



# M inistering Together

“News, comments and events of concern to the religious community”

The Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County

December 2006—January 2007

## Coming Events

### ❖ Bell Choir Celebration of Christ's Birth

Saturday, December 2, 6:30 p.m.  
Walnut Creek Community of Christ  
1786 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave., Walnut Creek

All are invited to this celebratory event. Refreshments will be served. For more information, contact [kfletcher52@yahoo.com](mailto:kfletcher52@yahoo.com).

### ❖ Project Homeless Connect

Thursday, December 7, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
Richmond Auditorium  
403 Civic Center Plaza, Richmond

Partners around the county are organizing this one-day, one-stop shop to offer a variety of services to people experiencing homelessness. Volunteers and in-kind donations are being solicited. High priority donations include new socks, underwear and sweats, quality jeans, sleeping bags, adults backpacks and hygiene kits. To help, contact Felix at (925) 313-6124 or [projecthomeless-connect@hsd.cccounty.us](mailto:projecthomeless-connect@hsd.cccounty.us).

### ❖ The Bethlehem Experience

Friday through Sunday, December 8 to 9  
6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.  
Lafayette United Methodist Church  
955 Moraga Rd., Lafayette

Come for a guided tour through the marketplace of Bethlehem on the night of Jesus' birth. For more information, call (925) 284-4765.

### ❖ Let Justice Roll Like a River:

A Commemoration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  
Monday, January 15, 12:00 noon  
Walnut Creek Civic Center  
Civic Park (corner of Broadway and Civic)

We gather again for this annual event to remember Dr. King's legacy of seeking peace with justice. Enjoy the music, inspirational speeches, and keynote by Birmingham native, Lester Cobb. For more information, call (925) 934-0759.

### ❖ Reconstituting Meeting of Health and Faith-in-Action Committee

Wednesday, January 10, 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.

Interfaith Council office

1543 Sunnyvale Ave., Walnut Creek

If you are interested in the intersection between health and faith, please join this re-forming group that will explore healing and health care from spiritual perspectives. Call to confirm your attendance at (925) 933-6030.

### ❖ Signs of Hope in an Emerging Universe

Friday through Sunday, January 12 to 14  
San Damiano Retreat, Danville

Come for an extraordinary and hope-filled conversation as noted physicist/cosmologist Dr. Brian Swimme and parish priest Fr. Brian Joyce find harmony with the Canticle of St. Francis and the New Story of our evolving universe. They will also take a fresh look at the Christian faith, Jesus, the Church, death and the afterlife. You may attend the keynote presentation on Friday, January 12 at 8:00 p.m. (\$20 at door) or the whole conference (\$165-195). Contact (925) 837-9141 or [www.sandamiano.org](http://www.sandamiano.org) to register.

### ❖ Caring Hands Volunteer Training

Friday, January 19, 8:45 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.  
John Muir Medical Center, Walnut Creek

You can lend a hand to frail, isolated or disabled seniors through friendly visiting, transportation, errands, respite care, light household tasks or minor home repairs. To sign up (by July 9), contact Carol or Linda at (925) 952-2999 or visit [www.johnmuirhealth.com/caring\\_hands](http://www.johnmuirhealth.com/caring_hands).

### ❖ All the Rivers of Paradise: Christian Responsibility in an Interfaith World

PSR Earl Lectures  
Tuesday through Thursday, January 23-25  
First Congregational Church of Berkeley

The theme for this annual event, sponsored by the Pacific School of Religion, is of particular interest. Lecturers and preachers include Mahmoud Mustafa Ayoub (professor of Islamic studies and comparative religion at Temple University), Bernice Powell Jackson (president of the World Council of Churches for North America), Tat-siong Benny Liew and Choan-Seng Song (both PSR professors). Our own Interfaith Council will be featured in a workshop as well. For registration information (only \$75 before January 1) contact (510) 849-8274 or [www.psr.edu](http://www.psr.edu).

## *Director's Letter*

Dear friends,

Between Thanksgiving and end of the year holidays (for me, Christmas, for others, Hannukah, Kwanzaa, Day of Hajj, Yule, Shogatsu), I am in a grateful mood.

I am grateful to you all who read this newsletter, who give financially to support our ministries, who volunteer to run programs and events, who pray for interreligious cooperation and understanding, who have made interfaith work a daily practice, who are willing to take risks.

I am grateful for the many partners we find in the county who are busy serving the poor and the underprivileged, the tempest-tossed and the bruised. (A recent political cartoon shows persons from the White House and Congress on a small globe, searching for something, and the earth itself is labeled "Common Ground." It is becoming increasingly obvious that, no matter how much we separate ourselves, we are inextricably part of a common ground. All one has to do to find it is look down...)

