

TOGETHER IN FAITH AND FRIENDSHIP No. 8

OFFICE OF ECUMENICAL & INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS
DIOCESE OF CHARLESTON

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INTERFAITH HARMONY MONTH CELEBRATION IN AIKEN



Old Saint Mary, Help of Christians Church (now the parish chapel) was the first stop for many of us on the tour of worship sites in Aiken held on Saturday, January 20. Bill Collins, a parishioner, has long been the convener and facilitator of the Interfaith Partners of Aiken. This year was the first since 2020 for January's Interfaith Harmony Month to resume an in-person celebration. Among the other sites hosting visits were First Baptist Church, Adath Yeshuran Synagogue, Aiken's Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), and Aiken Masjid (mosque). The Interfaith Partners of Aiken meet on the third Thursday of the month online. Scenes from the Aiken worship sites appear on pages 2 and 3.

ALSO INSIDE THIS ISSUE: Interfaith Harmony Month Events in Charleston; Mepkin Abbey Bringing People Together; Being Pro-Life and Ecumenical Too; Reverencing and Remembering Our Jewish Roots; So Many Causes, So Many Opportunities for People of Faith; Coming Soon and Various Resources

The interior of First Baptist, whose pastor, John Carroll, is constantly reminded that he bears the name of the first Catholic bishop in the United States.



The next two photos are of the young men at the Church of the Latter-day Saints who explained Mormon customs and beliefs. They pointed out one of many paintings of Jesus that are on the walls of their education wing.



The photos on page 3 are from the interiors of Adath Yeshurun Synagogue and the Aiken Masjid (mosque). From all of the Abrahamic religions represented—Jewish, Christian, Muslim—we experienced warm hospitality.



Two docents explain how Sephardic Jewish people came first to Augusta, Georgia and then established a synagogue in Aiken as the city became a tourist destination (for people like Fred Astaire and British royals) and a place of commerce.



The Ten Commandments, Jewish sanctuary with Torah scrolls enshrined; right: the Koran



Ugur Clare (right), from Turkey, is married to South Carolinian George Clare. Both are regulars with the Interfaith Partners. Both the synagogue and mosque reported 40-50 visitors.

INTERFAITH HARMONY MONTH EVENTS IN CHARLESTON

In Charleston, Mayor John Tecklenburg on January 3 read a formal proclamation at City Hall for Interfaith Harmony Month. He included area children of various faiths in the presentation. The Charleston Interreligious Council (CIC) organized a series of events throughout the month. The president of the CIC is Dena Fokas Moses, a member of the Greek Orthodox community. Dena is a graduate of Blessed Sacrament Catholic School and Bishop England High School who has a great affinity for Catholicism and an obvious concern for interfaith understanding.



Events of the month included a visit to Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim Synagogue, founded in the 18th century and the longest serving synagogue in the United States. Another special event was an evening of interfaith dialogue on the theme “The Purpose of Life” with presentations from representatives of nine faith traditions. The Hindu Temple and Cultural Center of West Ashley hosted the event. A photo of the temple’s worship space appears on the following page, to the right of Hindu hostess Shaila and one of Charleston’s Muslim women physicians.



MEPKIN ABBEY BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

The annual exhibit of Christmas crèches draws people of many faiths and cultures, both as visitors and as guides, ticket takers, docents, and parking assistants. Many make it a point to say that they have come from various denomination's churches and love both the abbey and the monks. This year's exhibit opened on November 25 and concluded on December 3.



Mark calendars for two special interfaith events to be held at Mepkin:

May 3 (Time TBA): an ecumenical dialogue on beliefs about the Blessed Virgin Mary, with special emphasis on the Anglican-Catholic statement "Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ"

May 7 at 4:00 PM: performance of the "Mary Oratorio," composed by Cormac O'Duffy.

BEING PRO-LIFE AND ECUMENICAL TOO



The annual Stand-Up for Life rally in Columbia on January 7, 2023, displayed a great deal of Catholic support—with the presence of priests, deacons, religious sisters, a number of parish and diocesan employees, and parish families. Also present were a number of our allies, including Students for Life and Christian partners. Participants we met identified themselves as Baptist, Village Church, and Presbyterian, among others. We celebrate the fact that we celebrate together our interest in building what St. John Paul II termed a “culture of life.”



