



Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee Walking Together

by Anne Mulqueen, OFS

In my last article for *TAU-USA*, I said the next article would focus on *growing in communion*. However, in the time between that article and this one, an important event took place: the first meeting of the current Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee. It didn't take long for us to realize that we couldn't address *growing in communion* until we knew where the OFS was in that process. And so with this article, I am enlisting your help so that we can serve you more effectively.

Several of you may be too young to remember that before Vatican II, it was generally assumed that the Catholic Church was *the one and the only Body of Christ* and that all other Christian churches were regarded as separated or unorthodox. Vatican II changed this "interpretation" to include other denominations in the Body of Christ. The Roman church expanded its interpretation of the Body of Christ to include Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants. Thereafter, a number of ecumenical endeavors began.

After the council we began to experience joint prayer, collaboration in social ministry, and ecumenical theological education at Catholic universities. Since November 21, 1964 – almost 50 years ago – when Pope Paul VI promulgated *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Decree on Ecumenism, it appears that we may not have paid a meaningful amount of attention to this decree nor given it a place of importance in Secular Franciscan formation.

Therefore, the Ecumenical-Interfaith Committee (EIC) would like to test that assumption and determine whether or not it is true. We decided that this column in *TAU-USA* would be an ideal vehicle to revive an ecumenical and interfaith dialogue in our Order.

In April of this year, the EIC held its first meeting in Massachusetts. The agenda was loosely constructed and saturated in prayer. Since it was the first time we had gathered as a committee, significant time was allotted to getting to know each other and finding out where the Spirit has been leading us individually in regard to ecumenism and interfaith ministry. The meeting was timed so the member of EIC could stay on to be participants in a workshop given by the Joint Committee for Franciscan Unity (JCFU), which followed immediately after the committee meeting. The JCFU is made up of The Third Order Society of St. Francis (TSSF), an Anglican/Episcopal order; the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans (OEF), an order of Protestant denominations, independent Christian churches, and Catholic communions; and the OFS, which we all know means *Ordo Franciscanus Secularis*.

As the EIC meeting progressed, it became apparent to the committee that we had no idea of how much the general membership of the Secular Franciscan Order knows about other Christian and non-Christian faiths. It became obvious that we could not serve you without knowing what you want and what you need from us. We needed to know where to begin.

Slowly but surely the Holy Spirit led us to go straight to the source of that information – you! And that is why we are asking you to take some time and answer a few very important questions so that we can serve you – not as we think you need – but as you actually need.

A short email to amulqueensfo@gmail.com will be sufficient. Don't worry about grammar, syntax, spelling, etc. – we want **just the facts!** Therefore, I am giving you an outline for your

answers. If one of the questions does not apply to your situation, simply skip over that question. And so we begin:

1. The name of your regional fraternity and your name.
2. May we contact you for follow-up?
3. Does your local or regional fraternity participate in any ongoing ecumenical and/or interfaith interaction?

And if so, with which denominations or faiths do you interact?

How – education, worship, outreach or another way?

4. Is there a local council of churches or interfaith community in the area in which you live and if so, please describe?
5. Does your parish have any Christian educational offerings featuring ecumenical or interfaith issues and if yes, please describe?
6. How familiar are you and your fraternity members with the Vatican II documents, especially *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Christian unity), *Nostra Aetate* (non-Christian religions), and Blessed John Paul II's encyclical letter *Ut Unum Sint* – (“that they may all be one...”)?
7. In your Inquirers/Candidates' formation groups, do you discuss or visit other churches, synagogues, mosques or other houses of worship as part of their preparation and if yes, please describe:
8. Considering the various kinds of ministry in your fraternity, on a scale of 1 (not at all important) to 10 (very important) how would you rate the importance of ecumenical and interfaith relations to your fraternal life?

I know that not all of you will agree with the need for further effort and education in the areas of ecumenism and interfaith dialogue. But I do want to initiate a dialogue with you in a reciprocal and respectful manner. The E-I Committee and I serve at your pleasure. Our

guiding principle is the command of Christ in John 17:21, “*that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*”

Whatever information you may be able to provide is greatly appreciated. We will do our best to serve you and your fraternities during our term of office.

Wishing you peace and all that is good,

Anne Mulqueen, OFS
Chair – Ecumenical-Interfaith Committee

Committee Members

Delia Banchs, OFS
Michael Carsten, OFS
Mary Lou Kreider, OFS
John Szczepanski, OFS



“Dialogue should help to build bridges connecting all people, in such a way that everyone can see in the other not an enemy, not a rival, but a brother or sister.”

Pope Francis