

Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee Walking Together

by Anne Mulqueen, OFS

Dear sisters and brothers,

It is serendipitous that the subject of this article quite literally is about *walking together* with one of our sister Franciscan Orders—the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans (OEF).

Ecumenical Franciscans come from all different Christian denominations. They profess a General Rule similar to our own, and in addition to this Rule, each member draws up a Personal Rule of Life based on the General Rule. Candidates are expected to be under spiritual direction throughout their formation process and after profession, Ecumenical Franciscans continue this practice.

My sister and companion in the ecumenical vineyard of the Lord is Shoshanah Kay, the co-minister of the Ecumenical Franciscans. In October 2015, Shoshanah came to our National Chapter in New Jersey and delivered a reflection that captured the essence of her Order. Inspired by her presentation, St. Clare Region adapted parts of Shoshanah's reflection for use at their regional chapter. With Shoshanah's permission I am sharing with you her unedited and enlightening reflection.

You, Secular Franciscans, have thousands upon thousands of members. We, Ecumenical Franciscans have tens upon tens.

You are pushing 800 years old. We are barely 30 something.

Measuring our years to your years, we are but kid-Franciscans.

Measuring our size to your size, we are barely more than a local fraternity.

We are an Order, not a local fraternity. But, nevertheless, let's stay with that image:

Imagine a really big fraternity of the biggest-hearted Franciscans you could ever meet. But scattered all across the United States and several more flung across several seas.

Bighearted Franciscans, committed to Christ and to one another as Catholic and Protestant, clergy and lay, married, partnered, single and celibate, of various ages, genders and sexual orientations, varying in education, profession, possessions and passions.

Bound together by a fascination with Francis and Clare

in their joyful abandon and reckless surrender into the abundant, overflowing, unlimited Love of our Living Lord.

Gentle, generous love which these two — our guides and yours — held in tenacious trust and expressed in tender attention to the least, the little, the lost and the leper.

On the surface, we may look very different from you. But at our deepest cores, the difference fades fast.

Here and there, and now and then, we in our little Order get together in 2's and 3's or 10's and 12's. And once a year, we make a really big effort

to gather all together — in one spot — for 5 days.

During these 5 days, our Chapter/Convocation, we go deep; we get close. We milk these days for all they are worth. Because we don't live close. And, for some of us, it's all we get — face-to-face — — these 5 days —

We worship; we pray; we sing; we laugh. We wonder together . . . We argue sometimes. We offend. We falter. We break bread. We learn to forgive. We begin again. And again. And again.

From this year's Chapter, I could share many things. I choose to share this one: We made a decision. A decision to discern — together — in prayer about anything and everything. Trusting that Our God will lead us to who-knows-where to do who-knows-what who knows how and God knows why, And no matter the what, where and why, we just wanna be true.

My husband and I just sent our youngest off to college. He went on crutches with a broken leg. He said he wanted wings.

We, your Franciscan kid brothers and sisters, stuff our backpacks full of youthful optimism and Franciscan idealism And we set off — as if to change the world.

We want to be the best that our churches gladly are and all that our churches, sadly, are not: humble and honest and open inclusive, inviting daring and caring listening and giving surrendered and willing courageously kind warm and alive faithful and free.

We want to follow Jesus like Francis and Clare. We want to kiss the leper, feed the hungry, save the planet, stop the violence, end the war, tear down the walls, build the bridges, light the darkness, rebuild the Church.

We mean so well, yet we fall so hard . . . But we get back up and try to walk with our broken leg as we pray to God and beg for wings . . .

By this, I mean to say:

We are not a perfect little Order of perfect little minimonks. We are — each and all — a mix and a mess. And our beautiful, blessed, beloved little Order can be as dysfunctional, distracted and distressed as any.

But we stick it out and we stick together Because we've caught a glimpse of the humble Christ who walks among us and shows a different way and a bigger love. So we look for Him. We listen for Him. We try to be still and we try to wait 'til we catch a glimpse of this humble Christ. Then we run to catch up And we try to pitch in And we work so hard And we mean so well as we try to walk with our broken leg to who-knows-where to do who-knows-what who knows how and God knows why 'Cause we just wanna be true . . . We just wanna be true Just like you with your thousands of faces and hundreds of years we just wanna be true -So just like you, we stick it out and we stick together. We strain to see 'til we catch a glimpse of the different way and the bigger love. Then grabbing hands and holding tight, We throw down our crutches and we run to catch up. We roll up our sleeves and we try to pitch in. And we pray to God . . . and we beg for wings . . . Shoshanah Kay, Co-Minister, Order of Ecumenical Franciscans

I'll close with the stanza that speaks to my heart

We worship; we pray; we sing; we laugh. We wonder together . . . We argue sometimes. We offend. We falter. We break bread. We learn to forgive. We begin again. And again. And again.

Couldn't all of us say the same thing about our own beloved Secular Franciscan Order?

With fraternal affection and in peace, Anne