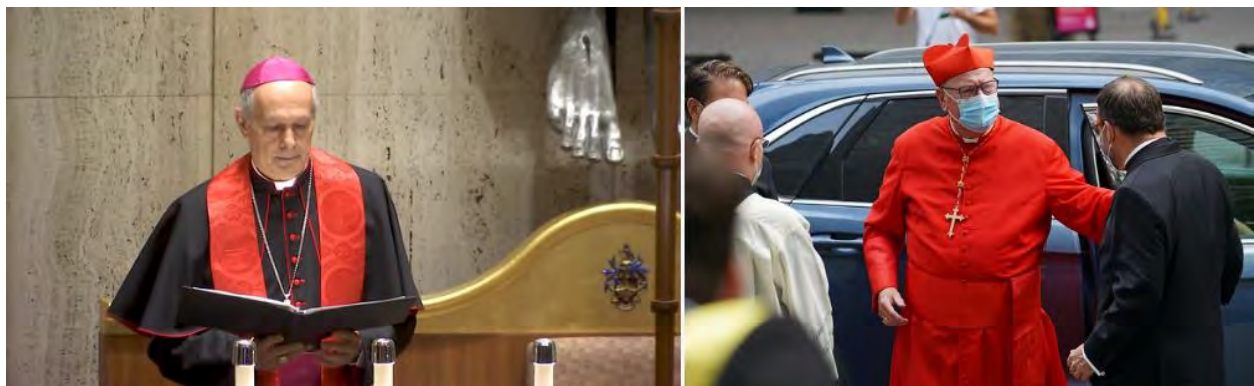


The Vatican's annual Prayer Service at the opening of the UN General Assembly

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New York City, United States -- On September 14, the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See [the Vatican] conducted its annual Prayer Service at the opening of the 75th session of the UN General Assembly at the Church of the Holy Family near the UN Headquarters. This gathering establishes a spiritual foundation for the new year at the UN and has been a tradition of the Holy See Mission since 1987. Usually during this special service, the church overflows with more than 350 participants including ambassadors, the UN secretary-general, the president of the UN General Assembly, UN senior staff, religious leaders and NGO delegates. However, in accordance with Covid-19 precautions, only 50 selected people were able to attend. Dr. Taj Hamad and Lynn Walsh, representing Universal Peace Federation, were fortunate to be among them. The eerie comparative emptiness of this beautiful chapel served to intensify one's the awareness of our pandemic-inflicted world.



Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN, presided over the Prayer Service. He reminded the audience, "In this time of the Covid-19 pandemic, prayers are needed more than ever." The archbishop also gave the final prayer, in which he asked that everyone could be God's

"instrument of a world of peace, justice, and fraternal welcome where no one is left behind."

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Roman Catholic Archbishop of New York, reflected on the pandemic by observing how interconnected we are by something completely invisible. He noted that we all have a heightened awareness for the elderly and vulnerable, as well as gratitude for the heroic medical care providers, and other essential workers. Cardinal Dolan quoted Pope Paul VI's words, appropriate for this time:

The hour has come for a halt, a moment of contemplation, of reflection, ... a moment to think anew of our common origin, our history, our common destiny. Today, as never before, in an era marked by such human progress, there is need for an appeal to the moral conscience of man. ... The edifice of modern civilization must be built upon spiritual principles; the only principles capable not only of supporting it but also of enlightening and animating it. And these indispensable principles of superior wisdom must be founded ... upon faith in God.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres gave a video message recognizing that the pandemic has tragically exacerbated inequalities throughout the world. He lamented that the "hard-won progress on poverty eradication, food security, and other Sustainable Goals" has actually been reversed by effects of Covid-19. H.E. Guterres expressed deep concern that the closing of places of worship due to the pandemic has "upset what is deeply ingrained in our human nature: our shared impulse to gather and face hard times together." He reminded the UN community that we can overcome these difficult challenges only with "unity, leadership, and solidarity."

E. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande of Nigeria, president of the 74th session of the General Assembly, spoke of humanity as being one family. He beseeched "the Creator that we have the knowledge, the courage, the compassion and the wisdom to do what is right by our fellow human beings... and to seek strength from the one God who creates and is not created."

Holy Family Pastor Father Gerald E. Murray gave the invocation and quoted Pope Francis's words in stating, "This is not a time for indifference, because the whole world is suffering and needs to be united in facing the pandemic."

Following the service, there was time for exchanges outside the church with Archbishop Caccia and Cardinal Dolan. The natural warmth of these dignitaries created a sense of positivity, unity, and personal connection. These spiritual foundations nurtured during this event will be necessary and instrumental for taking on this year's challenges at the United Nations.