REVERENCING AND REMEMBERING OUR JEWISH ROOTS

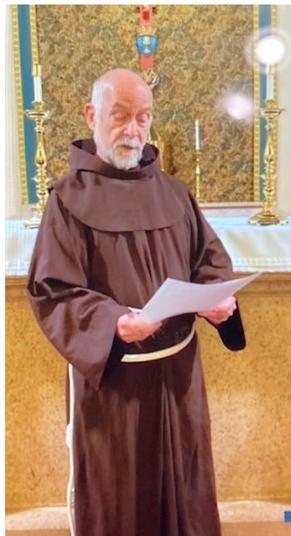
On November 28 this past fall, the USCCB Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs issued a call for Catholics to take part in a “recommitment to relationship with the Jewish community.” This urgent request was occasioned not only by the observance of the 60th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, the Vatican declaration on interreligious relations but also by the observable increase in hate crimes committed against Jewish persons, attacks on Jewish places of worship, and antisemitic rhetoric. In this diocese we have had a number of significant opportunities to relate positively and affably to the Jewish community. Several which have taken place since the last issue of this newsletter are highlighted here.

On October 17 Beth Yam Synagogue in Hilton Head invited four of us, representing different religious traditions—Reformed Jewish, United Methodist, Unity, and Catholic—to participate in a discussion on our perspectives on human life issues and our own tradition’s teachings about abortion. Each of us was able to present the teachings from Scripture and from moral reasoning on a program livestreamed in the Beaufort County area.

On November 22 Temple Emanu-el in Charleston (photos below) hosted an interfaith Thanksgiving service. A choir from mixed congregations and traditions offered musical selections and hymns on the theme of gratitude, and speakers from Unitarian-Universalist, Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and Hindu backgrounds offered reflections on the gratitude we owe to the Divine and the practical actions we can take to help the poor and hungry.



On December 20, the Jewish Federation of Charleston presented an online interfaith Hannukah reflection and prayer on the theme “Shine a Light on Anti-semitism.” Father Bob Menard, OFM, campus minister at Clemson, was among those who offered a prepared message. Numerous faith and civic leaders spoke of the need for fraternity, compassion, and understanding, using the image of light needed in our world.



Then, amid Interfaith Harmony Month, there were the journeys to Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim in Charleston and Adash Yeshurun in Aiken.

Finally, on January 25, Focolare Media and New City Press aired “The Courage to Remember,” featuring Holocaust survivor Liz Igra, Rabbi Noam Marans, and Monsignor James Murphy.

SO MANY CAUSES, SO MANY OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE OF FAITH

Our diocesan office and Catholic persons in our diocese hold board memberships in the South Carolina Christian Action Council (SCCAC), the Interfaith Partners of South Carolina (IPSC), South Carolinians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (SCADP), the Interfaith Partners of Aiken and regularly participate in the activities of the Charleston Interreligious Council. The last issue of this newsletter enumerated the many ecumenical activities and opportunities in each deanery. In addition, SCADP, in cooperation with SCCAC, offers a bimonthly book discussion online which often features persons who have been exonerated while on death row, family members of prisoners, victims of capital crimes (such as the Mother Emanuel shootings), and authors promoting restorative justice from a faith perspective. Atlantic Institute, active in Greenville and in Columbia, is also starting a bimonthly book discussion online as it continues to feature culinary and custom-focused presentations for intercultural and interfaith understanding. A number of these groups issue calls to action when matters like predatory lending, school choice, and racial justice are before the legislature.

Here are a few examples of some of the recent activities in which our diocese was represented. Photos include anti-death penalty activities, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day prayer and parades, and the January 28 presentation at Masjid Noor-UI-Huda in Columbia on care for the earth and Muslims taking actions akin to those recommended by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si.*'



Left: The SCADP offers some ways to advertise its cause. Right: A young woman at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day ecumenical prayer service and annual parade in Bluffton sported a shirt in which she described the Human Being as "100% organic" and noted "Colors May Vary."

The theme for Christian Unity Week 2023 (January 18-25), “Do Good, Seek Justice,” seems to have been a good theme for Interfaith Harmony Month as well.



Muslim men, women, youth, and children, along with participants from IPSC, were present for this presentation on January 28 in Columbia on the M4THEE movement—which focuses on ecological education from a scientific perspective and ecological action from the perspective of the Koran. M4THEE stands for Muslims for the environment. The speaker and his wife traveled from North Carolina for the evening event. We learned that the Muslims call the adult women “Sister,” so Sister Asha had to get another kind of Sister in a picture.

COMING SOON: SCCAC presents a lecture by Willie James Jennings on Racial Justice and Culture Reconciliation—likely live and live-streamed—on March 21, 2023. Time TBA.

VARIOUS RESOURCES: Along with the groups and events mentioned above, an interesting online resource is the Rumi Forum, based in Washington, DC. In cooperation with Virginia Theological Seminary, its online features include Religious Literacy, Interfaith Engagement, and Scriptural Reasoning. The latter takes a theme or topic and makes comparisons and contrasts among passages from the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, and the Koran. Online participants are encouraged to offer to read the scriptural passage of their faith tradition and to engage in discussion with the major presenters.

Focolare Media and New City Press also regularly present works on faith formation, ecumenical and interfaith understanding, and topics related to Catholic social teaching.