I am grateful for our chaplain to the juvenile detention facilities in Contra Costa, the Rev. Dr. Charles Tinsley. I am also grateful for the indomitable leader of the Singing Messengers, Jackie Wan, who tirelessly leads musical cheer-bringers into our county's nursing facilities.

I am grateful for Nora Chuch, our office manager, for Lenita Shumaker, our newsletter editor, for our wonderful Executive Committee members, for Raphael Asher, our president, for Will McGarvey, our vice-president, for Hal Foster, our treasurer, for Gwen Watson and Natalie Russell, leaders of the Social Justice Alliance. I am grateful for all of the past leaders of this organization, who worked so well at maintaining our various ministries, and the vehicle which is now the Interfaith Council.



I am grateful for those who teach religion and comparative religion, for the many spiritual directors, pastors, deacons and deaconesses, monks and nuns, retreat leaders, authors, dramatists and others who model godly lives.

I am grateful for the founders of this country, who understood the importance of the free exercise of religion, and who sought to limit the establishment of any sect as a national religion. I am grateful for the impulses of religious and non-religious people to seek the welfare of others. I am grateful that I can speak opinions informed by faith and not be derided (though we are still working on this as a diverse nation).

I am grateful for (now here I go) the pursuit of compassion, truth, life, love, companionship, trust, non-violence, insight, equality under the law, modesty, quality work, patience, hope, and, yes, faith.

And I am grateful for the privilege of serving you in this extraordinary manner. There are many of you I know who could do a wonderful job of guiding this organization. Heck, you virtually are, in the way you are organizing those around you to do amazing things. You have spirit, you have energy for the task, you have generosity, you have spark. You collaborate, cajole, create, manage, perform magic, expand, include, embrace, feed, shelter, pray, vote and participate.

It has been six years and some, over half-way around the clock face, that we have been together. The blessings keep coming. Being grateful helps me to see them even more clearly.

Yours,  
Brian

### **Your Participation Desired**

1. The Mountain View Family Shelter in Martinez is looking for congregational and other groups to fill many weeks in the new year by providing dinners to the residents. So many of you have been faithful in giving this service. If you can help again in the new year, please contact Gloria deVries at (925) 228-6920. The general need is for a week (Monday through Friday) of meals, but you may also provide for a single meal a month.
2. The Earl Lectures at the Pacific School of Religion, as advertised in "Coming Events," are a wonderful opportunity for continuing education that is local and substantial. This year's theme, "All the Rivers of Paradise: Christian Responsibility in an Interfaith World," is right down our alley. And it doesn't hurt that the venue is right down the street, figuratively.

Most events of the three-day event (January 23-25) happen at the First Congregational Church of Berkeley, which is located on the immediate south side of the Cal Berkeley campus. There are some registration materials in the Interfaith Council office. You may also get some by calling (510) 849-8274 or by visiting [www.psr.edu](http://www.psr.edu).

You can also come to a workshop led by leaders of our organization, entitled "Evolving Into Interfaith," which will be held on both Wednesday the 24<sup>th</sup> (3:30 to 4:45 p.m.) and Thursday the 25<sup>th</sup> (10:45 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.)

## Chaplain's Corner



The probation officer asked if I might check on a kid in her caseload who had been pretty much on his own since he was nine years old. He was so tiny that during his first intake into juvenile hall, he had to stand on a box for the booking picture. Even then, the stationary camera just barely recorded the kid's full face. Only a bit of "peach fuzz" on his chin and above his upper lip revealed that he was a teenager. The probation officer was concerned about the fourteen-year-old's safety because he was recently beaten nearly to death in the streets--onto which he was about to be released. "Home" was not where his heart was; life for this child had been dreadful.

I was asked to bring his mother to juvenile hall to collect her child and take him home. Upon arrival at juvenile hall, she was unable to produce any form of identification. Fortunately, the probation officer had authorized the child's release to either the mother or to me. I took mother and son home. The mother asked me for money, ostensibly for food. The look on the kid's face more than reflected the tremendous shame he felt for his mom's behavior. I gave her a few dollars. However, in subsequent encounters, I gave her grocery store gift certificates or food from the food pantry where her son had performed community service.

The kid, while on electronic monitor, performed court-ordered community service under my direction and went to church on numerous occasions. When we went out, he ate well for his size; there was very little food at his home. At the Court's insistence and with probation's persistence, the mother was able to reenroll the kid in school. I helped the family acquire some essential school supplies and clothing so that the kid could comfortably take advantage of the opportunity afforded him.

Owing to ongoing and profound difficulties in the young man's life, school, home, electronic detention, sobriety,

and discipline were too much for the confused and frustrated kid. He cut off the monitor, left home and went back out onto the streets. He was AWOL for months. A warrant for his arrest was issued. I heard *about* him but not *from* him.

I sent word out into the streets via other kids that he should call me. Given his fear, embarrassment, and confusion, I received no response to my appeals. My fervent prayer was that he would be taken back into custody before more danger might befall him. In due time, my prayer was answered. Upon his return to juvenile hall, he fell tearfully into my arms.

The probation officer recommended to the Court that he be sent to the Orin Allen program in Byron (probably to save this little kid's life more than for any other reason). The Court agreed. The kid's time there has been especially difficult for him. Other options and opportunities for this kid, beyond the gates of the "ranch," are precious few. We cannot and must not give up on this dear creation of God – his plight is not unique.

Keep the Kleenex handy; it will be needed as you read the letter he wrote and personally delivered to me. It is duplicated below exactly as he wrote it.

*"Dear Rev. Tinsley, Rev I myself need help, I need help to start a new life. I just need to get this program over and get out of here. Rev when I get out I need to get baptize so I can get clean and wish all my sines away. Rev Im sorry for Harting your fullings it aint like its your life but you cear for me and you want to see me doing something in life. Rev I gest need help because I don't what to indup died or in CYA and I deinitly don't what to leva my mom. So please help me thank you I love you Father."*

I don't want him to "indup died" either!

Rev. Dr. Charles Tinsley, Juvenile Detention Chaplain

## Transitions

A fond farewell to **the Rev. Bryn Smallwood-Garcia**, who leaves Orinda Community Church to become senior pastor at The Congregational Church of Brookfield, Connecticut (a church that will celebrate their 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year). She writes, "While it does grieve me deeply to have to leave such dear friends behind, after nearly eight years here, I am looking forward to what lies ahead for me and my family...No one likes to say 'good bye,' but I hope these last few months together can include celebration of all we have been able to accomplish together. Our Learning Community, youth, and parent groups are thriving, our worship is vital and alive, and our ministries of study, prayer, fellowship, pastoral care and outreach are full of dedicated and sincere disciples who reach out to others daily, in Christ's name. On a personal note, I feel particularly blessed by the gift it has been to share in nearly a decade of collegial ministry with my friend and fellow pastor Frank Baldwin. With him, all of you have mentored me an encouraged me to grow into this new call, and I hope you can rejoice with me in this new opportunity to serve Christ's church."

Farewell also to **the Rev. Mary Naegeli**, who leaves First Presbyterian Church in Concord and will be taking some time off from ministry.

### The Rev. Alan Kelchner Danville Congregational Church

Many of us are troubled when we hear others speak with great confidence about “what God wants” or whom God favors. The world has seen so much killing and innocent suffering caused by opposing groups who each believe passionately that “God is on their side.” There is no war like a holy war, in which each side characterizes the other as “evil.”

Most of the time, most of us are not so bold in our pronouncements about God Almighty. We prefer to speak of the Holy One more cautiously, as mysterious and unknowable: an unsearchable truth that lies beyond human control and beyond human understanding. And yet, even we who are cautious may be willing to say that it is “God’s will” that all people of the earth live in harmony and safety, and that there be no more bombs, assault rifles, or terror raining from the skies. You may well join me in the belief that it is God’s will for each of us that we live a full and happy life, that no one lives in fear, and that no child dies of starvation. *“It is the will of God in heaven that not even one of these little ones be lost.” (Matthew 18:14)*

I have a hunch we know more about God than we let on. Many years of listening to people talk about spiritual issues have taught me that most of us carry inside ourselves a certain emptiness, a restlessness, a feeling that something is missing or is out of synch. Theologians call it estrangement; psychologists call it anxiety. Some describe it as a profound loneliness or a sense of longing. Whatever you call it, I believe that this unease is, in itself, a voice from God. As Frederick Buechner said, we know God best as “the empty place inside of us where grace and peace belong.”

But we also experience the presence of God. We may not hear a voice from heaven, and we may not always get the direct answers that we pray for; but I believe that you and I have a pretty good idea of what God wants of us, and how we are to live each day. Perhaps we know more than we let on.

Somebody says something that’s not only cruel but also funny about somebody else, and everybody laughs. Do we laugh too, or do we speak up? When someone hurts us, do we take pleasure in our anger and hurt, or do we shake it off and build back a bridge? Will we be carefully guarded, or will we be brave today? Not in some big dramatic moment, probably, but in some small way; yet, brave still. Will we listen, truly listen this day, to someone we don’t want to hear? Will we be honest today or a liar? Will we reach out and be a friend? Will our self-talk be

glad and creative, or self-defeating and destructive?

I believe that God speaks to us in the midst of all the inner skirmishes and small decisions that make up our days. And what God says is: *Be merciful. Be brave. Feed my lambs. Love one another as I have loved you.*

### The Rev. Dr. Russell Peterman First Christian Church, Concord

#### *Does God Want you to be Rich?*

During a baseball game several years ago, I struck up a conversation with the guy sitting next to me—he seemed like a nice enough guy! However, around the 7<sup>th</sup> inning, he asked me a question that made me want to get up and find a seat somewhere else: “So, what do you do?” It isn’t that I’m ashamed of my profession; it’s just that when I tell people I’m a minister, I’m never sure what will come next! This time my new friend got excited, “Oh, cool! I go to a great church. Does your church preach the Prosperity Gospel, too?” I don’t remember exactly what my response was, but I do remember that my forehead got really wrinkled as I quickly waved down the beer vendor!

A recent Time cover story asked the question, “Does God want you to be rich?” The question is asked largely in response to a relatively recent line of thought within some Christian circles commonly known as Prosperity Theology. Such theology essentially suggests that a God who loves you does not want you to be broke; rather, a God who loves you wants you to be rich!

Though it requires some theological hopscotch, I suppose you could say that such thinking is biblical. In Jesus’ time, wealth was seen by many (though not necessarily by Jesus) as a sign of God’s blessing. That said, the folks who promote Prosperity Theology tend to ignore the things that Jesus *actually* said. You know, like “sell all that you have, give it to the poor and follow me,” and “it is easier for a camel to fit through the eye of needle than for a rich person to enter heaven.” In fact, around 60% of the stuff that Jesus talked about had to do with money or possessions, and I can’t think of one time when he talked about wealth favorably!

I don’t think Jesus would say that money is evil. I do think he’d recognize that our preoccupation with it often gets us in hot water! Paul’s famous line about the evil of money is actually a misquote. What he really said was, “the *love* of money is the root of all kinds of evil.”

Grace is a gift. As Barbara Brown Taylor says, *"the poor can't buy it with their poverty any more than the rich can buy it with their riches."* It's a gift, given by God. *"The catch is,"* she goes on to remind us, "You have got to be free to receive the gift. You cannot be otherwise engaged. You cannot be tied up right now, or too tied down to respond. You cannot accept God's gift if you have no spare hands to take it with. You cannot make room for it if all your rooms are already full. You cannot follow if you are not free to go."

Like all of us, I was overwhelmed with the story that came out of Lancaster County, PA . . . involving the horrific shooting death of several Amish children. What moved me the most was how in the midst of such terror the Amish community--Christians who shun the modern, materialistic way of life--showed such compassion and grace. Not only did they vow to welcome and care for the widow of the man who shot their children, they also spoke quickly of forgiveness, and many even went so far as to attend the funeral of the man who murdered their children as a sign of forgiveness.

Is there a connection here? Or is it merely a coincidence that those who are able to actually DO what Jesus says to do are those who live with their hands empty, reaching out to give rather than to take?

### **Meditation at Church Women United World Community Day—Lenita Shumaker**

What does the soul of humanity desire? What does the soul need, seek and reach out and cry for? Does the soul of one person require different fulfillment than another's? I think not. All of humanity possesses a soul requiring the same thing – to possess the peace that comes from being one with God, by whatever name we use for that Holy One.

Does the soul of humanity crave for ugliness, hatred, fear, violence, suffering and death? No. Just as a baby seeks love, comfort and protection from its mother, so does the human soul seek the love, comfort and security from the Great Creator.

Can we attain that love, comfort and security by sitting cross-legged at the side of the road, hands folded in our lap, waiting, waiting? We cannot say with certainty that such a method will not work, but through the ages seekers of wisdom have suggested other far more helpful paths.

As I sit in my comfortable home in Clayton, I may not meet someone who is dying from lack of food, or a refugee who has been pushed out of her homeland, or a mother whose children have been ripped

away to serve in a marauding army. I may never meet a political prisoner unjustly jailed, or a young teenager caring for younger siblings orphaned by AIDS. Chances are I will never meet a young woman whose parents have sold her simply for money to feed the rest of the family. Perhaps I will never even see the 10- and 12-year-olds on American Indian reservations who are sometimes drunk by noon. So what is all that to me?

Yes, just what is all that to me? Can my soul be filled with the comfort and security that it longs for, when I know that the world is in such need? Can my soul find its peace when there are homeless families needing shelter? My soul cannot be at peace unless I help provide service to others.

Martin Luther King said it far better than I can. Hear the words of Dr. King:

"Through our scientific and technological genius, we have made of this world a neighborhood and yet we have not had the ethical commitment to make of it a brotherhood [or sisterhood]. But somehow, and in some way, we have got to do this. We must all learn to live together as brothers [and sisters] or we will all perish together as fools. We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the way God's universe is made; this is the way it is structured."

And what is it that we ought to be? One with our creator and one with creation. Surely that points to service. As Gandhi said, "What is faith worth if it is not translated into action?" Indeed, whatever our faith, we are called to connect, first with the creator and then with each other in service where it is needed. That requires serving to alleviate misery, not to ease our conscience. Gandhi also said, "My Creed is service of God, and therefore of humanity." To put it in other words, What is any creed worth if it doesn't include service?

We have done an amazing job of separating each other with labels and divisions: young and old, north and south, Catholic and Methodist, Buddhist and Muslim, liberal and conservative, rich and poor, black and white, male and female. We have become very good at drawing circles that keep others out. Surely it is well past time to draw circles of healing. Let us follow our faith into service.

### **Ven. Jian Hu, Sunnyvale Buddhist Center**

We are not called Buddhas, we are not enlightened, because we do not see the reality of things. We do

not see impermanence as a fact of life. Observe how impermanence is a fundamental element in life. Think about how everything changes throughout your life, how everything comes to pass. New things come and go. Impermanence is all around us.

Suffering is the first of the fundamental truths that the Buddha taught in the Four Noble Truths. This first truth, suffering, is closely associated with impermanence. "Oh, our loved ones have departed," we would lament. "Such sorrow, such pain. Why did this happen?" We put the blame on life's impermanence.

But if you take a closer look, impermanence by itself does not cause suffering. If a stranger died, you would probably not feel any pain. Instead you may think, "People die all the time. That's life. All peo-

ple must die one day."

What is the difference? The difference is that when we come to know a person, we become attached to that person, and that is what creates the pain. When we care about someone, often we also simultaneously create an illusion, an illusion of permanence. We think that the person will stay the same, will always be there. We do not recognize, we ignore, or we choose to ignore the reality that all things change. That is the problem. Now this does not mean that we should not form close relationships nor that we should not care about others. What is important is to accept reality when impermanence hits. Do not delude ourselves or escape from facts. Delusion is what prevents us from becoming enlightened. We create a lot of delusions about people, about the world.

### ***Point of View—Risking Conversation***

#### **John Bateson, Executive Director Contra Costa Crisis Center**

Recently, when a friend asked my opinion on immigration, I rolled my eyes. It's a complex issue and there are no easy answers.

America doesn't have enough housing, classrooms, health care, jobs, and other essentials to support a limitless stream of people into this country. At the same time, where and how do we draw the line? Virtually all of us were immigrants once. My father came through Ellis Island from England. My mother's family came through Ellis Island from Norway. Once here, both clans worked hard and assimilated into the prevailing culture, in New York and North Dakota, respectively. Why should others be denied opportunities that my ancestors – and later my family – had?

I think of the movie *A Day Without a Mexican*. In it, the economy of Los Angeles and, by extension, all of California comes crashing to a halt because everyone of Mexican descent vanishes for 24 hours. Without maids, day laborers, child care providers, restaurant staff, landscapers, gas station attendants, farm workers, and other low-paid yet essential service people, the infrastructure of the state collapses.

The thing that makes me most uneasy about the immigration debate is that it smacks of privilege. Once people are admitted into an exclusive group, be it a private club, college, fraternal order, housing development, or business association, they often advocate for tougher entrance requirements. They're in, and now they want to keep others out – especially people who don't look like them, or act like them. In the same way, immigration seems to me like an attempt to protect the rights of people who once were on the outside and now are on the inside.

There are an estimated twelve million illegal immigrants in the United States today. Many more are knocking at the door, eager for a chance to pursue the American dream. I don't know whether we should let them in; I only know that locking them out feels wrong.

Robert Frost said, "Good fences make good neighbors." There's truth in that; however, I don't think the same thing applies to walls – especially thick, high walls topped by barbed wire that run hundreds of miles. One of the highlights of recent history was when the Berlin Wall came down. People everywhere rejoiced.

I don't want to live behind a wall, nor do I think that others should have to live in front of one. There must be a better way – I just wish I knew what it was.

#### **The Rev. Richard Mangini St. Bonaventure Catholic Church, Concord**

Coming out of a Jewish spirituality community in Berkeley is a powerful new group of spiritual thinkers and doers called The Network of Spiritual Progressives. They are calling together restless people of good will from every field and profession around the United States who are interested in establishing a new bottom line.

