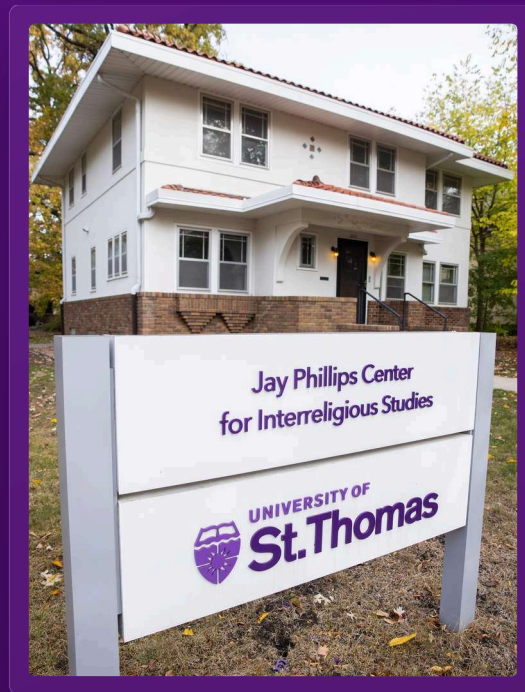




A year of encounter, a year of bridgebuilding

Impact report 2025–26 and a look at the year ahead, grounded in the conviction that interreligious engagement is core to the mission of a Catholic university.

Contents

Sixty years after Nostra Aetate, the Roman Catholic Church's call to encounter people of every religion and worldview is core to the mission of a Catholic university. Pope Francis called it a culture of encounter, "a culture of friendship, a culture in which we find brothers and sisters, in which we can also speak with those who think differently, as well as those who hold other beliefs, who do not have the same faith." This report reads the year through that call and the practice it asks of us: staying in relationship across difference.

01

FROM THE DIRECTOR

02

THE YEAR IN REVIEW, 2025–26

03

THE YEAR AHEAD, 2026–27

04

GRANTS AND INSTITUTIONAL IMPACT

05

SUPPORT THE CENTER'S WORK

Remembering the trail behind and looking at the road ahead...



Friends of the Center,

In my current research I have been thinking about relationships. Three in particular hold my attention: the relationship of interreligious studies to the broader study of religion, its relationship to interfaith engagement, and the relationship of the Jay Phillips Center to both the academy and the community.

I envision the Center standing with one foot on campus and one foot in the community. On campus, we lead the scholarship, where interreligious studies is a field with its own questions and methods. In the community, we stand among people already living with religious diversity, and we support their interfaith work.

That posture follows from how I understand the field. Interreligious studies is the ecology of the study of religion. It attends to relationships, patterns, and encounters between and among diverse

individuals, communities, and traditions that orient around religion differently, and how they meet and change one another over time. Interreligious studies examines the spaces between – the encounters – and what happens within them.

This year gave that ecology concrete form. The Catholic Church marked sixty years since *Nostra Aetate*, and we tried to do more than mark it. A rabbi and a scholar of Islam took up the anniversary in public. Students learned to disagree with curiosity. Survivors' testimony reached audiences through portraits and new technology. Musicians drew together Sephardic and Carnatic traditions over the care of water. Each was an encounter, and each put both feet to work: scholarship on campus, engagement in the community.

The year ahead holds similar threads. We host the national Viewpoints cohort, welcome Dr. Katharine Gerbner, and launch two cohorts built for sustainable encounters and relationships: the JPC Interreligious Studies emerging scholars with the Association for Interreligious Studies, and Minnesota leaders through MinneEncounter. Each builds relationships meant to last, the patterns an ecology depends on.

Thank you for being part of it.

Hans Gustafson

Hans Gustafson, Ph.D.

Director, Jay Phillips Center for Interreligious Studies
College of Arts and Sciences | University of St. Thomas

DIRECTOR'S YEAR OF SCHOLARSHIP

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Everyday Encounters: Humanizing Dialogue in Theory and Practice. Fortress Press, 2025.

"Engaging Religious Diversity: Radical Hospitality in Catholic Universities for the Common Public Good," in *Beneath the Roar and Tumult*, ed. Rachel Wheeler and Karen E. Eifler. Liturgical Press, 2025.

