

‘Peacemakers in Action’: Interfaith Non-Profit Tanenbaum Celebrates ‘Grassroots Activists’ Building Peace in Conflict Zones Abroad and In Workplaces and Schools at Home

AMT Staff

CEO of Tanenbaum, Rev. Mark Fowler, tells AMT how the organization’s new podcast will help build on its message of greater religious and social understanding.



AMT sat down with Rev. Mark Fowler, the CEO of Tanenbaum, the non-profit founded in 1965 by the “Human Rights Rabbi,” Marc Tanenbaum — a world-renowned pioneer in interfaith dialogue. Rev. Fowler, who was ordained in 2012, is using his extensive background in education to spearhead Tanenbaum’s work in peacebuilding at home and abroad, whether it’s countering extremism and conflict in war zones or combatting domestic workplace harassment or school bullying.



Pictured: Tanenbaum with Pope John Paul II in 1990

Rev. Fowler tells AMT about his journey to finding Tanenbaum and how the organization's new "Peacemakers in Action" podcast is boosting their pioneering work in breaking down barriers and fostering more meaningful interfaith relationships.

American Muslim Today: Tell us about Tanenbaum and what fueled its creation.

Mark Fowler: The [Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding](#) promotes justice and builds respect for religious differences. Over the last 30 years, Tanenbaum has grown into an innovative organization that transforms individuals and institutions to reduce prejudice, hatred and violence.

At Tanenbaum, we know that religion and religious identity are powerful motivators that are often misunderstood and abused to fuel tension, conflict, division, dehumanization and violence. Since 2018 alone, more than 80% of hate crimes worldwide have been committed against religious and racial minorities. Tanenbaum's Workplace, Peacebuilding, Health Care and Education programs raise awareness, build knowledge and implement strategies to promote long-term tangible change for more respectful and inclusive behavior in institutions and organizations worldwide.

T O D A Y



Pictured: Tanenbaum “Peacemakers in Action” Pastor James Wuye (Nigeria), Maria Ida “Deng” Giguinto (Philippines) and Reverend Jacklevyn “Jacky” Frits Manuputty (Indonesia).

AMT: Tell us about your work with the organization. Why did you choose to become involved with Tanenbaum?

MF: I found Tanenbaum when I was looking for work in training and development and education broadly defined in 2007 — education is a very important part of my history. In a way, Tanenbaum became an opportunity for me to explore and grow in an unknown realm: interreligious understanding.

I was hired as the Educator and Trainer for Tanenbaum and worked with the staff in our four program areas: Workplace, Peacebuilding, Health Care and Education. I was very motivated and inspired by Tanenbaum’s Peacemakers in Action. Our Peacemakers are individuals religiously motivated to end violence in active conflict zones around the world. In the face of conflicts that are often deemed by the world as intractable, they find the resolve within their religious and spiritual beliefs to work for peace amid chaos.



AMT: In what ways does Tanenbaum help build respect for religious differences and how have you worked with the Muslim community?

MF: Intolerance for religious difference is often bred from a lack of understanding of religious or spiritual practices and/or overt and subtle biases we may hold against a person or group of people. A [2019 PEW study](#) highlights U.S. adults' general ability to answer basic questions about the Bible and Christianity but shows that most are less familiar with other religions and world traditions.

Tanenbaum provides comprehensive solutions that foster respect for religious and non-religious beliefs and practices in the areas in which we work. We have been acknowledged as a globally recognized expert in providing thought leadership, innovative resources and experiential trainings.

Tanenbaum knows there are a number of ways that Islamophobia can manifest in very real-life situations and many are very overt. The reality is that there are also

many more subtle ways in which Muslims can feel excluded or disrespected, in the form of microaggressions.

Our Workplace program creates religiously inclusive HR policies, internal communications and training for managers and employees on topics like creating faith-based employee resource groups, establishing quiet rooms for prayer and scheduling reflection and flexible time off during holidays. Building respect for differences, at any age, requires intentionality and support, and it has never been more important to build a safe and supportive learning environment for all students.

Tanenbaum was a founding member of PrepareNY, a coalition of organizations working to combat acts of hate against Muslims in the year before the 10th anniversary of 9/11. We've created fact sheets and study questions for teachers to use with students to dismantle stereotypes against Muslims and educate them on the diversity of Islam.

AMT: Tell us about your commitment to peacebuilding.

The Peacebuilding program's work is twofold: it recognizes and documents the work of religiously motivated peacebuilders and convenes the Peacemakers in Action Network. The Network is comprised of 30 grassroots peace activists working across faith communities in 23 conflict and post-conflict zones. By documenting their work for more than 20 years, Tanenbaum is not only shining a light on models of transformed relationships and interfaith community building, we are taking the lessons the Peacemakers have taught us and creating resources such as [memorandums](#), eLearning modules and our newly launched [Peacemakers in Action podcast](#).

Through these, we can engage with key stakeholders, from diplomats at the Department of State to students of peacebuilding around the world, and ensure that the voices of all faith communities are heard. Highlighting the role Islam plays in peacebuilding around the world dismantles the stereotypes of the faith and its adherents.





AMT: Tell us about the Peacemakers in Action podcast. How will this boost your work?

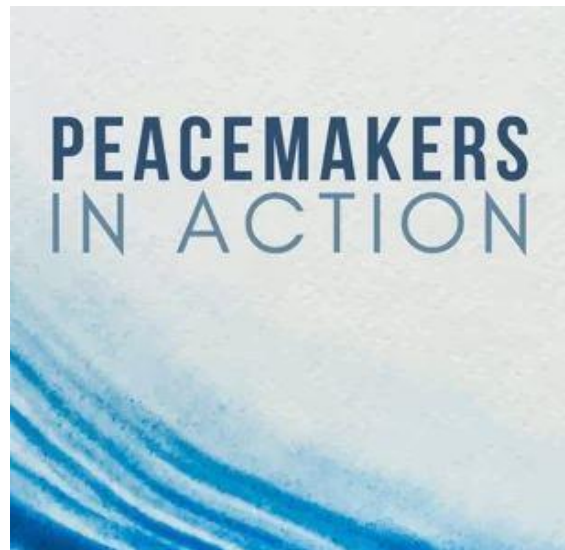
MF: The “Peacemakers in Action” podcast features the stories of grassroots activists motivated by their faith to pursue peace in their war-torn societies. These case studies feature two Tanenbaum Peacemakers in Action, Dishani Jayaweera of Sri Lanka and Jacky Manuputty of Indonesia.

It comes at a critical time, as mounting global religious tensions become increasingly politicized. Peace practitioners, international actors, students, diplomats and policymakers need to hear these firsthand solutions. The podcast model of our case studies also allows anyone interested in peace and peacebuilding to learn from the lives of these courageous people.

In the past, peacebuilding experts and the U.S. State Department have drawn from our previous works — Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution Volumes I and II — to inform their approach and provide models of conflict transformation. With the new audio format, we've spoken with peacebuilding professors and practitioners who are excited to continue including

the Peacemaker in Action stories as part of their curricula and work. The podcast allows for the audience to hear from the Peacemakers and experts directly, in a mobile format adapted to remote learning.

Our colleagues in the Workplace program at Tanenbaum have started incorporating the lessons from the “Peacemakers in Action” podcast into some of their training for Corporate Members and other companies. Lessons from Dishani’s work, like working with seemingly disparate groups, can be a lesson for all people, not just in the peacebuilding space. We didn’t anticipate this impact, but we look forward to its development.



“Peacemakers in Action” is available to stream through [Apple](#), [Spotify](#) and [Google](#).