



## *Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee Walking Together*

by Anne Mulqueen, OFS

In this issue of *TAU USA*, I have the privilege of introducing to you our newest member of the Ecumenical-Interfaith Committee, Patrick Martin, who also serves as Regional Minister of St. Margaret of Cortona Region—a region which encompasses the mid-Atlantic portion of the USA.

When my good friend and co-worker in the ecumenical-interfaith vineyard, Mike Carsten, resigned from the committee, I was faced with a daunting discernment process. The person chosen to fill the open position would be expected to jump into a process and ministry already in motion. That person would need the background and desire to espouse the committee's vision and goal, which is to advance ecumenical-interfaith awareness within the Secular Franciscan Order and ecumenical-interfaith involvement in secular society. And to do this, that person would have to have a solid grounding in his or her own Catholic faith while remaining open and committed to respectful and fruitful dialogue with other Christian denominations and faith expressions. And then I thought of Patrick.

Now I will let Patrick introduce himself to you.

I was ecumenical before I even knew the word.

Growing up Catholic in the South during the 60s was different from some other places. I vividly remember one Sunday when a visiting priest was making a mission call to our parish and delivering the homily at each Mass. He started by rattling off some statistics: Nigeria: 10 percent Catholic. Korea: 6 percent Catholic. Then, he added, Georgia (my home State) 2 percent Catholic.

Really? The entire State of Georgia was just 2 percent Catholic? That might explain why my family drove 30 minutes to and from church, even though we lived in Atlanta. That might also explain why I was the only Catholic Boy Scout in Troop 84, sponsored by Haygood Memorial Methodist Church. (I learned a lot about the Bible from attending Scout Sunday events at that church.)

I grew up being very comfortable with our Protestant brothers and sisters.

As Franciscans, we learn about Francis and his interfaith encounter with the Sultan of Egypt, Malik al-Kamil, during the Fifth Crusade. There's a history of Franciscan dialogue with Islam. We Franciscans seem to understand this reach across the religious divide. We reach out to our Protestant friends as well. Our Church calls us to respectful and ongoing relations with other Christians.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church cites two important Church documents as guides for understanding the relationship of Catholics with other Christians.

*Lumen Gentium, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, teaches us that:

15. The Church recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptized, are honored with the name of Christian, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter. For there are many who honor Sacred Scripture, taking it as a norm of belief and a

pattern of life, and who show a sincere zeal. They lovingly believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ, the Son of God and Saviour. They are consecrated by baptism, in which they are united with Christ. They also recognize and accept other sacraments within their own Churches or ecclesiastical communities. Many of them rejoice in the episcopate, celebrate the Holy Eucharist and cultivate devotion toward the Virgin Mother of God. They also share with us in prayer and other spiritual benefits. Likewise we can say that in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them too He gives His gifts and graces whereby He is operative among them with His sanctifying power. Some indeed He has strengthened to the extent of the shedding of their blood. In all of Christ's disciples the Spirit arouses the desire to be peacefully united, in the manner determined by Christ, as one flock under one shepherd, and He prompts them to pursue this end. Mother Church never ceases to pray, hope and work that this may come about. She exhorts her children to purification and renewal so that the sign of Christ may shine more brightly over the face of the earth.

And, again, in *Unitatis Redintegratio*, *The Decree on Ecumenism*, our Church says:

3. Even in the beginnings of this one and only Church of God there arose certain rifts, which the Apostle strongly condemned. But in subsequent centuries much more serious dissensions made their appearance and quite large communities came to be separated from full communion with the Catholic Church — for which, often enough, men of both sides were to blame. The children who are born into these Communities and who grow up believing in Christ cannot be accused of the sin involved in the separation, and the Catholic Church embraces upon them as brothers, with respect and affection. For men who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect. The differences that exist in varying degrees between them and the Catholic Church — whether in doctrine and

sometimes in discipline, or concerning the structure of the Church — do indeed create many obstacles, sometimes serious ones, to full ecclesiastical communion. The ecumenical movement is striving to overcome these obstacles. But even in spite of them it remains true that all who have been justified by faith in Baptism are members of Christ's body, and have a right to be called Christian, and so are correctly accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church.

The spirit of Francis is not limited to the Catholic Church. We find professed Franciscans in many Protestant denominations. The Secular Franciscan Order, through our Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee, continues to reach out to our brother and sister Franciscans in the Third Order Society of Saint Francis, the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans, and all Franciscans throughout the Christian world. Pray for ALL Franciscans so that, some day, as Jesus prayed, “They may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us, so that the world may know that you have sent me.” (John 17:21)

May the Spirit of God awaken in us the desire to work together to build God's kingdom as we strive for unity within the Body of Christ.

Your sister and brother, Anne Mulqueen and Patrick Martin