"From Indifference to Engagement: A Secular Response to Religious Diversity," in *Beyond Dialogue*, ed. Daniel Ross Goodman, Elaine Jean Lai and Anthony A. Lee. SUNY Press, 2026.

COURSES TAUGHT

Religion in Public and Professional Life

Interreligious Encounter

Dialogue and Disagreement in Religiously Diverse Secular Societies

Dialogue, Religious Diversity, and Leadership in Minnesota and Norway

SELECTED AFFILIATIONS

Co-chair, Interreligious and Interfaith Studies Unit, American Academy of Religion

Applied Religious Studies Committee, American Academy of Religion

Board of Directors, Association for Interreligious / Interfaith Studies

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

"Between 'Am I Wrong?' and 'Calmer Than You Are': Interreligious Leadership in a Diverse and Disagreement Society." Interfaith and Faith-Based Universities Conference, Brigham Young University, September 2025.

"Interreligious Phronesis: Bridging Practical Wisdom and Interfaith Engagement." European Academy of Religion, Vienna, July 2025.

"Belonging Through Difference: The Why and How of Engaging Religious Diversity in Catholic Higher Education," co-presented with William McDonough. The Teaching Hub, St. Catherine University, February 2026.

SECTION 02

2025–26: a year of *encounter*

The anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*

In October 1965 the Second Vatican Council promulgated *Nostra Aetate*. Two of the year's public lectures marked the sixtieth anniversary directly, one from Jewish–Catholic relations, one from the meeting of Islam and the Christian West.



Rabbi Abraham Skorka. Darrell Owens Photography

NOVEMBER • JEWISH–CATHOLIC RELATIONS

Rabbi Abraham Skorka

Senior Research Fellow for Jewish Studies and Jewish–Catholic Relations, Georgetown University

Sixty Years of Challenge and Hope: Catholicism and the Future of Jewish–Catholic Relations. Drawing on his friendship with the late Pope Francis, Skorka read *Nostra Aetate* as both a moral response to the Shoah and a lasting source of hope. He also spoke at Saint John's University, Benilde–St. Margaret's and for the JCRC, with coverage in the *Star Tribune* and *TC Jewfolk*. Co-sponsored with the Jay Phillips Center for Interfaith Learning at Saint John's University, the JCRC, Benilde–St. Margaret's and the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis.

APRIL • ISLAM AND THE CHRISTIAN WEST

Caner Dagli, eighth annual Terence Nichols Memorial Symposium

Monday, April 20, 2026 • South Woulfe Alumni Hall, St. Paul campus

The Boundaries and Bridges between Islam and the Christian West: Prerequisites for Understanding. Caner Dagli of the College of the Holy Cross. Co-sponsored with the Encountering Islam Initiative and the Department of Theology.



READ THE COVERAGE

Jewish and Catholic communities celebrate 60 years of a watershed moment. TC Jewfolk, November 2025.

Learning to disagree with *curiosity*

If interreligious engagement is a practice, disagreement is where it is tested. Much of the year's public work put that practice at the center.

St. Thomas was selected to host the fall 2026 retreat of the Viewpoints Fellowship, a year-long national program that trains undergraduate student leaders to navigate disagreement with curiosity. The Center announced the news in March. St. Thomas will host the six institutions in the fellowship's first expansion year, joining Dartmouth, BYU, Carnegie Mellon, Elon and the University of Delaware. The Center submitted fifteen student applications and secured eleven fellows in the national cohort of sixty-five.

The groundwork was laid in February, when Viewpoints founding executive director Shira Hoffer visited campus for two days. On February 17 the Center co-hosted the public panel *Justice, Character, and the Art of Disagreement* in Woulfe Alumni Hall, featuring Aaron Cobb of the Educating Character Initiative, Mikeya Griffin of the Rondo Community Land Trust, Shira Hoffer of The

Viewpoints Project and Yohuru Williams of the Racial Justice Initiative at St. Thomas. It was organized with the Four Pillars Project and the Center for the Common Good, with support from Interfaith America and Wake Forest University's Educating Character Initiative. The following day brought a student workshop, *Tangible Skills for Curious Disagreement*, and a workshop for faculty.

In March, Kambiz GhaneaBassiri of Carleton College delivered *Living Out Democratic Values: American Muslims and the Practice of Democracy*, co-sponsored with the Encountering Islam Initiative in the Department of Theology.

