

# INTRODUCING THE NEW MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL ECUMENICAL/INTERFAITH COMMITTEE

by Donna Hollis, OFS , National Councilor



The National Ecumenical Committee has changed faces and set different goals during the many years of its existence. Our focus has been on the outreach and involvement of those on our Joint Committee (TSSF Third Order Society of St. Francis, OEF Order of Ecumenical Franciscans and OLE Order of Lutheran Franciscans).

In our Regions, we have many members who are also involved with JPIC, and this goes hand in hand with Ecumenism. When working with Justice and Peace, we inevitably work with those in different denominations and spiritualities.

One of our goals is to make sure all our regions that are in ministry with either JPIC or Ecumenism work together. We would like to hear everything that is happening in our different regions regarding these ministries and post any events or information on our new and updated website under Ecumenical Committee. We want to have more input and invite everyone to experience/participate in what our Brothers and Sisters are doing in our Order. It is important to support each other in our endeavors.

I took over as temporary Chair when our Brother Mike Carsten, OFS, completed his term in 2021. After the call for a new chairperson, the NEC chose a member from our Order to continue the leadership of the Ecumenical Committee.

I would like to introduce our new National Ecumenical Committee Chair, Ronald Lacey, OFS. He is from the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Region and attends the St. Anthony Fraternity in Roxbury, MA. Ron will share his experiences with Ecumenism and how it has affected his life. He will direct our Ecumenical Committee with the goals we have discerned in moving forward.

Thank you Ron, for accepting this role in our Order. We appreciate your leadership with humility and collaboration. The Team looks forward to working with you.

## **Ronald Lacey, OFS**



I am honored to work with the members of the Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee – Marie Bianca, Donna Hollis, and Carolyn Townes – and I am grateful to the National Executive Council for giving me this opportunity. As Franciscans, we are called to be instruments of peace. We are needed! We humans create many divisions – all sad – but perhaps none is so tragic as the division we create in the name of religion.

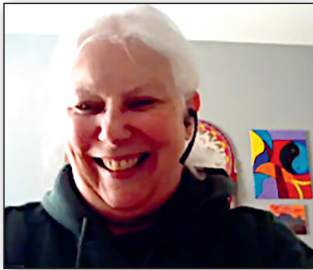
I was raised by a Roman Catholic mother and a Southern Baptist father, so I guess you could say that ecumenical awareness has been with me from the cradle. The two sides of my family have always gotten along peacefully, so I'm taken aback when I hear religious people (whether Christian or non-Christian) speaking disrespectfully of people of other faiths or denominations.

In college, I studied medieval history, with a special interest in religion and spirituality. One of my "concentrations within my concentration" as an undergraduate was Jewish studies. After receiving my master's in medieval church history from the University of Notre Dame, I taught Latin for a little while. For the past twenty years, I have worked in one of the libraries at Harvard University, where I have had the good fortune to take classes at the Harvard Divinity School, which is a major center of interreligious study.

I am blessed, in Boston, to live among many different Buddhist traditions, and I have studied meditation with several of them. From my living room window, I can see a mosque and, just past it, the steeple of an Orthodox church, where I sometimes go for Vespers. St. Columbkille's, where I often attend early morning Mass, is within walking distance from my house and next door to a yeshiva; the lads, with their hats, curls, and prayer shawls, running to school past the Gothic-revival belltower, create a scene to inspire Chagall.

So many ways to call upon God, all within a half-mile radius. This is, I believe, cause for great joy! I have found great wisdom in the traditions I have studied and neighbored. Who doesn't have something positive to share?

My hope for the Ecumenical and Interfaith Committee is that we may help initiate dialogue and understanding where they don't yet exist and deepen them where they have already begun. I very much look forward to working with the Ecumenical and Interfaith Committee on these goals, and we look forward to hearing your ideas as well!



**Marie Bianca, OFS**

As a young person growing up in Northeastern Pennsylvania, I always had a strong pull to deep spirituality. I attended a Catholic college—Marywood College. There I majored in Religious Studies and Psychology. But more importantly, I started a life of ministry in high school that has followed me through the years. Each step along the way has drawn me further and further into a deeper relationship with our Creator. My family gave me a rich foundation to build upon.

Fast forward to the late 1990s—I became professed as a Secular Franciscan in 1994; the journey continued to reveal deepening layers of who and what I am. I have served at all levels of leadership—local, regional, and national. What I find to be particularly enriching today is learning from other faiths to be the best Catholic I can be. The practice of each faith I have had the joy to experience has taught me a beautiful facet of faith that enriches who I am and how I live. Locally, I have served on the Interfaith Alliance of the Southwest for four years. I have served on the National Committee of Ecumenical/Interfaith work for three years. During that time, building new relationships with my brothers and sisters has been the central focus of my work. The work can be teaching modules of a retreat, attending community events, scheduling important and enriching topics of conversation, writing articles for our newsletter, research and building community. We have been recently blessed with two new members to our committee and the work can now expand and develop foundational expressions of unity.



**Carolyn Townes, OFS**

My name is Carolyn Townes, OFS, and I currently serve as the National Animator for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. Ecumenism is a part of who I am and so closely linked with peace and justice, that it was a natural fit to team with the Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee. I grew up Baptist and Methodist, becoming Catholic as an adult. I was so moved by the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults process that I became a catechist in the process for more than 10 years. I also worked and served with an Atonement friar whose work was ecumenism, which further deepened my knowledge of other faith traditions. Serving as a board member on two Franciscan organizations as well as ministering to a third has also given me the opportunity to connect and minister with ecumenical Franciscans. It is truly a joy to work with our brothers and sisters who worship and pray differently but love with mercy just the same.