



TOGETHER IN FAITH AND FRIENDSHIP **NO. 13**
OFFICE OF ECUMENICAL & INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS **OCTOBER 2024**
DIOCESE OF CHARLESTON



SCADP members and SCCAC joined in presenting 10,000 signatures begging Governor McMaster to hold off the execution of Freddie “Khalil” Owens. Father Michael Okere offered reflections and prayers at the noon Mass at St. Martin de Porres on September 20, the execution date, and then led the prayer vigil composed by SC Catholic Conference and Catholic Mobilizing Network, outside the prison in the hour and a half leading up to the execution. After the formal vigil a family from St. John of the Cross in Batesburg-Leesville joined with two others to offer a rosary as Owens was approaching the time of his death.

CONFRONTING ANOTHER LIFE ISSUE—THE DEATH PENALTY

We Catholics have become accustomed to meeting a number of Christian groups at our annual Stand Up for Life events at the state capital in January and many of our sidewalk gatherings for prayer in October, Respect Life Month. We have joined forces with Baptists, Lutherans, Orthodox Christians, and members of other denominations and free churches. A life issue that has brought many South Carolinians together this year, however, has been the death penalty—occasioned by the announcement that, after a 13-year hiatus, the state would be executing people on death row. The photos tell much of the story. We hold board membership on South Carolinians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty. Bishop Jacques Fabre-Jeune asked our parishes to offer intercessory prayer and conduct vigils as the first execution approached. The photos here show a number of events, including those at the State House and at the Broad River Correctional Institution as the hour of the first execution approached.

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Anti-death penalty activities took place throughout July, August, and September. They will continue with a public witness at the state house on October 10, and activities around the state throughout October under the aegis of the Palmetto Journey of Hope.

The youngest member of the SCADP Board is an outspoken opponent of abortion and of the death penalty (L). One of our newly ordained priests (Father Osteen) knelt to pray the rosary after the formal vigil at Broad River Correctional minutes before the execution of Freddie (Khail) Owens began. And one of the original founders of SCADP offered promotional materials at the Nickelodeon Theater in Columbia as a film showing was about to begin (R, shown with a friend). He also kept watch at the execution vigil.



For the second consecutive year, on July 22 Nickelodeon Theater in Columbia hosted the screening of a film dramatizing the practice and effects of the death penalty. A discussion, with testimony from legal experts, a minister, and an exonerated former prisoner followed. The event was co-sponsored by South Carolina Christian Action Council (Executive Minister Rev. Dr. Regina Moore shown below) and SCADP.



REFLECTING ON POLITICAL MATTERS



A day after the film showing at the Nickelodeon, the South Carolina Christian Action Council (SCCAC) offered a webinar on “Church and Society.” Clergy from across denominations interact with the many controversial issues of the day. The overall consensus of the presenters aligned firmly with what Catholics have been urging pastors and teachers of the faith to attend to: preaching and teaching principles—like human dignity, solidarity, concern for the poor, the common good—but refraining from attacking persons or using the church as a platform for partisanship. Our faith traditions do not always

see eye-to-eye on life issues, sad to say, but we continue to find that we can work together for many humane causes.

INTRODUCING INTERNS TO AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE—AND CHALLENGES

Both SCCAC and SCADP have had the custom of taking on as summer interns college or graduate students who are interested in criminal justice and the law. This year SCADP had four interns. Each one is responsible for certain research projects and also hands-on engagement, but there is also an educational component. Not surprisingly, both SCCAC and SCADP have made visits to Mother Emanuel in Charleston and the International African American Museum part of the educational segments. Shown below are some photos from the memorable visit to Charleston which interns made on July 16.



CELEBRATING NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE

While our diocesan African American and Native American Office is the annual sponsor, many of the office's activities end up including ecumenical and interfaith elements. This year's Tekakwitha celebration was no exception, as Cathy Nelson, a member of the board of the Interfaith Partners of South Carolina, arranged for traditional drummers to be part of the observance at St. Martin de Porres in Columbia on July 13, with Father Okere, Deacon Larry Deschaine, and Kathleen Merritt leading the day.



AN INTERNATIONAL AND ECUMENICAL POTLUCK

Every year the United Nations declares July 30 International Friendship Day. For the past three years, Catholics for the Common Good, based at St. Gregory the Great in Bluffton, have extended invitations to neighboring Christian churches to join in a potluck midday meal on or around that date. Participants are invited to prepare a favorite ethnic dish and, if desired, to show up in costume. This year 16 local churches were invited. This is one of those relatively simple ways to build relationships which foster Christian unity and add some lightness of heart as well. Father Saleh Diego brought some of his Pakistani culture along and joined a couple in dress from India.



SHELTERING FAMILIES IN NEED

For a number of years, churches from Beaufort and Jasper counties are among those which have hosted Family Promise, a program which provides shelter, usually temporary, to families in crisis. A long-awaited dream was fulfilled this summer as the two-county ecumenical effort opened a home which can provide more stable residence to up to 7 families. The mayors of Bluffton and Hardeeville were present, and Monsignor Ronald Cellini, dean of the Beaufort deanery, offered the blessing as the ribbon was cut on August 1. The goal of the residence is to assist families to get back on their feet, while providing them with support and basic necessities. Numerous area organizations have helped by providing furnishings and life necessities. This program mirrors, in many ways, a similar effort in Goose Creek and Moncks Corner celebrated at Pentecost.

Interior and exterior scenes at the new Family Promise shelter, with a ribbon cutting and open house August 1.



The shelter provides multiple bedrooms, including bunks for children, a fully equipped kitchen, comfortable spaces for relaxation, and laundry facilities.

STRATEGIZING FOR INTERFAITH EFFECTIVENESS

Interfaith Partners of South Carolina (IPSC) is active monthly in terms of board membership and various events which build understanding. In August, members of the board gathered to engage in strategic planning in the lead-up to Interfaith Harmony Month 2025, celebrated in January, and also to consider ways to celebrate Christian Unity Week—extending invitations to the Christian groups represented in IPSC. Charleston Interreligious Council (CIC) does the same, sponsoring not only interfaith events for all but also encouraging faith groups within the organization to plan special invitational events—throughout the year, but especially in January. An ongoing goal of both IPSC and CIC is engaging new membership and participation among youth and young adults.



Not surprisingly, perhaps, the younger planners were at their devices, while a segment of the IPSC board members in attendance were on both on their feet and seated as they engaged in the planning day, hosted by Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Columbia on August 28.

ECUMENISM AND ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER

Water Mission® is a faith-based organization which operates a gigantic complex—and an effective international service—out of North Charleston. It currently is responding to the dire need for clean water in areas of the US affected by Hurricane Helene, but its reach serves not only the Americas but also parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe desperate for clean water. Quite a few of our parishes have joined Christians, Scout groups, civic organizations, and schools in the Charleston area and in the Lowcountry to support the Mission financially. The Mission produces water purification equipment by tapping the expertise of retired engineers who contribute their services and skills. They ship the systems with instructions for use and solar panels which provide the electrical power needed for the systems. This year, once again, the Charleston area held its Walk for Water in March, and the Lowcountry at several sites in September. Catholics, Presbyterians, members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and other faith communities and service organizations and family groups showed up on Saturday, September 21. Some photos from the 2024 Walk for Water appear on the following page.



Religious leaders and scientists have warned us that future wars may well be waged over water. The groups assembled below hope to prevent that by providing clean water systems to areas all over the globe.



Notice the presence of young people. They rally for good causes and cross denominational and racial lines to do so. Below, right: Note the demonstration model of the water purification device sent all over the world.



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