



TAKING ANOTHER LOOK AT MARY

The greater Charleston area has long had an active interfaith group: the Charleston Interreligious Council. Its current president is Dena Fokas Moses, a member of the Greek Orthodox Church, who was educated at Blessed Sacrament School and Bishop England High School. Throughout the pandemic, the group continued online presentations and meetings. With a soft reopening in July 2022 at what was then the Pauline Book Store on King Street, it has escalated since January 2023, officially known as Interfaith Harmony Month around the state. Inter-Christian events, though, have been rarer.

Our diocese was able to host a groundbreaking event on Wednesday, May 3. A number of local areas have some ecumenical activities in the form of prayer and outreach projects. They include: Summerville's ministerial group; the Moncks Corner area, with much support from Mepkin Abbey; Johns Island through Our Lady of Mercy Mission. However, in recent years there has been little coordinated ecumenical dialogue—that is, inter-Christian engagement over beliefs. The May 3 event, hosted by the Diocese of Charleston and our office, convened a group of Catholic, Anglican, United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal, Reformed Episcopal, Lutheran, and Greek Orthodox bishops, clergy, and laity for a discussion on our mutual views of Mary, Mother of Our Savior. The springboard for discussion was a relatively little-known Anglican-Catholic agreement promulgated in 2005, *Mary, Grace and Hope in Christ*. The May 3 discussion featured Sister Sara Butler, MSBT, Ph.D., emeritus professor of theology at Mundelein, an architect of the document, and Bishop Chip Edgar of the Anglican Diocese of South Carolina. (Continued on page 2.)



Following the presentations by Sister Sara and Bishop Edgar, a group discussion led to consensus that many more of these should be held among our Christian groups. The next dialogue is scheduled for Wednesday, September 20, from 10:00 AM to Noon at the Assembly Hall at the diocesan Pastoral Center. The topic is a theological and pastoral look at the problem of human suffering, with a special focus on parents who have lost children to violence, disease, etc. The proposal sprang from comments on the image of the Pièta during the group discussion time.

Following the dialogue, Mepkin Abbey hosted a special musical event on Sunday, May 7, the *Mary Oratorio*, composed and conducted by Dr. Cormac O'Duffy, director of music at St. Theresa the Little Flower Church in Summerville and internationally known composer.



SAVE THE DATE

SEPTEMBER 20, 10:00 AM - NOON

Ecumenical dialogue on the problem of human suffering, with a focus on parents who have lost children: Assembly Hall, 901 Orange Grove Road, Charleston, SC 29407

EXPLAINING OURSELVES

Watch for articles in the monthly Charleston Mercury newspaper, on the Carolina Compass page. The paper invites articles explaining Catholic beliefs. In January it was "Joining in Faith and Friendship," in February it was "Displacing Valentine: On Two Missionaries" (Saints Cyril and Methodius), in April "Earth Days and People of Faith," and in the June issue "What's in a Name— Sacred Heart?"

EVENTS TO JOIN

There seems to be no end to events which we can join in ecumenically and interreligiously. A few examples over the past few months include both online and in-person webinars, faith displays, and meal-sharing. One held in Charleston on March 1 was the Atlantic Institute's dialogue dinner, which invited participants to partake of Mideastern delicacies and to discuss how the various Abrahamic religions treat the theme of LOVE. The event was held at the historic South Carolina Society Hall. Dr. Ghazala Javed, cardiologist and an active member of the Interfaith Partners of South Carolina, was among the speakers that evening.



On March 22, there was the South Carolina Governor's Prayer Breakfast (which drew familiar figures, including Bishop Edgar and Rev. Dr. Regina Moore, president of the South Carolina Christian Action Council).



And then there was the Seder supper at Beth Yam Synagogue in Hilton Head on April 6. Rabbi Brad Bloom, who has been a champion of interfaith conversations and special projects (such as fundraising in support of Ukraine) hosted.



ONGOING GROUPS—IN PERSON BUT MOST OFTEN ONLINE

South Carolinians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

Monthly board meetings (Monday evenings online, 8 PM; in-person January and June at Washington Street United Methodist Church, Columbia, Saturday mornings.

