

TOGETHER IN FAITH AND FRIENDSHIP

No. 10

OFFICE OF ECUMENICAL & INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS
DIOCESE OF CHARLESTON

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DIALOGUE, LISTENING, LEARNING, RALLYING, AND CELEBRATING

It sometimes seems that summer means a lull in many activities, but in ecumenical and interfaith circles the summer brought opportunities to learn from one another and to lend support to those things which we value and hold in common. Then the fall comes, with the resumption of many school and work schedules—and also a burst of activities. In this issue, we will look at some of the summer and early fall events which quite literally aim to bring us “together in faith and friendship,” even as we hold fast to our Catholic faith. Activities in Charleston, Columbia, Greenville, Aiken, Bluffton, Beaufort, and Kingstree drew us across the state to give testimony to what the Church has asked us to do: 1) respect those elements of holiness and truth which can be found in other faith traditions and 2) collaborate, with other Christians and with people of good will, on projects and causes which serve humanity (Catechism of the Catholic Church, §819 and 821 and *Nostra Aetate*, art. 2).

On July 22 members of the South Carolina Christian Action Council, the Charleston Interreligious Council, and the Interfaith Partners of South Carolina celebrated the dedication of a new organ and the launch of a memorial garden at **Mother Emanuel** in Charleston, the scene of the notorious 2017 slayings. Then on August 23, these same groups traveled to the newly opened **African American Museum**, located at the site where many slaves landed, for a heritage tour and show of solidarity. At the latter event, evangelical, Catholic, Orthodox, and Latter Day Saints joined Muslim, Jewish, Baha’i, Unitarian, Unity, and other spiritual groups from around the state.



CATHOLICS FOR THE COMMON GOOD IN A FIESTA OF FOOD AND A FUND-RAISER FOR WATER

This group, founded at Saint Gregory the Great in Bluffton, is dedicated to advancing knowledge of Catholic social teaching and banding together for racial justice and care for creation. For the second year, the group has hosted a mid-day potluck meal to commemorate **International Friendship Day**. This year again it drew clergy and members from several area denominations and representatives of African, Asian, Latino/a, and European ethnic groups.



A fruit of the first potluck has been the involvement of attendees in the annual **Walk for Water**, which supports the creation of water purification systems that are installed around the world and around the U.S. The production of these systems is done in North Charleston by a volunteer group of retired engineers. Friends from Lowcountry Presbyterian Church arranged for a number of us to tour the facility in August 2022. We Catholics and Presbyterians joined in the September walk again this year, along with United Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, and other Christians from the area. USC Beaufort students also served to signal the route and display placards which raised consciousness about the plight of many who lack clean water and suffer from water-borne disease. (See photos on the facing page.)



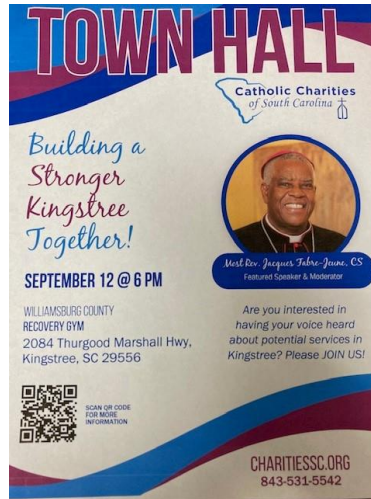
Above: Catholics for the Common Good group. Below: UCS Beaufort students on Walk for Water.



Below Left: a display of the water purification machine. Below right: Two Protestant ministers joining the Walk for Water.



FOR THE SAKE OF GROWTH AND CHANGE IN KINGSTREE



The Felician Sisters have operated an outreach center in Kingstree for more than 30 years. One of Amtrak's stops, Kingstree is in the midst of Williamsburg County, one of the poorest in the state. The sisters provide food, emergency supplies, after-school programs, outreach and referrals, and join with a number of faith communities to tend to the needs of young and old. As he has circulated across the state, Bishop Jacques Fabre-Jeune has developed a passion to prompt the Church to be an instrument of transformation of culture so as to break the cycle of poverty. Initial meetings at St. Ann Church this past summer led to a Town Hall meeting to which 70 church leaders were sent invitations.



Sisters Susanne, Carol and Johnna serving clients at the Felician Center in Kingstree



Those first meetings at St. Ann in the summer of 2023 explained the proposed project to a number of local stakeholders and diocesan representatives. After those meetings, Lydia Doyle and Catholic Charities were charged with organizing a Town Hall event which would focus on giving people from the area a chance to voice their perceived needs. The Ecumenical/ Interreligious Office was tasked with inviting area clergy to participate. Invitations to pastors and parishes had a mixed result: one being that many small faith communities do not have active mail service (so envelopes sent to the church addresses were returned); the other that 10 faith communities sent representatives to the September 12 event, a happy surprise. Dates have not yet been set for follow-up, but a number of possibilities are clear, especially since there is grant money available for early childhood education and other prospective initiatives.



Above: Clergy (including Bishop Fabre-Jeune; Vicars General Monsignor Droze and Father Gregory Wilson; Father Edward Fitzgerald, dean of the Myrtle Beach deanery, and Father Artur Przywara, local pastor), parishioners and townspeople gather for the Town Hall on September 12, 2023. Below: Lydia Doyle introduces the discussion after Bishop Fabre-Jeune invited all clergy forward to extend hands over those assembled. The Bishop and Catholic Charities hosted and Catholic Charities provided refreshments as the group discussed the needs of the Kingstree community—especially those pertaining to youth and the elderly.



LISTENING, LEARNING, AND EATING TOO!