The year closed this strand in April with *Dialogue in Practice: Lessons from Norway*, an online conversation with Kirkelig Dialogsenter Oslo, the Church Dialogue Center Oslo.



Justice, Character, and the Art of Disagreement, February 2026



Tangible Skills for Curious Disagreement, February 2026



READ THE ANNOUNCEMENT

St. Thomas selected to host the Viewpoints Fellowship. blogs.stthomas.edu/jay-phillips-center-news

Forming dialogue across difference

Alongside the public events, the Center runs year-round programs that form students and community members in dialogue across religious, spiritual and worldview difference.

CERTIFICATION • YEAR-ROUND

Interfaith Fellows: Engaging Religious Diversity

A year-round certification with four micro-credentials, managed by Prof. Mary Elmstrand and funded in part by the Mike and Linda Fiterman Family Foundation. This year it added a Leadership Through Dialogue track and drew on student ambassadors as peer leaders: Glemma Tita-Sama Ndjeunu, Soora Khan, Max Segal and Naomi Peters.

DIALOGUE TRAINING

Bridging the Gap

A five-session bridgebuilding curriculum facilitated by Prof. Mary Elmstrand, with a \$200 student stipend. The spring cohort met five times, February through April.

DIALOGUE SERIES • EACH SEMESTER

Peace Meals

A six-part interfaith and intercultural dialogue series over lunch, with registration each semester. Led by Sarah Chamseddine and Campus Ministry.

IN THE CLASSROOM

Dialogue and Disagreement in Religiously Diverse Secular Societies

A course taught by the Center's director, carrying the same practice into the undergraduate curriculum.



PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

Mary Elmstrand, M.Div.

Interfaith Fellows and *Minne*Encounter program manager

Interfaith Fellows



Engaging Religious Diversity, the Center's year-round certification. Through hands-on dialogue, community engagement and a cohort of peers, students learn to lead across difference in the workplace, in public life and in their own neighborhoods. Open to all St. Thomas students, at their own pace or in a year-long cohort with a \$600 stipend.

1

Interfaith Scholar ACADEMIC FOUNDATION

An approved course, research project or online certificate.

2

Interfaith Practitioner COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement through internships, dialogue programs or the LtD track.

3

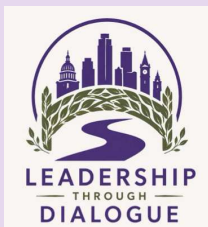
Interfaith Leader LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

Serve in a role or facilitate a dialogue session.

★

Interfaith Champion ALL THREE, PLUS

All three badges, four monthly sessions and a public reflection.



FLAGSHIP COHORT TRACK

Leadership Through Dialogue

A year-long cohort within Interfaith Fellows. Students join MinneEncounter Fellows for shared dialogue lunches, build on Bridging the Gap practices, attend fall and spring retreats, and step into facilitation. A \$600 stipend for full participation. Priority deadline May 6.

FLEXIBLE TRACK

Self-paced

Register, choose from a range of activities and earn badges on your own timeline. No application required.



LEARN MORE AND REGISTER

Interfaith Fellows: Engaging Religious Diversity. link.stthomas.edu/IF

Open to students of all religious, spiritual, secular and nonreligious worldviews. Managed by program manager Mary Elmstrand and director Hans Gustafson.

The year's largest strand

Holocaust education is one of the deepest expressions of the Center's mission, joining historical memory to living Jewish-Christian relationships. The Center organized several public events and co-sponsored a University of Minnesota lecture series.

ORGANIZED OR CO-ORGANIZED BY THE CENTER

- Feb 11** **David Frey**, *What You Do Matters: Lessons from Holocaust Perpetrators and Peacekeepers in Rwanda*. McNeely Hall, Room 100.
- Mar 1** **Jack El-Hai**, a conversation on *The Nazi and the Psychiatrist*, recently adapted as the film *Nuremberg*. O'Shaughnessy Education Center Auditorium.
- Mar 10** **Manny Gabler**, *Surviving the Holocaust: A Shanghai Refugee Story*. McNeely Hall, Room 100.



APRIL • MEMORY AND TECHNOLOGY

Todd Presner, Holocaust Testimony in the Age of AI

Thursday, April 16, 2026, noon to 1:15 p.m. • 3M Auditorium, Owens Science Hall, Room 150

Todd Presner of UCLA, author of *Ethics of the Algorithm*, on history, memory and ethics as artificial intelligence reshapes survivor testimony. Presented with Museum Studies and the Holocaust and Genocide Studies minor.

