

On the left, see the draft of a collaborative project in which our diocese has been engaged on behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), the Catholic Association of Directors of Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers (CADEIO), and the Catholic Climate Covenant. (More in the story below.)



TOGETHER IN FAITH AND FRIENDSHIP

OFFICE OF ECUMENICAL & INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS
DIOCESE OF CHARLESTON

SEPTEMBER 2020

Virtual Ecumenism

The months since our pilot diocesan ecumenical newsletter (May 2020) have continued to see us limited in the ability to gather physically with ecumenical and interfaith groups. We haven't lacked for the ability to reach out, pray together and communicate, however. There have been a number of activities in which we have been engaged on the national level, statewide, and locally. Some of the US-based interfaith groups have also managed to expand internationally, as some of the articles below will reveal.

A National Project on Behalf of Our Common Home

It was the spring of 2019 when CADEIO, the group representing diocesan ecumenical officers, announced that its members had been asked to prepare materials which might be issued by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to expedite understanding of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. Michael Terrien of CADEIO invited heads of several USCCB departments, a professor and a professor emeritus from Catholic Theological Union, the executive director of Catholic Climate Covenant, a former lay official of the Franciscan Network, and our diocesan director, Sister Pam Smith, to spearhead the project. It entailed frequent emails and Zoom meetings to develop the outline and content for the proposed guidebook for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue on care for the environment. By a stroke of Divine Providence, Bishop Joseph Bambera (Scranton), heading the USCCB Secretariat of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, was in Bluffton to celebrate a family funeral. After the funeral, the document was hand-delivered to him, and, after a bit of airplane reading, he expedited sending it through some of the usual channels. The guidebook is expected to serve as a companion piece to the booklet of primary sources, "Catholic Teaching on the Environment," issued by the USCCB earlier this year. At this writing, the draft is making its way through several layers of USCCB offices and is print-ready. Interestingly enough, only two diocesan officers are listed in the document: Michael Terrien of the Archdiocese of Chicago, CAEDIO chair, and Sister Pam, chair of the committee.

Combatting Racism

After a presentation last November at the State Museum in Columbia, the **Fellowship of South Carolina Bishops** recommended that members of the 6-denomination group (Lutheran, Episcopalian, United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal, Christian Methodist Episcopal, and Roman Catholic) recommended setting up book study groups on the theme of “Confronting Hate.” Our own Office of Ethnic Ministries had already been underway with the study of “Just Mercy” by Bryan Stevenson (also a film). A group in Rock Hill began discussing Jennifer Berry Hawes’ “Grace Will Lead Us Home: The Charleston Church Massacre and the Hard, Inspiring Journey to Forgiveness.” In Bluffton, a group, now being joined by persons beyond the state borders, has completed study of “Trouble I’ve Seen,” by Drew Hart and next takes up the Hawes book. From initial face-to-face dialogues and a bit of a hiatus, the new way of meeting is, not surprisingly, online. (Pardon the imprecise—and incomplete—screen shot!)



A few of the attendees at an anti-racism discussion group this month

The South Carolina Christian Action Council (SCCAC) has also been steadily engaged in confronting racial injustice and fostering mutual understanding. This group comprises 13 denominations, with two Catholics serving on the board. **Upcoming on October 15, from 10:00-11:30 AM is an online session on the theme “The Inconvenient Truth: The Injustice of Racism and Poverty in SC Law and Steps toward Change.” The presenters include Rev. Dr. Robin Dease (United Methodist) and Lynn Shuler Teague (League of Women Voters).** The position of SCCAC is consistently fostering understanding by listening and collaborating on issues on which all members come to consensus. Recently this has taken the form of advocating for legislation to end predatory lending and standing for racial justice.

Members of the SCCAC from the Columbia area participated in peaceful demonstrations for racial justice this summer. Those of us who could not make it to those events engaged in local prayer and remembrance meetings on the 5th anniversary of the shootings at Mother Emanuel. Shown on the next page is a fraction of the group which gathered in Ridgeland, home of State Senator Rev. Clementa Pinckney, the first victim of the shooter, who was leading the Bible study at Mother Emanuel. The service of prayer and remembrance held at Harold Turpin Park was led by Missionary Baptist ministers.

