



UAE unifies faiths with launch of Abrahamic Family House

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Good morning Colleagues,

Last Friday in New York City, the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity—a group of religious leaders representing Islam, Christianity and Judaism—[announced the plans](#) for a first-of-its-kind Abrahamic Family House to be built in Abu Dhabi.

The Abrahamic Family House will serve as a place for worship, learning and gathering, and reflect the UAE's belief in tolerance and inclusion for all people, regardless of their faith. [Sir David Adjaye's design](#), which includes a mosque, church and synagogue, will embody the relationship between the three Abrahamic faiths and serve as a platform for nurturing interfaith harmony.

The Abrahamic Family House project commemorates the [historic visit](#) of Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, who met in Abu Dhabi earlier this year and signed the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace. Shortly after the visit, UAE leaders [formed the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity](#), which is tasked with developing a framework to implement the objectives contained in the document, and overseeing the development of the Abrahamic Family House. The Committee is made up of religious, educational and cultural leaders from around the world. Recently, Rabbi M. Bruce Lustig of Washington, DC [was appointed](#) to the Committee of Human Fraternity.

Kindly see the article below that further details this exciting project. As always, please reach out if you have questions or would like to further discuss.

~Hagir



[UAE vision of interfaith harmony takes shape in Abrahamic House of Fraternity](#)

The National
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It will be a place for religious tolerance and education, bringing faiths together and sending a message of unity to the world. The Abrahamic Family House, which was unveiled in New York on Friday before construction begins on Saadiyat Island next year, will be a physical manifestation of the Document on Human Fraternity signed by Pope Francis and Dr Ahmed Al Tayeb, the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, during the pontiff's visit to Abu Dhabi in February.

The document called for the reconciliation of people of all faiths and goodwill in service of universal peace.

The Abrahamic Family House, named after the revered prophet Abraham, is being designed by the renowned British architect Sir David Adjaye. Images were released in New York on Friday, where members of the [Higher Committee of Human Fraternity](#), formed to deliver the vision outlined in the document, met for the second time.

In recognition of Islam, Christianity and Judaism, the three main buildings – a mosque, a church and a synagogue – will each lead to a central garden under which will sit a museum and centre for education. While the places of worship are the same height, the designs and interiors will be significantly different.

Mr Adjaye's largest project to date is the \$540 million (Dh1.98 billion) Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African American History and Culture, which opened in Washington in 2016.

The 53-year-old was selected after a competitive bidding process and only learned from judges that his company was the winner two weeks ago. "I was compelled by the brief," he told *The National*.

"There has never been a building that has the three faiths in one form. I wanted to see if we could make a building that has the unique experience of each of the faiths but to connect them all with the one device. And that is the garden."

The mosque will be orientated toward the Kaaba in Makkah, the church's altar will point east towards the sun, and the synagogue's podium and Torah will face Jerusalem.

Each building will have a separate street entrance but with the ground rising gently into a podium in the middle of the site, visitors to the garden will be able to peer into all three buildings. The project is due to be completed in 2022.

"The design is very contemporary but it is rooted in the histories of all three faiths," Mr Adjaye said. "I am deeply humbled to be involved. It's a once in a generation moment."

The Higher Committee of Human Fraternity has [eight members](#). They chose the US financial capital for their second meeting to coincide with the UN General Assembly. The annual gathering of world leaders was an opportunity to fulfil their mission of spreading harmony and understanding, the committee said.

Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, chairman of the UAE's Department of Culture and Tourism, said he and his colleagues had a simple message.

"Love thy neighbour, be good to thy neighbour, help thy neighbour. In a world that is ever so connected, in reality we have become disconnected," he said.

"Projects and initiatives likes the Abrahamic Family House – and there will be many to come in the future that the council will invoke – will bring people together. The UAE has people from the Jewish faith, the Christian faith and, of course, the Muslim faith. We are creating a place where they can practise their religion freely and learn from each other.

"We will invoke acceptance and education of other faiths not only to citizens of the UAE and citizens of the region but to the millions of tourists who come to Abu

Dhabi. They will see that message of love and hope.”

Bruce Lustig, the senior rabbi at Washington Hebrew Congregation, the US capital's largest and oldest synagogue, said he was honoured to participate at a time when “no place of religious worship seems immune from hate, or from violence”.

“When Pope Francis came to Abu Dhabi and signed the document he brought a message of hope. We want to actualise the responsibility to meet and greet and promote the safeguarding of the human family,” he said.

“In a world that is often dark and fractured the Family House is a blazing hope for the future. We are interested in faith over fear, justice over injustice. Our mutual respect and understanding should safeguard our whole human family.”

Cardinal elect Miguel Angel Ayuso Guixot, president of the pontifical council for inter-religious dialogue of the Holy See, said the committee was working to broaden the number of faiths that could eventually be included.

Of the Abrahamic Family House, he said: “It will be a sign of how on common ground, Christians, Jews and Muslims can have a place of worship and an educational project that is open to the extension of other communities. This is part of our responsibilities.”

Judge Mohamed Mahmoud Abdel Salam, former adviser to the Grand Imam of Al Azhar in Cairo, said the Document on Human Fraternity had already been translated into a dozen languages and that the number would grow.

The Abrahamic Family House would be a step forward for inter-faith dialogue, he said.

“The idea is to extend a hand to everyone. We may be different, but we are all brothers.”

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