I bring to this conference the good wishes not only of the monks and nuns of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, but of the many religious and laity who have been associated with us in our interreligious activities over the past thirty-seven years. We are honored to be part of this celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Nostra Aetate, which occurs in the year that also marks the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Thomas Merton, one of the pioneers of monastic interreligious dialogue.

The organization known as Monastic Interreligious Dialogue began in 1978 in response to an appeal of Cardinal Sergio Pignedoli, the second president of what is now the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. In his letter to the Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Confederation, he asked that monastic men and women become more closely involved in interreligious dialogue since, as he put it, “Monasticism is a bridge between religions.”

I wish to take this occasion to express our gratitude to Cardinal Tauran and the entire staff Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue for their continuing support and encouragement. I would also like to say how grateful we are to our Holy Father, Pope Francis, for his emphasis on friendship and fraternity in interreligious dialogue. We were greatly honored by his appreciative reference to Monastic Interreligious Dialogue in his apostolic letter to all consecrated men and women on the occasion of the year of consecrated life.

In his Rule Saint Benedict speaks of a monk as someone who truly seeks God—vere Deum quaerit. Dialogue with the adherents of other religious traditions is becoming an ever more integral and important part of the Christian monastic quest for God. With the Trappist monk Christian de Chergé of Tibhirine, one of the shining examples of dialogue at the level of religious experience, we are growing in our understanding that, as he said in L’invincible espérance, “Speaking otherwise of God is not speaking of another God—Parler autrement de Dieu ne veut pas dire parler d’un autre Dieu” (p. 128).

We give thanks for the witness of the followers of other religions who, by sharing with us their search for what is of ultimate value, help us and all Christians in our search for God.