a town where a quarter of his classmates were Jewish. He was especially close to Jerzy Kluger, the son of the president of Wadowice's Jewish community. Kluger lives in Rome today and remained a close friend of the pontiff until John Paul II's death in April 2005.

Eight-foot-high replicas of vintage photographs and postcards serve as the exhibit walls. These photographs, along with artifacts and videos, will take visitors back in time to pre-war Wadowice, the Krakow Ghetto during World War II, and Cardinal Wojtyla's ministry in Krakow and Rome. As visitors walk through the exhibit, symbolically retracing the pope's steps, they will see the church in Wadowice as the future pope saw it from his own bedroom window. They will learn about Jewish life during World War II after walking through a re-creation of the gate of the Krakow Ghetto. At the exhibit's end, visitors will be able to write prayers and place them in a replica of the Western Wall in Jerusalem, just as the pope did during his visit to Israel in 2000. These prayers will be transferred to Jerusalem after the exhibit closes.

Photographs and artifacts are being loaned from museums in the United States, Poland, Italy, and Israel. Some of the artifacts include:

- Reproductions of the pope's baptismal certificate and high school and college transcripts, on loan from the City of Wadowice Museum.
- An official license plate, bearing the swastika symbol, from one of five Nazi-owned vehicles used in Wadowice, loaned by the City of Wadowice Museum.
- Shoes worn by Jewish prisoners at Auschwitz and a can used for Zyklon-B, the chemical used by Nazis to kill Jews in gas chambers. These items have been loaned by the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Poland.
- The biretta that the future pope received when named a cardinal in 1967 and vestments he wore at an interreligious prayer service in Assisi, loaned by the John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, D.C.

The creation of the exhibit itself is a testament to interreligious dialogue. Dr. James Buchanan, Rabbi Abie Ingber, and Dr. William Madges, exhibit-co-creators, in their work in establishing the exhibit,

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transformed the face of Catholic-Jewish dialogue in Cincinnati. Dr. James Buchanan, co-executive director of *A Blessing to One Another*, and director of Xavier's Edward B. Brueggeman Center for Dialogue, believes that what is being celebrated is much more than just an exhibit. "Our hope is that it will be an experience that has a spiritual dimension to it as well as stimulating people to begin to think more deeply about and engage more actively in interreligious dialogue."

Public Program

On September 7, the day after the exhibition opens, leading Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish theologians will participate in a program open to the public in which they will reflect on the pope's legacy and explore the changing relationships among faiths. The program will take place in the Museum's Edmond J. Safra Hall starting at 7:30 p.m. The program is \$5 and free for members.

Funding Credit

A Blessing to One Another: Pope John Paul II and the Jewish People was created and produced by Xavier University (Cincinnati), Hillel Jewish Student Center (Cincinnati), and The Shtetl Foundation. The New York exhibition is presented by the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust thanks to the generosity of Angelica Berrie, Peter S. Kalikow, The Fritz and Adelaide Kauffmann Foundation: Elliot M. Hershberg, Theodore N. Mirvis, Bernard Turner; the Ollendorff Center for Religious and Human Understanding, the Oster Family Foundation, and the Theodore and Renee Weiler Foundation: Richard I. Kandel. The Museum also thanks the Pave the Way Foundation and the Center for Interreligious Understanding. The lead financial sponsors of *A Blessing To One Another* are the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati and Xavier University. Media sponsorship provided by *New York Post*.

About the Museum

The Museum's three-floor Core Exhibition educates people of all ages and backgrounds about the rich tapestry of Jewish life over the past century--before, during, and after the Holocaust. Current special exhibitions include: *Ours To Fight For: American Jews in the Second World War*, which explores the lives of Jewish men and women who served during WWII; and *Bukharan Odyssey*, photographs by Zion Ozeri of one of the world's most exotic and colorful communities. The Museum offers visitors a vibrant public program schedule in its Edmond J. Safra Hall. It is also home to Andy Goldsworthy's memorial *Garden of Stones*, as well as James Carpenter's *Reflection Passage*, Gift of The Gruss Lipper Foundation. The Museum receives general operating support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, and is a founding member of the *Museums of Lower Manhattan*.

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