

Christian-Jewish dialogue at ANU reflects on antisemitism, safety and social cohesion

The Canberra Christian-Jewish Dialogue Group met at the Australian National University on 29 July 2026 to reflect on the Royal Commission into Anti-Semitism and Social Cohesion. The in-person meeting brought together around twenty participants, including Jewish students, Christian participants, Jewish community representatives, Mr Peter Cain MLA and supporters of Christian-Jewish dialogue.

The discussion focused on the lived experience of Jewish students at ANU, the wider challenge of antisemitism in Australian society, analysis of current politics and the Gaza War, and the practical role Christian allies can play in strengthening social cohesion.

Jewish student representatives described a campus environment in which they often feel the need to assess social and political safety before speaking openly about being Jewish, having Israeli family connections or participating in Jewish student life. This is mainly due to concern that revealing Jewish identity may change how others see or treat them.

This pressure affects ordinary student life, including attendance at student events, participation in class discussions and willingness to join Jewish student networks. One student described the constant vigilance involved in deciding when to speak and when to remain silent, especially when discussion touches on Israel. Another spoke of the academic consequences of this pressure, including needing to step back from courses because the campus environment had become too difficult.

ANU's institutional response to antisemitism is mixed. Jewish student representatives acknowledged regular engagement with university administration, including ongoing meetings, but have often felt their concerns were not fully heard or acted upon. A particular concern is ANU's adoption of only part of the Universities Australia definition of antisemitism. A university definition needs to recognise not only discrimination against Jews as a religious or ethnic group, but also historical antisemitic tropes and how antisemitism appears in political language about Israel.

A practical concern is the enforcement of poster policy. Material regarded by Jewish students as antisemitic has remained in central campus spaces for far too long after complaints. The university has allowed material that is framed as political criticism of Israel while drawing on antisemitic stereotypes.

Comparing ANU's approach with other universities, Monash is a positive example because of its engagement with Jewish students and its willingness to facilitate dialogue between Jewish and Muslim students. The University of Canberra has shown a quicker and calmer response to concerns raised by Jewish students.

The tension between safety and openness in Jewish community life has led to the need for security at Jewish venues and events, with registration processes, undisclosed locations and security checks that make Jewish communal life harder to access. This burden also affects student organising. Jewish student representatives need to consider safety when staffing a stall, meeting new people and growing the student community.

Christian student groups need to become more visibly present in support of Jewish students. Support from outside the Jewish community is limited. Practical ways for Christians to build stronger relationships can include a Shabbat meal, informal campus gatherings and conversations on the shared history of Judaism and Christianity.

The connection between antisemitism, anti-Zionism and political language is a serious concern. Jewish people are expected to answer for Israel in public debate. Legitimate political criticism does not include language that denies Jewish self-determination or makes Jewish students feel unsafe. Claims about genocide are particularly troubling in a context where

Hamas started the war and could have ended it at any time by releasing the hostages, but instead chose to use the people of Gaza as human shields.

The Royal Commission is an important opportunity for practical change, with hopes that it will lead to stronger education, clearer institutional responsibilities, better policy enforcement and greater accountability for antisemitic conduct. Education is especially important, including school and university programs that teach about antisemitism, racism and prejudice through personal stories and historical memory.

Mr Peter Cain MLA offered practical avenues for support through the ACT Legislative Assembly, including petitions, motions, questions on notice and speeches. Advocacy should also engage university governance.

The work of dialogue can include maintaining direct contact with Jewish students, identifying trusted Christian students and student groups willing to engage respectfully, exploring joint Christian–Jewish student gatherings, supporting stronger ANU policy and enforcement, and encouraging Christian communities to learn more about antisemitism and the Jewish roots of Christianity.

The deeper purpose of the meeting was relational as well as practical. Jewish students said it mattered to be heard and seen. Christian participants were challenged to turn sympathy into action. The group recognised that social cohesion depends not only on formal policy, but on repeated acts of trust, friendship, courage and shared presence.

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ANU Chaplaincy