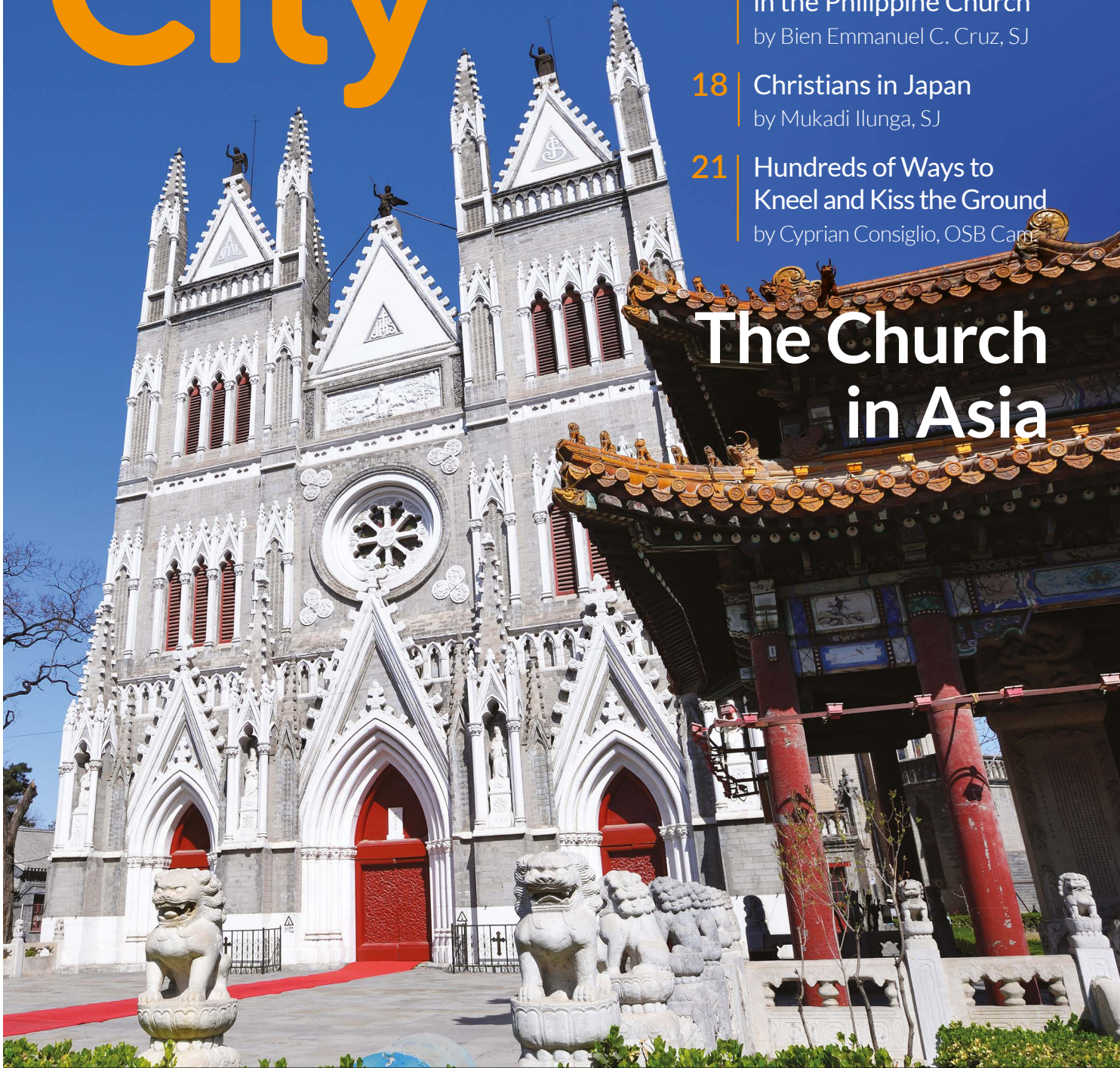


# living City



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# Letter From the Editor



**W**e have heard a great deal in the last twenty years about the growth of Christianity in what is called the Global South, as compared to the Global North, where most of us live. “Global South” includes all of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. “Global North” means North America, Europe, and Japan—as well as Australia and New Zealand, countries that, although located in the southern hemisphere, are connected economically and politically with the others in the north.

It seems to us that Africa and Latin America have received a lot of attention in recent months and years, when Christians talk about the state of their faith around the world, and the peoples of Asia much less so. We have tried to address some of that lack, and understand some of the important trends, with this important issue of the magazine.

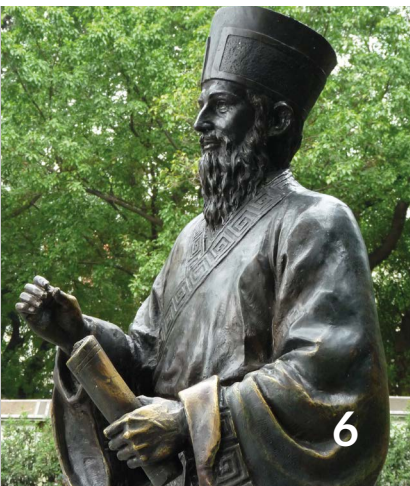
We bring you firsthand accounts of lived faith experience from Japan, China, India, Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

You may want to begin on page 14, with a quick look “By the Numbers,” to get a sense of the scale of what we’re talking about. For example, churches are growing in countries like Cambodia and Laos in ways that may surprise you.

Two more things, please: Take special note of a new initiative we’re starting on page 21. And I hope you don’t miss my movie review at the back of the magazine; if, like me, you need a good cry, you should see this one.

Jon M. Sweeney  
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## Our Vision

Renew the world by enkindling  
the spirit of unity.

## Our Mission

Provide content that empowers  
people to grow spiritually, improve  
relationships, engage in dialogue  
and foster collaboration within the  
Church and throughout society.

## Our Values

Dialogue – Unity in diversity  
– Advocate for the poor and  
vulnerable – Focus on relationship –  
Gospel-centered

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## Letters to the Editor



Photo by Robert Collins | Unsplash

### Thankful for play and leisure

I really loved this issue [July-August]. I wrote some notes. It had an evenness of tone, and literary riches. The reader was taken into the confidence of each author. We became friends. The range of reference was awesome but not overwhelming. It is a treat to have the translator of Rilke writing for us. I read the issue from cover to cover in one go. A welcome new experience.

There was good humor and good sense. The weave and waft of spirituality was as light as a soufflé. The reading public of *Living City* will surely grow with a house style like this.

*Thomas Sherrard*  
Toronto, Ontario

I wanted to thank you for issue on *Leaning into play, leisure and joy*. I especially appreciated the article on “Learning to Play Again.” I can remember as a child being very imaginative, playing with friends like Jackie the Moon Dragon and many hours making a big cardboard box into a spaceship. As an adult I’ve discovered that I’m not very good at relaxing. As a Catholic deacon sometimes we are very focused on our work and ministry not to mention the everyday responsibilities of being a husband, father, and grandfather. I have to be intentional about taking time out, to play, to walk in the green belt by our home, and just being with my grandchildren. One special thing that combines play and joy for me is helping out at our

vacation Bible school each year. I’m usually the comedic character in the skit that sets the tone of the day. This year I was a would-be undersea treasure hunter. After one of the skits a young child told me, “You be careful looking for that treasure.” It was a reminder to cherish the imagination of a child and to enjoy each moment. As adults we can all too often be all business. Learning to play again is vital to our physical, mental and spiritual health. Thank you for this reminder.

