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Rhea F. Klein Youth League
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Jewish Studies

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Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies

“Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities.”

—Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 250

Mission and Background

The mission of the Saint Leo University Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies (CCJS) is to build mutual respect, understanding, and appreciation among Jews, Catholics, and all people of good will by providing opportunities for interreligious education and dialogue.

Inspired by *Nostra Aetate*, a declaration by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) that provided a new and positive framework for the Catholic Church's relationship with the Jewish people, CCJS facilitates theological study and dialogue among Christians and Jews at the scholarly level, in the classroom, and in the local community.

The center was established in 1998 through the joint efforts of Saint Leo, the American Jewish Committee, and several principal founders, including Rabbi A. James Rudin, senior interreligious advisor to the American Jewish Committee; Dr. Arthur F. Kirk Jr., president emeritus of Saint Leo University; Bishop Emeritus John J. Nevins, the Diocese of Venice; and Bishop Emeritus Robert Lynch, the Diocese of St. Petersburg. Given Florida's growing and diverse population, these leaders recognized the need in the state for an academic center devoted to the biblical and theological study of Catholic-Jewish relations and interreligious dialogue, as emphasized by the Second Vatican Council.

CCJS remains the only academic center of its kind in the Southeast. Our key programs aim to reach the three complementary areas highlighted in the coming pages: community, students, and scholars.

About Saint Leo

Saint Leo University is a Catholic Benedictine university dedicated to helping learners of all backgrounds and ages gain the competence and courage to be more. Offering more than 60 degree programs to more than 14,190 students each year, the nonprofit university is known for providing a values-based education in the liberal arts tradition and a community of belonging for those who seek a greater purpose in life. Saint Leo is regionally accredited and offers a campus in the Tampa Bay area of Florida, regional education centers, and several online programs. The university is home to more than 104,000 alumni. Learn more at saintleo.edu.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING



Left to right: Dr. Matthew Tapie, director, Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies; Friar Henry Fulmer, Sacred Heart Catholic Church; Rabbi Joel Simon, Congregation Schaarai Zedek; Rabbi Rachel Blatt, Congregation Kol Ami; and Rabbi David Maayan, the Cohn Visiting Chair in Jewish Thought and Assistant Director of the Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies.



CCJS promotes interreligious dialogue in local communities

CCJS regularly hosts scholarly lectures in churches and synagogues, providing members of the Tampa Bay community and beyond with opportunities for interreligious education. These programs deepen mutual understanding and respect among members of different faiths and model forms of interreligious dialogue that enhance civility and peace in the local community.

“This work is about relationships. If we want to do it, we have to personally know a Jew, a Christian, a Muslim, a Buddhist, an Atheist ...”

—Rabbi Jason Rosenberg, Tampa

EDUCATING STUDENTS

“The CCJS activities allow for students from different majors to see a new window of other faiths outside of class, and sometimes it is just about planting the seed or providing the window that allows people to actually want to learn about other cultures. The result is encouraging learning instead of prejudice.

“Personally, my CCJS involvement gave me leadership and personal growth opportunities, and I found an academic home in interfaith studies. I am now in graduate school, taking an interfaith approach to studying Judaism and Jewish-Christian relations.”

—Saint Leo alumna Iris Semer '16, former CCJS Fellow,
and graduate of the Cardinal Bea Centre for Judaic Studies,
Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome

Pictured above right: *Iris Semer '16 and CCJS Director Dr. Matthew Tapie*



CCJS equips students with the interreligious knowledge and skills necessary to build peace in a complex and challenging world

CCJS faculty design and teach undergraduate and graduate courses (REL 223 *World Religions in Dialogue* and THY 540 *History and Theology of Catholic-Jewish Relations*, among others) that equip Saint Leo students, including Catholic clergy and deacons, with an understanding of the complex relationships among the world's religious traditions. Through courses and guest scholarly lectures, Saint Leo students gain the interreligious knowledge and dialogue skills needed to establish the peaceful coexistence of diverse religious traditions within our society. Campus undergraduates also enjoy support from the center in organizing interfaith social functions in a welcoming environment. In addition, students at University Campus have the opportunity to participate in interreligious dialogue groups and individual research projects.



SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTIONS





CCJS has a visible role in the academic study of Jewish-Christian relations

CCJS faculty play an important part in conducting research in Catholic-Jewish relations, comparative theology, and interreligious dialogue. In addition to publishing numerous scholarly books and journal articles, as well as giving lectures in local, national, and international contexts, our faculty provide leadership on the Advisory Board of the journal *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, the Catholic University of America Press, and the Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC. These scholars' advanced study of theology, history, languages, and culture contributes to greater levels of understanding and respect for religious traditions in their diversity. Additionally, the CCJS director and assistant director are members of both the center and university faculty, teaching in the Department of Philosophy, Theology, and Religion.

“We should all support the Saint Leo University Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies. With wonderful faculty, this is a great program. A program not only for the Florida region, but with outreach for the entire world. I hope that we all take pride in Saint Leo University and support these efforts.”

—Susannah Heschel, PhD, Eli Black Professor of Jewish Studies at Dartmouth College

Pictured left: Dr. Victoria Barnett, of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum



Donors moved by the mission of the Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies may direct specific donations to the center through Saint Leo University.

Financial gifts help underwrite guest speakers' fees and travel costs, public program expenses, curriculum updates, student gatherings, faculty research, and more.

Gifts of all amounts are appreciated and respected.

Donations can be made simply and easily by visiting **your.saintleo.edu/give** and the Special Projects page. Representatives from the university are also readily available to answer questions and discuss more options.

Thank you.

Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies supporters Gail and Paul Whiting (left) and Maureen and Douglas Cohn (right) are photographed with the center's founder Rabbi James Rudin (center) at an event celebrating his contributions to Catholic-Jewish relations.

ADMINISTRATION

The Saint Leo University Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies is housed in the Department of Philosophy, Theology, and Religion, and is part of the College of Arts, Sciences, and Allied Services.

Faculty Members



Dr. Matthew A. Tapie

- Associate professor of theology
- Director of the Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies
- Author of several scholarly articles published in European Journal for the Study of Thomas Aquinas; Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations; Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law; and the Journal of Moral Theology
- Author or editor of five books, including *The Challenge of Catholic-Jewish Theological Dialogue* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2024), a volume of essays from a special symposium held at the CCJS in 2021.
- Member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Committee on Ethics, Religion, and the Holocaust; member of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Catholic and Jewish Modern Orthodox Dialogue, as well as the Catholic and Orthodox Union/Rabbinic Council of America Dialogue



Dr. Benny Bar-Lavi

- Maureen and Douglas Cohn Visiting Chair in Jewish Thought, Saint Leo University
- Assistant Director, Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies, Saint Leo University
- Raised in Mexico City and Jerusalem
- B.A., Hebrew University of Jerusalem
- Ph.D. in History, University of Chicago
- Researches the religious co-production of Judaism and Christianity

Staff Member

Laurie Gens

Administrator of Programs and Events

Phone: (352) 588-7711

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Advisory Boards

The center's administration is aided by the generous counsel of the respected members of the CCJS Scholarly, National, and Campus Advisory Board. Please visit the CCJS website for a current list of members at saintleo.edu/ccjs.

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Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies

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