

Ecumenical Interfaith Committee Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity



NEW BEGINNINGS WITH A HOPEFUL VISION OF UNITY AMONG ALL PEOPLE

by Mike Carsten, OFS, Committee Chairman

“Gaining inspiration from the example and the writings of Francis and, above all, filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, each day the brothers and sisters faithfully live the great gift which Christ has given: the revelation of the Father. They should bear witness to this faith before all:.... – in their associations with all men and women, brothers and sisters of the same Father;”¹

“The Presidency entrust one of its members with the duty to closely follow up the field of justice, peace and safeguard of creation, the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and all those situations which require immediate intervention.”²

These two quotes are the point of beginning for the Ecumenical and Interfaith Committee (EIC) in our legislative documents. Many years ago, the International Presidency recommended to the OFS-USA during a National Visitation that some form of work with our protestant brothers and sisters needed to begin. As a result of that Visitation, the Ecumenical Committee was formed. Eventually this was expanded to include the field of Interfaith work; thus, the Ecumenical and Interfaith Committee was created in its current form.

Early on within the OFS, the Ecumenical work was given expression by sharing invitations and attending each other’s chapters with the National Ministers and Ministers General of the Franciscan Orders that existed outside of Catholicism. This included the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS), The Third Order Society of St. Francis (TSSF) and the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans (OEF).

In the early 2000s, the Ecumenical Committee met with these branches of the Franciscan Family and discussed the possibility of dialogue. After consulting the Executive Councils of the respective Orders, The Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity the (JCFU) was formed.

Since that time, the JCFU has met and worked together as a committee supported organizationally and financially by the Member Orders. Since its beginning, the JCFU has offered educational workshops based on the “Elements of Franciscan Unity” to member orders’ leadership across the United States and has filed Annual Reports to the Member Orders on our efforts. A few years ago, the Order of Lutheran Franciscans was invited to join the committee, and we have all been blessed by their presence. Why do we do this? Why bother to put time and treasure into this effort?

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis speaks to us on this very issue. His words are prophetic.

134. Indeed, when we open our hearts to those who are different, this enables them, while continuing to be themselves, to develop in new ways. The different cultures that have flourished over the centuries need to be preserved, lest our world be impoverished. At the same time, those cultures should be encouraged to be open to new experiences through their encounter with other realities, for the risk of succumbing to cultural sclerosis is always present. That is why “we need to communicate with each other, to discover the gifts of each person, to promote that which unites us, and to regard our differences as an opportunity to grow in mutual respect. Patience and trust are called for in such dialogue, permitting individuals, families and communities

¹ OFS General Constitutions Article 12.1

² Statutes of the International Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order. Article 13.2

to hand on the values of their own culture and welcome the good that comes from others' experiences".[117]

In this writing, I want to share with you that I have been given a great opportunity to serve the Ecumenical and Interfaith Committee as Chairperson for six years. More recently, I have also served as the Chair of the Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity, and prior to those six years as a member of the OFS-USA-EIC, serving with Anne Mulqueen, OFS.

At the same time, I also oversee two full-time ministries on the streets of Detroit serving the poor, the disenfranchised, and displaced: St. Aloysius Neighborhood Services and Franciscan Ministries. This labor of love and fulfillment of my vocation as a Secular Franciscan has been especially challenging during the current Covid-19 pandemic and has taken a toll on my body, mind, and spirit. At this writing, the vaccinated in the City of Detroit stands at just

over 41 percent, and the next six to eight months will be even more challenging for those serving on the front lines.

Because of what I have already experienced and what yet lies ahead, I find myself no longer able to serve both the OFS as chairperson of two committees and serve those most in need in southeast Michigan. As a result, I have resigned as Chairperson of the OFS-USA Ecumenical and Interfaith Committee to the OFS-USA Executive Council through our National Minister. I have also resigned as Chairperson of the Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity. Each are effective as of the end of Chapter 2021.

It has been my highest honor to serve the OFS-USA in this capacity, and I thank the OFS-USA Executive Council, our National Minister, Jan Parker, OFS, and each of you my OFS sisters and brothers for giving me this opportunity to serve.

FEAST DAY OF ST. CLARE OF ASSISI

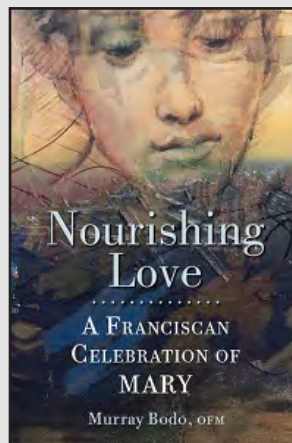
by Beatrice Sanford, OFS

The St. Clare Secular Franciscan Fraternity of Ave Maria, Florida, celebrated the Feast Day of St. Clare of Assisi by inviting Father Murray Bodo, OFM, to speak about the Blessed Mother on August 7. The topic was of great interest to all, as St. Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Secular Franciscan Order, honored Mary as a mother and as an advocate in his own prayers.

A total of 60 professed men and women from Florida, California, Colorado, Maryland, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Virginia participated in the 22nd annual commemoration of St. Clare, who more than 800 years ago established the Poor Clares Religious Community.

Father Murray opened his talk discussing ***Nourishing Love: A Franciscan Celebration of Mary***. His book, written during his confinement due to the pandemic, is a collection of his meditations, poems, reflections, and prayers from the Franciscan point of view.

Father Murray discussed three events that highlight his lifelong devotion to Our



Lady. Attendees listened intently as they learned of his dedication to the Blessed Mother shortly after he was born in St. Mary's Hospital, a facility managed by the Franciscan Sisters in Gallup, New Mexico. Father Bodo shared how the Blessed Mother answered his prayers in 2017 when Hurricane Dorian was going to make a direct hit on his hermitage but veered to spare Florida the wrath of this Category 5 hurricane. In the last story, Father Murray related his mystical experience at the age of 80 while visiting the Basilica Della Santa Casa in Loreto, Italy. Father Murray explained that this personal encounter with Mary was something he had prayed for since he was a young boy. Tradition holds that the sanctuary of Our Lady of

Loreto contains three of the four walls from Mary's childhood home in Nazareth. Father Murray joked that he was in good company since the Marian shrine has been visited by a number of popes, including Pope Saint John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis. As part of the closing of the St. Clare celebration, attendees participated in the Franciscan Crown Rosary led by Carol Bart, minister of the St. Clare Secular Franciscan Fraternity.