Bi-monthly book discussions on topics of criminal justice, capital punishment, testimonies from exonerated persons who had been on death row, family members of persons who had been murdered, and those serving in prison ministry.

Calls to action when there is relevant legislation—such as the recently passed “secrecy bill,” which would permit South Carolina to execute by lethal injection without disclosing failed executions, drugs used, drug suppliers, and the like.

On behalf of the diocese, we hold board membership.

South Carolina Christian Action Council

Hosts online discussions and webinars and selected in-person events on racial justice, educational initiatives, public health, and predatory lending.

Along with the Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina—and, of course, the actions of our South Carolina Catholic Conference—we were able to make some special efforts and to present testimony (either in state senators’ or representatives’ offices or in public hearings) to advocate for caps to loans. In this state title loans and payday loans can escalate to 300% interest and more in little time, and, not surprisingly, the most victimized are minority groups, elderly poor, veterans, and families with members serving in the military. Our moral tradition calls that usury.

On behalf of the diocese, we hold board membership.

Interfaith Partners of South Carolina

With the exception of summer months, this group holds monthly Midlands Meet-ups online and informal supper gatherings in Columbia once to twice per month. The focus is always on understanding one another’s faiths and helping mutual causes, particularly related to the health of the elderly poor, via the state Agency on Aging. The group participates actively in Interfaith Harmony month and also joins Peace in the Park initiatives in Columbia and Irmo.

We hold at-large board membership.

Interfaith Partners of Aiken

Hosted and coordinated by a parishioner of St. Mary Help of Christians, this group holds monthly online meetings for faith-sharing purposes and plans interfaith events (tours of places of worship) every January. It also, in post-pandemic mode, is opening up additional activities, with some planned for Thanksgiving Week and also invitational musical events.

Atlantic Institute (which hosts both live and online events) and Charleston Interreligious Council are mentioned in articles above. We are actively engaged with these groups too.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

A group called **Braver Angels**, with its coordinator, a Catholic school graduate living in Anderson, and chapter members located around the state, has begun reaching out to our various faith communities and interfaith organizations. Its purpose is to promote civil discourse and to sponsor activities in which people of diverse religious backgrounds and political perspectives can unite for common interests.

Also previously cited in this newsletter are the **Catholics for the Common Good**, operating from St. Gregory the Great Church in Bluffton. Dedicated to Catholic social teaching, racial justice, environmental causes, and ecumenical cooperation, this group participated this year in January's Martin Luther King Day activities, Stations of the Cross for Racial Justice in March, the diocesan Ethnic Ministries Office presentation from its Native American group for Earth Day in April, an online interview with an African woman who is a member of St. Martin de Porres Church discussing situations of poverty and racial justice in May and Bluffton's annual May River clean-up, a project which took the group through downtown Bluffton and along the riverbanks to collect litter and recycle improperly disposed materials.

Catholics for the Common Good announces its next ecumenical event:

International Friendship Day Potluck Dinner, Saturday, August 12, from 1L30-2:00 at St. Gregory.



INHERENTLY ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH

All of our outreach centers—whether run by Catholic Charities, the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy, the Felician Sisters, or the Sisters of Saints Cyril and Methodius—serve people in need, regardless of race or religion. They also ally with various church groups who support them with food drives, volunteer services, donations, and referrals. One recent beneficiary of the services of a home repairs committee and some extraordinarily generous donors is a historically Black church, Bethlehem Baptist, outside Beaufort. The church members came to the sisters at the St. Francis Center at St. Helena Island when a tree fell on the roof of the extended part of their building, where the pastor’s office and Sunday school classrooms were located. The project has gone on for months, because not only were there issues with a collapsed section of roof but also with drywall, flooring, and termites. The project will be completed within a few weeks of this publication.



Above: A portion of the church exterior before roof replacement. Below: part of the interior, with new flooring, new drywall, new paint, and new furnishings. The simple expression “We’re blessed” sums up parishioners’ responses to Catholic helping hands.



Continue to watch for Rumi Forum’s online Scriptural Reasoning series with comparison/contrast studies of passages from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Koran. Also look for special presentations to counter anti-Semitism from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL)