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Walking together on the road to salvation

by Tom Gallagher



Vincentian Fr. Carl Schulte (Courtesy of the Sr. Marie de Mandat-Grancey Foundation)

Sr. Marie de Mandat-Grancey, a Daughter of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, was the founder of the House of Mary, located in Ephesus, Turkey. The stone house has attracted pilgrims since the late 19th century as the place where the Blessed Virgin was brought by the Apostle John to live until her assumption. De Mandat-Grancey helped restore and preserve Mary's House from 1891 until her death in 1915. Today, Mary's House provides a unique venue for millions of both Christians and Muslims as a place of peace and prayer.

In December 2010, I wrote an NCR story titled, "An intercessor with Muslims," which tells how two Catholic women, Erin von Uffel and Lorraine Fusaro, longtime friends and residents of Long Island, N.Y., believe they have identified a way to model peaceful coexistence and respect between Christians and Muslims by making people aware of de Mandat-Grancey and Mary's House.

Vincentian Fr. Carl Schulte has written de Mandat-Grancey's biography, using archives and materials sent by von Uffel. The Life of Sr. Marie de Mandat-Grancey & Mary's House in Ephesus was recently published by St. Benedict Press/TAN Books. NCR recently spoke with Schulte, 91, about his book.

NCR: Did you know of Sister Marie and her life's work?

Schulte: I had no idea of who she was and I worked closely for 12 years with the Daughters of Charity and they never mentioned her name. It was the "touch of the divine" because I got dragged into it.

Why did you believe so strongly that this book needed to be written?

In pre-World War I, the French press covered this, but the story never broke in the United States. Mary's House presents a tremendous opportunity to strengthen the relationship between Christians and Muslims. Sister Marie had the attitude to reach out to Muslims, the Greek Orthodox and others. I believe the book will be valuable to the time we live in, not as a tool to convert Muslims, but because we are all walking toward the same God.

You have written that Sister Marie's life aligns itself with the privacy manifested in Mary's life. How so?

Sister Marie tried to serve God in a quiet way. St. Vincent de Paul encourages us to see Jesus in the suffering of the other, to smile at the other person. Sister Marie reflected a kindness toward others, letting God to do the work. The first person hired by Sister Marie to care for Mary's House was a Muslim.

Does your study of Sister Marie lead you to any insights into how Christians and Muslims can overcome fear and prejudice toward each other?

First of all, I am not a Muslim expert. In my view, we can't take the attitude that Muslims are trained to hate us. We cannot judge before we know the other. We are companions on the road to salvation.

The Quran mentions Mary's name more than any other woman and dedicates an entire chapter to her. How does this help Christian-Muslim understanding?

Mary is a starting point in discussion with Muslims and in creating a friendship with Muslims. Most of us love our own mothers and our mothers love us. We need to realize that Muslims are honest people who relate to Mary, and who love the Blessed Mother.

On Oct. 27, Pope Benedict XVI will be in Assisi, Italy, to host the interreligious prayer meeting for peace on the 25th anniversary of the event started by Pope John Paul II. If you were to attend, what message would you share?

I go back to St. Vincent de Paul, who recommends beginning everything with a smile and to go out and meet the other, show respect to the other and appreciation for who they are. It is not an easy task, but we have to listen. People are ready to find answers. We all have the same God and we are walking together.

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