



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
For democracy. For everyone.



## Second Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue: *Strengthening trust and embracing hope for our common future*

19-21 June 2025, Rome

BERKLEY CENTER  
*for Religion, Peace & World Affairs*  
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

### Religious Literacy for Parliamentarians

*Side Event organized by the Berkley Center for Religion,  
Peace & World Affairs of Georgetown University  
(English only)*

*Friday 20 June 2025, 12:30 – 14:00  
(Chamber of Deputies of the Italian Parliament, IV floor Committees Room)*

#### Concept note

#### Background and Rationale

In an increasingly interconnected and religiously diverse world, effective and inclusive policymaking requires a nuanced understanding of religion's role in public life. For parliamentarians, this includes not only awareness of religious dynamics within their own constituencies, but also the capacity to engage constructively with religious actors and institutions on a wide range of policy issues—from education and public health to peacebuilding and social cohesion. Yet many legislators lack the tools and confidence to navigate these interactions effectively.

This side event—"Religious Literacy for Parliamentarians"—will address this gap by providing an introduction to the core principles and competencies of religious literacy in policymaking and legislation. Drawing on the experience of experts from North America and Europe who have worked extensively at the intersection of government and faith engagement, the session will highlight why and how parliamentarians can constructively engage with religious communities in ways that are respectful, inclusive, and aligned with democratic governance.

#### Objectives

This session will:

- Make the case for why religious literacy matters in public policy and democratic governance.
- Introduce parliamentarians to core principles and practical skills for engaging religious actors.
- Identify challenges and risks associated with faith engagement—and strategies to mitigate them.
- Share tools, resources, and training materials available to support legislators in building capacity for religious engagement.
- Foster dialogue and peer learning across national contexts about best practices in religion-related policymaking.

#### Format

The session will feature a moderated panel discussion followed by interactive Q&A and small-group dialogue. Panelists will include current or former policymakers and scholars with demonstrated expertise in religious engagement within government contexts. Printed and digital resources will be made available to participants for continued learning.

## Expected Outcomes

- Increased awareness among parliamentarians of the relevance of religious literacy to their legislative responsibilities.
- Greater confidence in approaching religious engagement in ways that enhance social inclusion and policy effectiveness.
- Expanded access to relevant frameworks, guidelines, and tools for integrating religious literacy into parliamentary work.
- Strengthened global network of legislators committed to inclusive dialogue and interfaith understanding.

## Target Audience

Members of Parliament, legislative staff, civil society partners religious leaders, faith-based organizations, and international stakeholders attending the IPU Conference.

Contact & Primary Facilitator:

Dr. Peter Mandaville, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University, Washington DC. E-mail: [ppm27@georgetown.edu](mailto:ppm27@georgetown.edu)

## Biography of Moderators

**Peter Mandaville** is Professor of Government and Politics at George Mason University and Senior Research Fellow at Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs. He previously served as the Director of the Office of Faith-Based Partnerships at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and as Senior Advisor for Religion & Inclusive Societies at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). Prior government experience includes serving as a member of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff and as Senior Advisor in its Office of Religion and Global Affairs. His most recent book is *The Geopolitics of Religious Soft Power: How States Use Religion in Foreign Policy* (Oxford University Press).

**Katherine Marshall**, a senior fellow at Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, leads the center's work on religion and global development. She is also a professor of the practice of development, conflict, and religion in the Walsh School of Foreign Service, teaching diverse courses on the ethics of development work and mentoring students at many levels. She helped to create and now serves as the executive director of the World Faiths Development Dialogue, an NGO that works to enhance bridges between different sectors and institutions. In September 2022, she was appointed as a member of the Advisory Committee on Voluntary Foreign Aid at the U.S. Agency for International Development. Marshall has five decades of experience on a variety of development issues in Africa, Latin America, East Asia, and the Middle East, particularly those facing the world's poorest countries; one way she shares her expertise is through her blog [Faith in Action](#). She was a World Bank officer from 1971 to 2006, and she led the World Bank's faith and ethics initiative between 2000 and 2006. Marshall is a member of the Working Group on Child Rights and Family Values and the Working Group on Displaced Persons and Hospitality to the Stranger, both part of the Culture of Encounter Project.