



Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee Walking Together

by Anne Mulqueen, OFS

Dear brothers and sisters,

As reported in the last issue of TAU-USA, a new Chair for the Ecumenical-Interfaith Committee will be selected, and my term of office will end at the November Chapter of the National Fraternity. What a joy it has been to chair this committee for the past four years, and I will miss writing to you. It is a privilege to work with countless deeply spiritual and talented people—too many to list.

One great benefit of term limits is that it encourages Secular Franciscans with fresh ideas to seek leadership roles in the OFS. And knowing that your time in office will come to an end, forces you to think about the impact you will leave on the members you serve. The impact I wish to leave is to encourage you to study the original documents for ecumenical and interfaith action. These documents come from the Second Vatican Council; *Unitatis Redintegration* (Decree on Ecumenism) and *Nostra Aetate* (The Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions). They can be accessed on the Vatican website.

Unitatis Redintegration (Decree on Ecumenism)

This document addresses restoring unity among Christian churches. It delves into the history of disunity between East and West, as well as between the Roman church and the churches of the Reformation. Obviously, I cannot allude to all the chapters of this document due to space constraints, but the following passages deserve careful consideration.

Unitatis Redintegration 1 views unity as a priority.

The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only.

Unitatis Redintegration 3 is a history lesson on the divisions among Christians.

Even in the beginnings of this one and only Church of God, there arose certain rifts, (Cf. 1 Cor. 11, 18-19; Gal. 1, 6-9; 1

Jn. 2, 18-19.) which the Apostle strongly condemned. (Cf. 1 Cor. 1, 11 sqq; 11, 22.)

Unitatis Redintegration 5 states that ecumenism is a concern for ordinary people.

The attainment of union is the concern of the whole Church, faithful and shepherds alike. This concern extends to everyone....

Unitatis Redintegration 9 speaks of Catholic and non-Catholic dialogue.

We must get to know the outlook of our separated [brothers and sisters]. To achieve this purpose, study is of necessity required, and this must be pursued with a sense of realism and good will.

Unitatis Redintegration 20, my final point, speaks of our common focus on Christ.

Our thoughts turn first to those Christians who make open confession of Jesus Christ as God and Lord and as the sole Mediator between God and (humankind), to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Nostra Aetate (The Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions)

This document relates to humanity's common search for God. It addresses the religions outside the Abrahamic monotheistic traditions and then speaks of Islam, Judaism and respectful relations. These religions seek to reach beyond themselves to attain union with the creator of all.

Nostra Aetate 3 in regard to Islam states:

They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God.

Nostra Aetate 4 in regard to Judaism states:

Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets.

... Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross, Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles, making both one in Himself.

Nostra Aetate 5 concludes with:

We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: "He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8).

Commitment to ecumenical and interfaith work is based on love, prayer and personal conversion and respectful communication, and I'm sure I've missed other components. Prayer is essential so our activities mirror and express Jesus' desire in John 17:21 that *all may be one*. A converted heart is essential, because fractured relations do exist among Christians and non-Christians faiths. Consequently, all persons serving in this area need to be open to God's

inspiration and direction. When entering into communication with those of other faith traditions, we need to possess a sound grasp of our own faith. And since the greatest of all virtues is love, to enter into ecumenical-interfaith encounters, it is essential to ask the Holy Spirit to give us the grace to be respectful, humble, genuine, gentle and generous because all God's people deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

I am grateful for this opportunity to express my appreciation to you. You have made my time of service a wonderful experience. I have learned so much through our interaction, and I will miss serving you in this capacity.

Your sister in Christ, Saints Francis and Clare,
Anne Mulqueen, ofs