CO-SPONSORED, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA CENTER FOR JEWISH STUDIES



Jan 21
Jack Zipes

Feb 4
Sharon Musher

Mar 17
Devin Naar

Apr 15
Hannah Pollin-Galay



VIEW UPCOMING PUBLIC EVENTS

Public lectures, panels and concerts throughout the year. stthomas.campuslabs.com/engage

Memory and technology, side by side

Two paired installations addressed declining Holocaust knowledge among college students through portraiture, survivor testimony and emerging technology. Co-sponsored by the Museum Studies minor, the Holocaust and Genocide Studies minor, and the Innovation Fellows program.

EXHIBITION • MARCH TO APRIL; O'SHAUGHNESSY-FREY LIBRARY ROTUNDA

Transfer of Memory

A traveling exhibition by photographer David Sherman and writer Lili Chester, with the JCRC. Large-scale color portraits of Minnesota Holocaust survivors, photographed in their homes and paired with personal narratives of lived memory and dignity.

EXHIBITION • MARCH TO APRIL; DATA VISUALIZATION WALL, O'SHAUGHNESSY SCIENCE CENTER

IWitness Interactive Experience

Using the USC Shoah Foundation's platform, visitors ask questions of Holocaust survivors and receive real-time video responses drawn from roughly 55,000 hours of recorded testimony.



The IWitness installation, with Todd Presner on site at right.

IN THE NEWS



Exhibits promise that survivors' memories live on. TC Jewfolk



A St. Thomas Holocaust exhibit tells survivors' stories. Pioneer Press

Interreligious studies across the disciplines

The Faculty Fellows Program, launched in fall 2024, draws faculty from across the university into the intellectual and strategic life of the Center. Convened by director Hans Gustafson, the fellows meet each semester and carry the Center's mission into their departments.



Shaherzad Ahmadi ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF HISTORY

Author of *Bordering on War* (University of Texas Press), a history of Iran's Khuzestan province. She comments in national media on the U.S.-Iran conflict and continued research on the Red Cross in Iran.



Rabbi Ryan Dulkan ADJUNCT FACULTY IN THEOLOGY

Coordinator of the Encountering Judaism Initiative. Jewish studies, Midrash and scriptural interpretation.



Mary Elmstrand ADJUNCT FACULTY IN THEOLOGY

Program manager for the Center's Interfaith Fellows and MinneEncounter programs.



Christopher Wong Michaelson

PROFESSOR OF ETHICS AND BUSINESS LAW, OPUS DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR OF PRINCIPLED LEADERSHIP

Launched the course *Work and the Good Life* and published *The Meaning and Purpose of Work* (Routledge), with articles in *Business Ethics Quarterly* and *Clio*.



Fuad Naeem ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY

Teaches and researches Islam and Muslim intellectual and religious traditions.



Laurel Marshall Potter ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY

Won the Catholic Theological Society of America's Catherine Mowry LaCugna Award for the best new-scholar essay, for "Comparative Theology as Fundamental Theology" in *Theological Studies*. She also joined the Center's national Scholars in Interreligious Studies cohort.



Ted Ulrich PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY

Continued his book on Gandhi and Aurobindo Ghose, with recent work in the *Journal for Hindu-Christian Studies* and the *International Journal of Hindu Studies*.

Encounter through the *arts*

The Center's arts programming carries interreligious encounter into music and performance.

APRIL • CONCERT

Sacred Bridge: Earth and Water

Tuesday, April 14, 2026, 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Schoenecker Center Performance Hall

David Jordan Harris and Nirmala Rajasekar wove music, poetry and folktales from Sephardic *piyyutim* and *kantigas* and South Indian Carnatic ragas on the sanctity of water and care for the earth. Co-produced with the Jay Phillips Center for Interfaith Learning at Saint John's University and the Office of Sustainability Initiatives. A May screening of *Our Blue World: A Water Odyssey* extended the theme.



Sacred Bridge: Earth and Water at the Schoenecker Center, April 2026.

