



## Hundreds Attend Events Featuring Pope Francis' Friend, Rabbi Abraham Skorka

November 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016



*From left to right: CCJS Director Dr. Matthew Tapie, Saint Leo University President Dr. William J. Lennox Jr., Rabbi Abraham Skorka, Abbott Isaac Camacho, OSB, of Saint Leo Abbey.*

The Center for Catholic-Jewish studies focused most of its energies in the fall on the much-anticipated November visit of Rabbi Abraham Skorka of Buenos Aires. As many know, Rabbi Skorka is a dear personal

friend of Pope Francis, and I truly believe his visit and several speaking engagements strengthened Catholic-Jewish relations broadly. At Saint Leo, he stayed with the Benedictine monks of Saint Leo Abbey and shared in prayers and conversations with clergy and faculty. In a bit of a personal introduction, he spoke with Dr. Stephen Okey, assistant professor of theology, for the blog *Daily Theology* in a [fascinating interview](#) about his formative years, his training first as a scientist, and his decision to become a rabbi. (The rabbi sometimes speaks softly, so you will want to adjust the volume setting on your device).

Moving to the topic of interfaith relations, Rabbi Skorka delivered multiple heartfelt lectures that collectively reached more than 400 students, faculty, and interested community members from here to Sarasota, FL. His first talk, available at this link, ["My Journey with Pope Francis,"](#) was a retelling of his introduction to the Argentinian cardinal who became Pope Francis and their collaboration today. The remainder of the day focused on the current state of Catholic-Jewish relations in Florida. Rabbi Skorka engaged in dialogue with His Excellency Frank J. Dewane, Bishop of the Diocese of Venice; Rabbi Gary Klein of Palm Harbor, FL; and Dr. John Borelli of Georgetown University. Additionally, interreligious officers from the Archdiocese of Miami, the Diocese of St. Petersburg, and the Diocese of Venice, each summarized the present status of Jewish-Catholic relations initiatives in their respective areas. A highlight was Rabbi Richard Birnholz of Tampa discussing his congregation's tradition of visiting Catholic parishes in South Tampa.

In the evening, Rabbi Skorka delivered a lecture to students and guests gathered in the Saint Leo Abbey Church, "Why Interreligious Dialogue Matters." He focused on the theme of cultivating dialogue and emphasizing how such investments of human time, attention, and empathy work to prevent violence. "I mean real dialogue, sincere dialogue," he said.

Next, Rabbi traveled with us to Temple Emanu-El in Sarasota to receive the center's Eternal Light Award for his lifelong commitment to Jewish learning, interreligious dialogue, and promoting understanding and respect between Catholics and Jews throughout the world. Rabbi Skorka is the 13th recipient of this award. He delivered a keynote address for the occasion recalling the intellectual contributions of an influential philosopher and civil rights leader, "[My Engagement with the Thought of Abraham Joshua Heschel](#)." It was Rabbi Heschel's work that opened Rabbi's Skorka's heart to dialogue. Dr. Susannah Heschel, daughter of Rabbi Heschel, gave the response. We learned that this encounter between Rabbi Skorka and Susannah Heschel was actually a reunion. Rabbi Skorka had visited the Heschel home in New York decades ago, just after he decided to become a rabbi.

We are so grateful to Rabbi Brenner Glickman, and the members of Temple Emanu-El, for their kindness in co-sponsoring this portion of Rabbi Skorka's visit.

After leaving Sarasota, Rabbi Skorka traveled to Pennsylvania to Saint Vincent College to engage in a high-level dialogue regarding Catholic-Jewish relations with an audience of more than 400 people. He ended his tour in Cincinnati, where he visited Hebrew Union College and then spoke to students and faculty of Xavier University. It was our pleasure at CCJS to arrange for the rabbi these visits to northern destinations.

Rabbi Skorka also requested that I write to the Holy Father, Pope Francis, to summarize the events of the rabbi's trip. It was my privilege to do so. We are so grateful for our time with Rabbi Skorka and are thankful to G-d for bringing the rabbi and the pope together in Buenos Aires decades ago. We pray that the work of leaders like Rabbi Skorka and Pope Francis will continue to effect positive change in interreligious relations throughout the world.

**Contact:**

**Matthew Tapie, Ph.D.**

*Director of the Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies and Assistant Professor of Theology*

[matthew.tapie@saintleo.edu](mailto:matthew.tapie@saintleo.edu)

[www.saintleo.edu/ccjs](http://www.saintleo.edu/ccjs)