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Cardinal George Koovakad, prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, poses for a portrait in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican in this file photo from Dec. 7, 2024. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)

by Cindy Wooden, Catholic News Service

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Vatican City — September 9, 2025

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When people of different religions work together to serve people in need, they show the world that faith promotes peace and not hostility, Pope Leo XIV said.

"When our dialogue is lived out in actions, a powerful message resounds: that peace, not conflict, is our most cherished dream, and that building this peace is a task we undertake together," the pope said in a message to an interreligious meeting in Bangladesh.

Cardinal George Koovakad, prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, was visiting Dhaka, the country's capital, Sept. 6-11 to meet with church leaders, seminarians and civil authorities and to participate in the interreligious meeting with A.F.M. Khalid Hossain, the government's religious affairs adviser.

In his message, released at the Vatican Sept. 9, Leo told participants, "Every group discussion, every joint service project or shared meal, every courtesy shown to a neighbor of another religion — these are bricks of what St. John Paul II called 'a civilization of love.'"

Islam is the state religion of Bangladesh, according to the country's constitution, and more than 90% of its population is Muslim. But the constitution also recognizes freedom of religion for all the nation's 167 million inhabitants. About 8% of the population is Hindu and, according to Vatican statistics, there are about 433,000 Catholics.

The theme for the interreligious meeting was "Promoting a Culture of Harmony between Brothers and Sisters," which Leo said not only reflected the openness of participants, but also demonstrated their belief that "our human community is truly one — in origin and in destiny under God."

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