A recent e-mail from the group writes: "Under the 'New Bottom Line' proposed by the Network of Spiritual Progressives, institutions, social practices, corporations, legislations, government activities, etc. should be judged efficient, rational and productive not only to the extent that they maximize money and power, but also to the extent that they maximize love, caring, generosity, kindness, ethical and ecological sensitivity, and enhance our capacities to respond to the universe with awe, wonder at the grandeur of creation."

The group has held national and local meetings both in Washington, DC and Berkeley with thousands of people in attendance. The new movement to forge connections is growing because many professionals feel frustrated and alienated in their work because they experience being stuck in systems that are stuck in myopic over-concern with money and power...

What a marvelous movement for the Roman Catholic

## *Point of View—Continued*

Church to join and local diocese such as Oakland and San Francisco. This is precisely what the Vatican Council on Non-Christian Religions should become a part of.

I would hope that Pope Benedict would use his offices and spiritual authority to encourage and further these kind of connections as a positive step forward. World religions need to step up to the plate and begin to move the dialog beyond money, power, spiritual doctrines and theologies to human connections.

It is this kind of leadership that will change the impression of the Moslem world about Christian authorities and the impression of the Christian world about Moslem radicalism. Why Pope Benedict used the obscure quotation from a Byzantine emperor, I don't know, but 99% of his talk to scholars at Regensburg University in Germany last September spoke of the importance of reason as developed in Greek Western thought, as a basis for dialog between Christians, Moslems, Asians and all people of good will. The reaction of many Moslem spiritual and political leaders was an example of why "reason" is necessary for any dialog to make progress in understanding and to forge connections.

When "reason" is left out of the dialog equation, history has shown Christian and Moslem examples of Crusades and Jihads. Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East have very long and excruciating memories. It has been a two-edged sword swung both ways.

One Catholic Church journalist has identified one of Pope Benedict's requirements for dialog and progress in understanding two different points of view: Reciprocity – do unto others what you would have them do to you. What you want, you have to be able to give. Freedom, development, mutual respect, human rights, the rule of reason is a two-way street based on respectful dialog and mutual sharing. The rule of a few, whether monarchies or radicals, the total disregard for the will of the people to make progress and to be developed, the calling for or indiscriminate killing in the name of God, ethnicity or doctrine advances chaos only and not connection.

### **Dr. Amer Araim, Dar-ul-Islam Mosque, Concord**

For Believers, Hope is an Endless Journey

I have always emphasized to members of my family and friends as well the congregations where I speak that as a believer I am continuously living with a hope of a better future for humanity. I am grieved and saddened by destruction of human lives and the environment. However, I am convinced that the wisdom, mercy and power of Allah shall provide human beings with compassion as well as the means to come to their senses and liberate themselves from their greed and to stop the spiral of violence. People of faith have a great role to play in this regard.

It was really a good opportunity for me, the members of the Muslim community and other faith groups as well as faculty members and students of Diablo Valley College to

welcome Mr. Ronald Young, the Executive Director of the United States Interreligious Committee for Peace in the Middle East. I was moved by the welcome extended by my brothers and sisters of the Islamic Center of San Ramon Valley to Mr. Young, Rabbi Raphael Asher, Reverend Brian Stein Webber and all our friends who visited the Center on that occasion. We agreed to cooperate not only on the level of our religious institutions but beyond that by arranging to get together with our families. I wish to stress that despite what might be considered as differences with regard to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, all of us believe that violence should come to an end immediately, the Palestinians and the Israelis belong to the same land and they should live there on the basis of peace, justice and mutual respect and that our differences should not lead in any way to acrimonious accusations and disruption of the friendly relationship, which we have built over the years through working together within the Interfaith Council.

In this regards, I wish to share my agony for the nineteen innocent people (including many women and children) of Beit Hanoun in Palestine who were recently killed by the Israeli forces. This mayhem is added to the long list of tragedies and sufferings by the Palestinians and will not stop until the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories comes to an end. The Israeli authorities are not interested in withdrawing from the Palestinian territories and unless the international community takes effective steps to achieve this noble goal, the sufferings of the Palestinians will continue. Nevertheless we should not lose hope and instead we emphasize our belief that "We shall overcome one day."

The other tragedy is unfolding in Iraq on daily basis. In the latest one, according to the Iraqi Minister of Higher Education, militias supported by certain quarters within the Iraqi government abducted more than hundred staff of his ministry. The Occupying Forces could not do anything to stop the continuing tragedy in Iraq. The only way out is for the United States to bring the matter before the United Nations Security Council, withdraw its forces from Iraq and replace them with United Nation peace-making troops, the Council to order that all militias to be dissolved and establish a war-time tribunal to bring to justice any person involved in violence in Iraq.