SECTION 03

2026–27: the practice *continues*

What is coming

SIGNATURE EVENT • SEPTEMBER

The Viewpoints Fellowship fall retreat



Friday to Sunday, September 4–6, 2026 • Minneapolis campus, Opus Hall

St. Thomas welcomes the full national cohort of roughly sixty fellows and staff from six institutions for the fellowship's in-person fall retreat. The Center serves as sponsor, venue, and campus host, with the Center for the Common Good. Sessions cover constructive disagreement, emotional resilience, community building and narrative storytelling.



PUBLIC LECTURE • OCTOBER

Who Decides What Counts as Religion?

Obeah, Slavery, and the Making of Religion in Colonial Jamaica

Tuesday, October 6, 2026, noon to 1:10 p.m. • North Woulfe Alumni Hall, Room 378

Katharine Gerbner, Ph.D., associate professor of history and director of religious studies at the University of Minnesota, draws on her book *Archival Irruptions* (Duke University Press) to show how colonial records reveal African ways of understanding the world. In collaboration with seven programs across the College of Arts and Sciences, including History, English and the M.A. in Diversity Leadership.



Free and open to the public. Details and optional registration for Dr. Gerbner's lecture.
tommielink.stthomas.edu/event/11929556

PROGRAMS IN FOCUS

Two cohort programs also carry the year ahead. The pages that follow introduce each in full.

Jay Phillips Center Scholars in Interreligious Studies — a national fellowship for emerging scholars, with senior scholars in residence

MinneEncounter Fellows — a yearlong cohort forming emerging Minnesota leaders in dialogue across difference

Jay Phillips Center Scholars in Interreligious Studies

A field-building fellowship offered with the Association for Interreligious / Interfaith Studies (AIIS) and the *Journal of Interreligious Studies*. Each scholar receives a stipend, a short residency at St. Thomas, mentorship from the senior scholars in residence, peer-review mentorship with the journal, and a supported opportunity to present at the American Academy of Religion.

SENIOR SCHOLARS IN RESIDENCE, 2026-27



Dr. M. Cooper Minister

Professor of religion and director of Shenandoah Conversations, Shenandoah University



Dr. Kevin Minister

Professor of religion and director of Shenandoah Conversations, Shenandoah University. Vice president and president-elect of AIIS

THE 2026-27 COHORT



Samah Choudhury

Assistant professor of religious studies, DePaul University



Soren Hessler

Assistant professor, Candler School of Theology, Emory University



Shaunesse' Jacobs Plaisimond

Assistant professor of religion and health, University of South Florida



Laurel Marshall Potter

Assistant professor of theology, University of St. Thomas

ALSO A JPC FACULTY FELLOW



Kate E. Soules

Executive director, Religion and Education Collaborative



Jizhang Yi

Founding director, Institute for Humanistic Buddhist Thought and Practice, Trinity College, University of Toronto



Meet the full cohort and learn more about the program: sites.google.com/view/jpc-scholars-in-irs

MinneEncounter Fellows

A yearlong cohort program for emerging Minnesota leaders who navigate religious, spiritual and worldview diversity in their work and communities. Designed and led by the Center in partnership with the Collegeville Institute.

Fellows meet monthly at St. Thomas and gather for two residential retreats at the Collegeville Institute. They build relationships through storytelling, and dialogue, share a monthly lunch with the Center's undergraduate interfaith leaders, and carry out a project in their own context with program funding. Led by Hans Gustafson and Mary Elmstrand of the Center, and Aizaiah Yong of the Collegeville Institute.

THE 2026-27 COHORT



Eamaan Rabbat

Dean of academic affairs,
Ribāṭ University



**Dr. Felicia
Washington Sy**

Senior director, Cornerstone
Advocacy Services



Hue Schlieu

DEI coordinator



Rabbi Jill Avrin

Director of campus affairs,
JCRC



Kelli Kester

Licensed alcohol and drug
counselor



Matt Kaul

Technical writer, Medtronic



Muhammad Jiwa

Facilitator and sustainable
realtor



Sister Pearl Pham

Interfaith chaplain



**Sarah
Chamseddine**

Campus minister, University
of St. Thomas



Meet the cohort and learn more. collegevilleinstitute.org/minneencounter

MinneEncounter joins the Dakota mni, water, the Scandinavian minne, memory, and Minnesota itself. Encounter is a meeting with specific people, with the willingness to be changed.

