



Ecumenical Interfaith Committee Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity

Our vision is to educate and to raise the awareness of our Franciscan sisters and brothers in the United States to the ecumenical and interfaith movements in the Church.

Introducing the Spring Newsletter
www.ofsusaecumenicalinterfaith.org

Welcome

Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat to the Ecumenical Interfaith Committee

Imam Arafat serves as the president of the Islamic Affairs Council of Maryland and the president of the Civilizations Exchange & Cooperation Foundation. He earned his reputation as a scholar and teacher of Islamic spirituality through his formal education at Damascus University and his dedication to pursue a true understanding and relationship with Allah. This dedication has led him to extensive involvements with many national and international interfaith organizations that work to bring people together to create a world in which peace and cooperation is the goal. Since January 2005, Imam Arafat has been conducting programs on Islam in America through the International Speakers Program of the United States Department of State in more than 25 countries. He is currently teaching at Notre Dame of Maryland University.



INTRODUCTION TO ISLAM

by Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat

Excerpt from the Spring OFS-USA-EIC Newsletter

What is Islam?

The Arabic word “Islam” literally means “surrender” or “submission.” Islam, as a faith, means total and sincere surrender to God so one can live in peace and tranquility. The Arabic word “salam” means “peace” and the phrase “assalamu alaikum” means “peace be with you,” the greeting of Muslims around the world. This peace is achieved through active obedience to the revealed commandments of God and by following the teachings of His prophet, Muhammad, the son of Abdullah, born in Makkah in 570 AD. It was not Muhammad, but Adam, who first brought Islam to humanity. Then each prophet and messenger came to exhort the people to a clear understanding of God’s

commandments. They offered teachings relevant to their time until God chose the final prophet, Muhammad, to come with the Last Testament referred to as the Qur’an. It is the Muslim’s holy book, which speaks in detail regarding five of the twenty-five recognized prophets, who are considered to be the chief prophets of authority: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.

The Sultan & The Saint

Francis went to meet the Sultan because Francis rejected the violence of the Crusades and religious wars. After meeting the Sultan and experiencing Muslim spirituality, St. Francis went through a transformation in which he had a new vision of

Christians and Muslims living in peace and harmony and saw his mission and that of his followers to be one of building bridges between the people of the two faith traditions.

Today, nearly 99 percent of Muslims around the world have not even heard and do not talk about the story of the Sultan & the Saint.

This is one of the most important stories today for the Muslim world. It has nearly been forgotten in the Arab world. I have been asking many of my friends and people I come across: "Do you remember or have you read about the story of the Sultan and the Saint?" Most have never heard the story!!!

Now we are in a crisis!! We only talk about problems like Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda, Zawahiri and Isis. We don't talk about the Sultan, who welcomed St. Francis and engaged in discussions with him. Also in the West, we should talk more about St. Francis, who went to build bridges of interfaith, dialogue and outreach.

I have been reading in Arabic from different Christian sources in the Middle East about how this story impacted Christians in the Holy Land and other places in the Middle East.

I really feel that it is about time that our faith communities in America do a little bit more guided by the spirit of the Sultan, who welcomed the Saint. As an Imam in the United States, I feel it is about time to use this story and prepare a curriculum accessible to various audiences regardless of their religion, age or nationality to transmit the true meaning of brotherhood, spirituality and compassion, the only path to peaceful coexistence in a religiously and culturally pluralistic world. We are witnessing a unique period in the history of mankind. We have social media and the super information highway accessible on every corner of this earth. The challenge for us is how we are going to use these kinds of blessings from Almighty. The blessings of knowledge and the blessings of technology can be used for our benefit or for our destruction. Are we going to use them for our well-being or for our ego and self-fulfillment?

I hope that a new era is about to start. These days, with the issues of refugees and immigrants, who are part of the results of broken systems of our civilization of today, the only solution is true cooperation between the followers of the Sultan and the followers of Saint Francis, Muslims and Christians.

To learn more about Islam, please read Imam Arafat's entire article. See the link below

Secular Franciscans Learn the Similarities between our Faith and Islam

by Don Watkins, OFS

Excerpt from the Spring OFS-USA-EIC Newsletter

St. Irenaeus Fraternity recently joined with neighboring St. Bonaventure Fraternity, (St. Kateri Tekakwitha Region) to learn about the similarities between our two faiths. Don Watkins, OFS published an article about that experience on the web. This same article will be published in

Franciscan Connections which is a journal of the Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure University. The Fraternity also is reaching out to the Olean, New York area Islamic Community and has expressed a desire for the fraternity to visit their mosque.

The complete text for the preceding articles can be found on the new Ecumenical Interfaith website. Click on the link for the spring newsletter at the top of the homepage.

www.offsusaecumenicalinterfaith.org

Facebook: @OFSUSAEIC - Twitter: @Ofs_Usa_Eic