### **Receive the Newsletter On-line**

We now have the capability of sending you the newsletter as a Publisher attachment to anyone who wishes to receive it. If you would rather get your newsletter as an e-mail than as printed copy, please contact the office at [eye4cee@aol.com](mailto:eye4cee@aol.com) and we will transfer your name onto that list. Please know that if you change to getting the newsletter electronically, we will take you off of the newsletter mailing list.

## Singing Messengers Rehearse for Winter Program

# This 'N That

## Reflective Intrafaith Reading Room

Both Tuesday and Thursday Singing Messenger Teams rehearse after Thanksgiving through the beginning of January, before starting to visit our county's fifty nursing home facilities, with a musical program called "Showtime USA."

There are immediate openings for enthusiastic singers (no experience necessary), so that the people visited will feel the warmth of the larger Interfaith Council family. Leave a message for the director, Jackie Wan, at the Interfaith Council office, 925-933-6030. She will call you back. Or e-mail her at jackielegato@yahoo.com.

## Midwinter Music Workshop

Choristers Guild of the Greater San Francisco Bay Area, Inc. presents: "*With Love! A Director's Guide to Spirit, Joy and Beauty in the Children's Choir*" at the upcoming Midwinter Workshop. The clinician, Randal McChesney, is currently President and Executive Director of the Richards Institute of Education Through Music. He is widely recognized for outstanding work with children of all ages and a delight to the lay person learning to direct a children's group and the professional musician looking for inspiration and new ideas.

The Midwinter Workshop will be held **January 26 to 27** at St. Theresa Church, 30 Mandalay Rd. in Oakland. The opening session is at 1:30 p.m. on Friday, and the workshop concludes on Saturday at 3:30 p.m. Fees include Saturday breakfast and lunch, snacks and the reading packet. Those registering after January 19 will not be guaranteed a reading packet or Saturday lunch.

Early bird registration fee is \$75 for members, and \$100 after December 15. Non-members may join the Choristers Guild for \$65. For more details or registration form, contact Jackie Wan at 500 Creekside Rd., Pleasant Hill, CA 94523-2123 or jackielegato@yahoo.com.

A portion of the Intrafaith Peace Project goal is to provide a quiet, simple and safe space for personal exploration and reflection on the rich interfaith heritage of the world.

Individuals are invited to spend a few hours in their own pursuit of the books, familiarizing themselves with the rich and diverse spiritual traditions of humanity. This study can foster Intrafaith spirituality and interfaith sensitivity.

This project claims the religious traditions of any particular community as part of the collective wisdom of the worldwide human community. This claim is being done with respect and reverence for the sacredness of each tradition. Explorations:

- Advice for collecting appropriate books for the interfaith library. Donations would be gratefully accepted but not expected.
- Advice where such an interfaith library and reading room would be located.
- I am willing to live in a place where the library and reading room would be housed. I would do so at my own expense.
- Conversations and dialogue with the interfaith community in development of this project.
- Study days and Intrafaith prayer services available on a continuing basis.
- Sub-committee establishment to develop this project.
- Temporary library in my apartment as a place of welcome, study, prayer, dialogue and conversation.

Contact: Thomas P. Bonacci, C.P., (412) 953-1205, [peace@thomaspbonacci.net](mailto:peace@thomaspbonacci.net).

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## **Annual Meeting Benediction**

Some of you requested the words spoken by the Rev. Will McGarvey at the conclusion of the annual meeting. Here they are, having been adapted from a poem by Souza.

"With the freedom of the children of God,  
graciously given to you through each of your faith traditions:

Dance like nobody's watching,  
Love like you'll never get hurt,  
Work like you don't need the money,  
Shop with an eye for the needy,  
Sing like only God is listening,

Live like it's heaven on earth,  
Touching those around you with the love, joy, and peace of God.  
Go in peace."

# Social Justice Alliance-SoJA

## WINTER NIGHTS GLEANINGS

### November Host Congregations

Warm, safe nights, delicious meals, generous volunteers, transportation and other services were provided by **First Baptist Church of Antioch, Shell Ridge Community Church & Bnai Tikvah, Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church, and St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church** for those families that needed shelter during November. **Christ Community Church, PCA, Walnut Creek**, brought support services.

As the month ends, Winter Nights Shelter is housing: 1 baby, 1 toddler, two 12-year-olds, two 14-year-olds, one 13-year-old, one 17-year-old, four mothers, three fathers, and four seniors. These guests join the staff in sending thanks to the host congregations.

### Winter Nights Van

**Hedco Foundation** granted \$6,500.00 to Winter Nights Shelter for purchasing a 15-passenger van, which doubles the number of seats we've had for the past two sessions. Our "new" van has 74,000 miles on the odometer, drives like a charm, passed a mechanical inspection with flying colors, and has been smog-checked. For the past two years, we've transported children and adults in 7 passenger vans, which were donated to us in good condition. They served us well, and we'll continue to use the green van. But this large van is what we've needed to offer services beyond driving students to school.

We send our thanks to the **Hedco Foundation** and to our grant writer, **Lorri Gazzano**.

### Winter Nights Shelter Featured Four Times in November

Four recent events featured the Winter Nights Shelter: The Interfaith Peace Concert "Humanity as Family," the Lamorinda Interfaith Ministerial Alliance, and Thanksgiving Masses at St. Perpetua and Christ the King Parishes. A combination of offering collections and apron sales took place. We are greatly pleased to be chosen.

### Blind Dog Band's Generosity

**Jackie Pels** and **Jill Harcke** asked those attending their combined party to make a donation to the Win-

ter Nights Shelter as a birthday gift, and the funds were sent to us. But it didn't end there. The band that played at the party, the **Blind Dog Band**—a talented and entertaining group—requested that their band's fee of \$400 go to Winter Nights Shelter. Thank you, **Blind Dog Band** members. Your generosity warmed Jackie and Jill's hearts, and suffice to say we were thrilled.

### Two Holiday Shopping Ideas

Looking for a gift that is unique? We have two suggestions for you: **Winter Nights Aprons** and **Loving Neighbor Gift Cards**.

- 1) The aprons with embroidered WN logo in color and pockets at the bottom sell for \$20, with half of that amount going to shelter funding.
- 2) You can order a Loving Neighbor Gift Card and choose the amount of your gift to Winter Nights as a holiday remembrance for a friend or acquaintance. Aprons and cards will be sent to you if you'll call **Gwen Watson** at 925-930-9965.

### Winter Nights Appeal Letter

The annual WN Appeal Letter was mailed in October, and our benefactors have been responding with generosity, for which we are most grateful.

**Martin Luther King Day** will be here before we know it.

**When:** January 15, 2007 at Noon at the Walnut Creek Civic Park Community Center. We work with the Mt. Diablo Peace and Justice Center to put this program together every year. We are looking for people who have ideas and time (for one or two meetings) to help plan this important observance.

Please call the Interfaith Council Office (925-933-60300 if you want to participate in planning this great gathering! You will be notified about the meeting.

### Eldercare Services Support Groups

When concerns of aging family members are part of every day, when they interfere with work, your health or other relationships, you need to join a support group. Such groups are currently meeting on a monthly basis at the offices of Eldercare Services, 1808 Tice Valley Blvd. in Walnut Creek. Call (925) 937-2018 to join one of these free groups.

**Please pray for:**

First United Presbyterian Church, Martinez  
 St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Orinda  
 St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Walnut Creek  
 St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Walnut Creek  
 Pilgrim Congregational Church, Walnut Creek  
 Winter Nights Clients and volunteers  
 Non-profit groups working to improve the lives of the poor worldwide  
 An end to the violence in our county, Alameda County and San Francisco  
 Rev. Tinsley and the youth he serves

**Thank You Corner**

The Interfaith Council greatly appreciates all of its volunteers, board members, Singing Messengers and committee members and financial supporters. Without your warm spirit of cooperation, we could accomplish nothing. In this season of Thanksgiving, we give thanks for you all.

We thank our hardworking newsletter volunteers for donating their time so that YOU can receive news and information about what we do. Thanks to Madeline Gomes, Mary Hogan, Edith & Jim Reed, Dick Shumaker, Dolores White, Ruth Wittman and Jean Witucki.

**Next Deadline: January 15, 2006**

**Please send copy marked to the attention of:**

**Interfaith Council Newsletter, 1543 Sunnyvale Avenue, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-1903**

**PH: (925) 933-6030**

**FAX: (925) 952-4554**

**E Mail: <eye4cee@aol.com>**

**The Interfaith Council  
Of Contra Costa County**

1543 Sunnyvale Avenue  
 Walnut Creek, CA 94597  
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Council President.....Rabbi Raphael Asher  
 Executive Director.....Rev. Brian Stein-Webber  
 Chaplain.....Rev. Charles Tinsley  
 Singing Messengers.....Jackie Wan  
 Office Manager.....Nora Chuch  
 Editor.....Lenita Shumaker  
 Layout/Design.....Nora Chuch