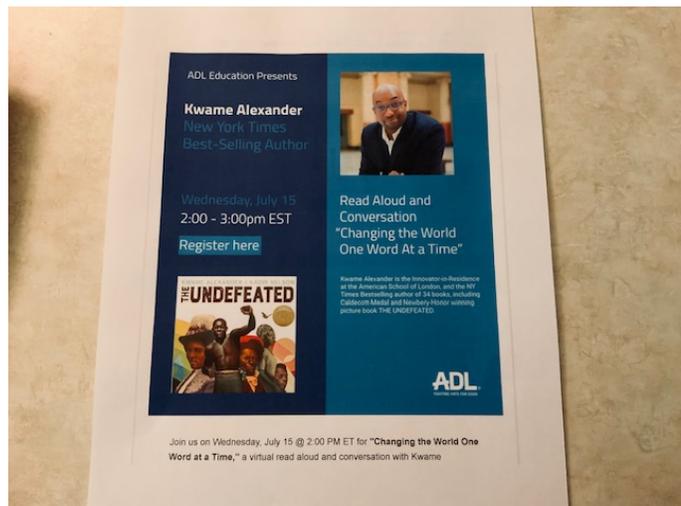
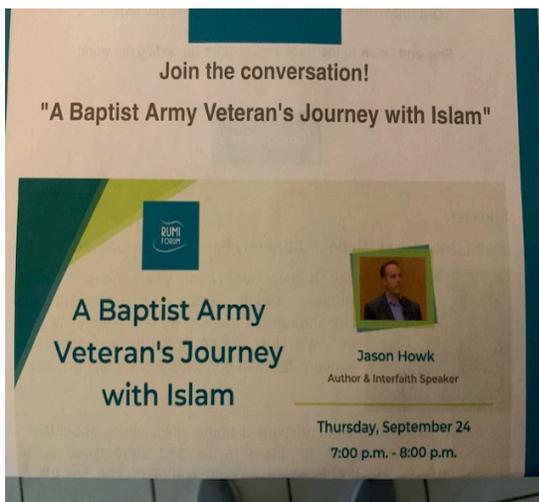


At Harold Turpin Park, Ridgeland

Going Global

Thanks to the **Interfaith Partners of South Carolina (IPSC)**, who have continued to host monthly “meet-ups” to inform members of activities and dialogues on behalf of mutual trust and understanding, we have also connected with a number of other interfaith groups. The Jewish **Anti-Defamation League** and the **Rumi Forum** have hosted a series of online events. Raising awareness of how anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are of a piece with other forms of racial, ethnic, and religious prejudice has been the goal of a variety of presenters. They have also spoken of the importance of recent Mideast agreements which promise mutual benefit. Each of these groups affords participants the opportunity to enter questions into Chat boxes and engage in question-and-answer sessions. Another group, the **Atlantic Institute**, has hosted virtual church tours in which religious leaders show their places of worship and explain customs and beliefs.

The photos below are only two examples of the flyers promoting some of the meetings which we have attended.



Another group with which we have actively participated is **Greenfaith**, an interreligious gathering of individuals who are concerned with addressing care for creation from the perspectives of their own faith tradition. Participants open the meeting by lighting a candle, pause for a moment of silence, listen to a reading and brief reflection from the sacred writings used by one group or another, and then proceed to gather in Chat rooms with three or four other individuals to share on assigned reflection questions. Doing this repeatedly, week after week, and then month after month, has afforded us the opportunity to learn about the needs and concerns of a priest from Nigeria, a Muslim woman living in Detroit, a Buddhist nun in New Mexico, an African American minister in New York City, a Native American on a reservation in the American West, and a Unitarian from Australia—just to offer a few examples.

What emerges repeatedly is the need for food and for access to clean water, concern for failing crops amid excessive heat, air quality temporarily improved by the restrictions of COVID-19 and then deteriorated in the face of wildfires, along with the ravages of severe storms and floods. Participants join together to express compassion but also to share information about resources available from one another's denominations and religious connections. Mere participation and presence helps put us on the map for others and also encourages us to join local action. Engagement with the Greenfaith subgroup clustered in the South Carolina Midlands and Charlotte, NC, has helped raise awareness of what our churches are doing to help feed people. We look to ways we can network around the region and help members of the dialogues become aware of groups collecting and distributing food.



Left: A sample of non-perishable foods bagged for distribution at St. Helena Island, SC. Right: Cub Scouts collect for several Beaufort-Bluffton-Hardeeville area food banks and outreach centers.

Coming Soon

Rabbi Brad Bloom of Beth Yam synagogue, Rev. Dr. Jon R. Black of Campbell Chapel A.M.E., and Sister Pam Smith will engage in a podcast on October 26 (time TBA) on the theme “Dealing with the Unfathomable.” Contact us at: psmith@charlestandiocese.org or (843) 819-7991.