Dialogue and religious diversity in Norway

THEO 228, From Frozen Lakes to Frosty Fjords, is a January-term study abroad course that teaches dialogue through immersive, practice-based learning in Norway. It puts students inside the kind of encounter the Center is built to foster.



2025 J-Term group at the Dialogue Peace Bench in Oslo.

After a few days in Minnesota, students work in Norway with the Dialogue Pilots through dialogue sessions, workshops and encounters with Norwegian scholars and peers. They examine antisemitism, Islamophobia, secularism, pluralism and freedom of expression, and Norway's commitment to *det livssyns åpne samfunn*, a worldview-open society rooted in constructive disagreement. Students leave with practical dialogue skills and a clearer sense of how religiously diverse secular societies navigate deep difference.

TAUGHT BY

Hans Gustafson and Rabbi Ryan Dulkan. January 2027 • 4 credits • undergraduate.



A few spaces remain for January 2027. Read the full brochure and apply. stthomas.via-trm.com/program_brochure/33565

Funded work

External and internal funding lets the Center extend its mission. Recent completed grants built the foundation for this year's work.

900+

PARTICIPANTS AT THE 2025
IDEAS FESTIVAL

13

INTERFAITH FELLOWS
GRADUATED ACROSS THREE
COHORTS

225+

REACHED BY CULTURE OF
ENCOUNTER INITIATIVES

FOUNDATIONAL GRANTS, RECENTLY COMPLETED

Inspiring Campus Change (Interfaith America with the Templeton Religion Trust, \$10,000, 2024–25) produced a 44-page multifaith strategic planning report and three Culture of Encounter initiatives reaching more than 225 participants. The Arthur Vining Davis Foundations grant (2021–25) built the Interfaith Fellows program across three cohorts, graduating 13 Fellows and culminating in a 2025 Ideas Festival of 18 events and more than 900 participants.

ACTIVE THIS YEAR

Campus Pluralism Grant for ACCU Institutions

INTERFAITH AMERICA AND THE ACCU • \$8,000 • 2025–26

Supports the integration of Peace Meals, Bridging the Gap and a Viewpoints Project campus visit into a multi-semester pluralism strategy.

Bridging the Gap on Campus

INTERFAITH AMERICA • \$10,000 • OCT 2025–JUN 2026

Supports a year-long undergraduate bridgebuilding cohort of ten to twenty students.

Portraits and Pixels

FACULTY AND STAFF INNOVATION FELLOWS

Supported the paired exhibitions and programming on survivor testimony and artificial intelligence.

Many thanks to our *partners*

The Center builds its programs with institutions and organizations across the Twin Cities, the country and beyond. Its work belongs to this wider network.

Jay Phillips Center for Interfaith Learning

Saint John's University. Co-produced concerts and shared programming.

Collegeville Institute

Co-designs and leads the MinneEncounter Fellows program.

Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations

National network of centers the Center belongs to.

Association for Interreligious / Interfaith Studies

The field's scholarly association. Partner on the Scholars fellowship.

Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas

Holocaust education and the MINNE fellowship.

University of Minnesota Center for Jewish Studies

Co-sponsored the Jewish studies lecture series.

Interfaith America

Grants and student bridgebuilding programs.

The Viewpoints Project

The Viewpoints Fellowship in constructive disagreement.

Interreligious Studies Media

Publishing partnership supporting Interreligious Studies Press.

Journal of Interreligious Studies

Peer-reviewed journal in the field. Peer-review mentorship for the Scholars fellowship.

Minnesota Multifaith Network

Statewide multifaith network.

Join us

The Center's programs are free and open to the public because encounter across difference belongs to everyone, not only to the academy. We invite you to be part of the year ahead.

Attend.

Public lectures, panels and concerts throughout the year.

Connect.

Join the mailing list to hear what is coming.

Give.

Make a gift to sustain the work.



MAILING LIST



GIVE

Visit stthomas.edu/jpc

Follow the Center on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and X

facebook.com/USTJPC · instagram.com/jay.phillips.1293

linkedin.com/company/jayphillipscenter · x.com/jpcifl

Jay Phillips Center for Interreligious Studies

University of St. Thomas | College of Arts and Sciences

2115 Summit Ave., St. Paul, Minnesota 55105

(651) 962-5780 · jpc@stthomas.edu · stthomas.edu/jpc