*Deacon Joe Hensley*  
Lakewood, Colorado

### The Focolare EcoPlan

I’m personally delighted that articles like this are being featured. Increased awareness is essential to convince people we are faced with a serious problem. However, the article, in my opinion, falls short of a real and concrete call to action. I’m certain that the authors of this article have suggestions that could speak to the reader’s heart, legs, and hands. A message of “Love” is certainly the answer but individuals need these experts to share what people can/must do at the grassroots level. Perhaps a series on this topic to continue to raise awareness and to highlight specific and concrete measures that could help fulfill the Focolare EcoPlan’s goals.

*Tom Rowley*  
Allen, Texas

We would like to hear from you too. The letters to the editor email address is [letterstolivingcity@focolaremedia.com](mailto:letterstolivingcity@focolaremedia.com) Emailing the editor gives us permission to print your letter in a future issue of the magazine, and to edit it for length or clarity.

# Youth Engagement Shines at Interreligious Conference

by **Flavia Cecchini** and **Ana Clara Giovani**

From May 29th to June 2nd, the interreligious congress “One Human Family” was held at Castel Gandolfo, Italy. Dedicated to fostering dialogue, the event brought together people of various generations, cultures, and religions, with youth playing a significant co-protagonist role.

Before an audience of 500 people from diverse religious backgrounds and from every corner of the world, Jessica from Israel and Dana from Palestine engaged participants in an icebreaker. Despite the ongoing conflict in their homeland, these two young women had been working together for months to prepare for this activity. It may seem ordinary, but in times of war, it’s a profound sign of peace.

The five-day congress, organized by the Focolare Movement, featured panels, meetings, and activities centered on themes of peace and dialogue. Participants were welcomed representing a mosaic of religions and traditions. Buddhists, Jews, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Baha’is, and Muslims shared moments of mutual understanding, exchange, and dialogue.

Contemporary challenges such as peaceful coexistence among communities, artificial intelligence, economy, and ecology were discussed, emphasizing the crucial role that religions and traditional faiths can play in today’s world. Both on and off the stage, people formed new and deepened existing relationships, tangibly creating *one human family*.


Amidst the diverse audience, a group of around fifty young men and women took part in panels, prayers, and joyful moments. Buddhists from Risho Kosei Kai, a lay movement from Japan, shared a prayer during a session devoted to the variety of spiritualities. A group of Christians and Muslims from Algeria, Palestine, and Italy, part of the Focolare Movement, organized and hosted a panel on the impact of artificial intelligence on relationships and religions.

Parañtap, a Hindu from Shanti Asharam, played a melodious and cheerful Raag of Indian classical music on the flute. At eighteen years old, it was his first time attending an interfaith conference: “Earlier, I used to have this misconception that only my religion is the best since it is the only one with all the



ancient scriptures and texts. But when I came to the interreligious dialogue conference, my mind started getting a clearer picture of the essence, richness, and values each religion holds. I feel blissful to have been here because it opened the doors of my mind.”

One group of participants had a private audience with Pope Francis. Ayna, an Albanian Muslim from IDIZEM—Intercultural Center of Munich, had the opportunity to greet the Pope: “The discussions on fraternity, justice, and reconciliation were inspiring, and the sense of unity among diverse faiths was truly heartening. Meeting Pope Francis was a highlight, reinforcing the importance of interfaith dialogue and collaboration for global peace. I once again realized that dialogue now is more necessary than ever.”

This gathering of diverse faiths stood as a testament to the transformative power of unity and dialogue. The active participation of the youth highlighted their vital role in shaping the present and future of interreligious encounter, ensuring that these efforts will continue to grow and evolve. In a world often divided by conflict, the sight of people from different religions coming together was not just symbolic but profoundly meaningful. A living sign of peace. 

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## Flavia Cecchini

is a student at La Sapienza University in Rome, majoring in modern literature. She collaborates as a journalist for *Città Nuova*, the flagship magazine for Focolare publications such as *Living City*.

## Ana Clara Giovani

is a multimedia journalist and a PhD candidate for interreligious dialogue and media. She has been engaged in interreligious dialogue for nine years and is a youth representative of Religions for Peace.