On July 23, the Interfaith Partners of Aiken visited the Unitarian Universalist Church which hosted a presentation on Sikh faith and culture. Children performed meditative compositions, and, of course, there was food and a grateful appreciation of the chance to learn more about this montheistic tradition, which dates back to the late 15th century in India.



Then, on Sunday, September 17, a Baha'i member of the Interfaith Partners of South Carolina opened his home for a picnic—which turned out to be indoors, due to some threatening weather. At least eight faith traditions were represented, and, once again, young people were present, curious to learn about the various customs and beliefs. Among ecumenical and interfaith groups, a common concern is the irreligious turn taken by many young people, so considerable effort is made to include them.



Both of these events display how finding commonalities and socializing together can break down barriers of misunderstanding and open doors to possible collaboration on causes for the universal common good.

CHARLESTON ECUMENICAL GROUP RESUMES



The Number 9 issue of this newsletter featured a special ecumenical dialogue on Mary which took place at the diocesan Pastoral Center Assembly Hall in May. Participants proposed a follow-up, and the topic which gained consensus was our Christian attitudes toward suffering and ministry to the grieving—especially those who have lost children to violence. On Wednesday, September 20, a group representing Catholic, Orthodox, and United Methodist traditions gathered to hear presentations by Rev. Dr. Regina Moore, Executive Minister of the South Carolina Christian Action Council, and Sister Pamela Smith, director of this office. Rev. Dr. Moore’s remarks included the story of a group of prisoners who have initiated a ministry to Catholic high school boys to educate them about the dangers of criminal behavior and gang violence. The conversation which followed exhibited illuminating insight on grief, sacramental and prayer support, and work to undo the culture of violence. The group agreed to plan an event during Christian Unity Week 2024 and to seek out additional friends and clergy to attend.

Left: A view of an in-house ministry offered by prisoners. Right: Rev. Dr. Moore offering her remarks.



RALLYING FOR LIFE

St. John Paul II, in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae: The Gospel of Life*, exhorted us to have a unified approach to respect for human life and human dignity. We have found partners in other faiths for two of the issues on the agenda for Catholic and ecumenical and/or interfaith groups in South Carolina: **an end to abortion and the abortion mentality** and **an end to the death penalty**. On Sunday, October 1, Beaufort County had its annual Choose Life rally on U.S., 21 in front of county government buildings. This year, as before, we Catholics (including Father Andrew Trapp) were joined by a Lutheran pastor and his wife and representatives of Grays Hill Baptist Church, among others.



While our efforts to protect human life from conception continue, we also have been very much engaged in the effort to end the death penalty—which seems likely to resume in South Carolina in the near future. This summer, at the Nickelodeon Theater in Columbia, South Carolinians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (SCADP) screened “83 Days,” a documentary about the conviction and electrocution of 14-year-old George Stinney, Jr., of Alcolu, SC, for a crime (kidnapping, rape, and murder) for which he was exonerated 70 years later. After the film was shown, the filmmaker, a lawyer, and a survivor of death row (who was himself exonerated of a crime) were on hand to speak about the film and the death penalty in general. SCADP director Rev. Hillary Taylor hosted the event.



Upon the recommendation of Michael Acquilano and the South Carolina Catholic Conference, we now hold board membership in SCADP. SCADP meets monthly and sends alerts regarding pending executions and legislative initiatives. The following page shows photos from a recent rally.

October 10, 2023, was World Day against the Death Penalty. Again, representatives from Catholic, United Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, Unitarian, Unity Church, Hindu, and a neo-pagan were among those present at the state capital for a press conference. We ranged from the seasoned elders to a mother (also a minister) with her baby. I was given the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Catholics present, who included Father Sandy McDonald, Father James LeBlanc, Deacon Carl Johnson, and a delegation from St. Anthony of Padua and our Catholic African American Ministry. Anti-death penalty events continued across the state in the Palmetto Journey of Hope, October 15-22.





AN OPPORTUNITY TO EVANGELIZE

Atlantic Institute, with its South Carolina headquarters in Greenville, has a long history of creating programs which foster inter-cultural understanding and interfaith exchange. Since the pandemic, they have offered a few in-person events but numerous online ones, including all sorts of things: demonstrations of ethnic cuisine, children’s programs, a book club featuring authors from different cultures, and explanations of faith traditions. Over the previous three to four years, it seems that there was only one program featuring a Catholic, and that was a teacher from St. Joseph Catholic School in Greenville on the topic of students dealing with grief. This summer, however, appearing frequently on the gallery of those present for numerous Atlantic Institute offerings presented an opportunity this July and September to offer one-hour presentations on Catholic faith and customs. On July 25, Sister Pam Smith offered an overview of Catholic beliefs as part of the Insitute’s Tour of Faith series, entitled “Journey to Catholicism.” During the Q and A period, it became clear that the online audience included not only South Carolinians but also participants from other states. Then on September 28, Sisters Patricia Rogan and Kathleen Adamski, Franciscan sisters residing in Charleston, offered an exposition of the life of St. Francis of Assisi and an explanation of the custom of blessing animals.





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UPCOMING EVENTS—WORTH ATTENDING OR TUNING TO

Ongoing programs offered online and in person by

Atlantic Institute South Carolina (including online book club)

Charleston Interreligious Council

Interfaith Partners of Aiken

Interfaith Partners of South Carolina

South Carolina Christian Action Council (including occasional online book features)

South Carolinians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (including online book club)

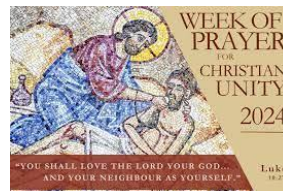
Also see online programs offered by

Anti-Defamation League

Focolare and New City Press

Rumi Forum

January 2024 Interfaith Harmony Month—with activities across the state ((to be announced))



January 18-25, 2024 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity