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## **AJC's 'ambassador of Judaism': Rabbi travels the globe to promote interfaith relations**

by [dan pine](#)

Rabbi David Rosen has a mantra: To make the world a better place, but “even if I’m kidding myself, I’m having a lot of fun.”

The British-born Israeli does have a great gig. As director of inter-religious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, Rosen travels the world, meeting with religious leaders of all faiths, breaking bread with them and sharing a Jewish perspective.

“AJC pays me to be ambassador of Judaism to the religions of the world,” he said of his post, which he’s held since 2001. “I have the empowerment of the agency behind me — not just the material empowerment, but the moral empowerment as well.”



*Rabbi David Rosen photo/cathleen maclearie*

Rosen, 59, counts among his friends two popes (one living, one dead), multiple cardinals, ministers, imams and a Dalai Lama — well, the Dalai Lama.

He is the only Orthodox rabbi ever to be knighted by the Vatican. He earned that for his efforts to improve Catholic-Jewish relations. Among his achievements, he helped negotiate the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and the Holy See.

Success in high-level interfaith work requires “having a good Jewish background, the knowledge to address virtually every issue from the perspective of your heritage,” Rosen said during a recent stop in San Francisco for some AJC business. “At the same time, having an [embracing] attitude toward humanity at large, which I would put in Jewish language as seeing the divine image in every human being.”

Rosen's resume includes stints as Chief Rabbi of Ireland (he was recruited from his native England), senior rabbi of a large South African Orthodox congregation (again, recruited) and professor of Jewish studies at the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies. However, his work in inter-religious understanding forms the bulk of his curriculum vitae.

He tends to take the long view when it comes to Jewish interfaith relations. In that regard, nothing pleases him more than the shift in Catholic-Jewish relations, which he says have never been as good as they are today.

"There is no comparable transformation in the history of humankind to that of the Catholic Church toward the Jewish people," Rosen said, referring to the dramatic theological and social shift since the scope of the Holocaust, and the church's passivity, came to light.

Adds Rosen: "To have gone from Jews [being] condemned to suffer and wander, rejected by God, to a situation where [Pope John Paul II] described us as the dearly beloved elder brother of the church: there's nothing comparable."

The picture is nowhere near as positive when it comes to Jewish-Muslim relations, though it is not as bleak as some might expect. Based on his experience with Islam around the globe, Rosen believes the vast majority of Muslims are what he calls "moderates."

"I'm not Pollyannaish," he said. "I know there are plenty of nasty people out there. What we need to do, if we're serious about defending the Jewish people, is identifying all those constructive [Muslim] voices, strengthen them, empower them and develop constructive relationships with them."

Rosen was one of the founders of Rabbis for Human Rights, a multi-denominational group that often stands at the front lines of human rights battles on behalf of Israeli and Palestinian Arabs.

Perhaps because he witnessed reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, and between whites and blacks in South Africa, Rosen is upbeat about the prospects for solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He's even upbeat about resolving Israel's thorny religious-secular divide.

He's basically an upbeat guy.

"It's very difficult to have a sense of Jewish history and not be upbeat," Rosen said. "We defeated all the odds. Even our [Israeli] politicians are a great source of faith, because if we can survive despite them, then by God, someone must be looking out for us."

<http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/61752/ajcs-ambassador-of-judaism-rabbi-travels-the-globe-to-promote-interfaith-re/>