



Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity



Assalamu Alaikum

by Mike Carsten, OFS

Assalamu alaikum is the traditional Muslim greeting, which is not something most of our sisters and brothers hear every day. Nor do we often hear positive comments when the name Allah is used in reference to God. In today's world, there are certain buzz words that catch our attention and give us pause, which makes our anxiety rise. What is the conditioned response to our angst? Fear. Keep people out. We must "build a wall."

My wife Kathy and I work and serve the poor on the streets of Detroit, a stone's throw from the city of Dearborn. Dearborn is home to the largest population of Muslims in the United States. If I have learned anything serving the poor on the streets of Detroit, it is that poverty, misery, hunger, and fear know neither jurisdictional boundaries, nor honor or recognition of religious affiliations.

This past month, a young man volunteered with us as we served the poor. He is 19, a Muslim, and his family has sent him here from Turkey to escape the current political turmoil and violence in his homeland. He is a senior in high school learning our language and experiencing our culture. For this young adult's parents, the United States is viewed and used as "sanctuary." Coming to downtown Detroit and serving the homeless and poor was not anything that was on this young person's radar when his parents sent him here for an education. Yet here he was. How did he come to us? He was brought by another 19-year-old high school senior who is here in Michigan from Poland. They are both looking to serve, and at the same time experience a place of peace and community. Imagine! A 19-year-old Catholic high school senior works side by side, hand in hand with a 19-year-old Muslim high school senior, serving those in need regardless of race, ethnicity, or religious affiliation, serving with volunteers who are Secular Franciscans, Southern Baptists, Romanian Orthodox, Lutheran, and agnostic.

Our Rule, Constitutions, and National Statutes call for us in our Ecumenical and Interfaith efforts to move beyond talk. We are called to follow the example of the young adults I have mentioned above and fearlessly move out into our communities

From our Rule, we read:

Secular Franciscans

- ❖ should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters. *Article 5*
- ❖ are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children. *Article 11*
- ❖ should set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters. *Article 12*

