



M inistering Together

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

The Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County

February 2007

Director's Letter



Dear friends,

I don't remember it being this cold, this long, ever. I know we're not supposed to complain when it's so much worse in other parts of the country, especially with the

huge storm [active as of this writing] that has already taken dozens of lives from Oklahoma to Maine.

But cold is cold. And we aren't as equipped to deal with it in the Bay Area as are other places. Makes you really appreciate the value of temporary shelters. Our own **Winter Nights Rotating Shelter** has been taking in some extra families, thanks to the willingness of the host congregations. County shelters have added beds, and I'm sure relatives of those on the streets are more willing to roll down the sofa beds and lay mattresses on the floors, if only for the short term.

Yes, we must lend our collective weight toward efforts to end homelessness conclusively. Legislation, increased funding to housing agencies, attention to social services, strengthening of drug counseling programs—all of these will make a difference. In the meantime, thank you all for keeping in mind those who brave the cold on the streets or in their cars.

And thank you to the legion of congregations and groups who continue to provide warm meals for the **Mountain View Shelter in Martinez**. This means you, East Bay Methodist Church, Congregation B'nai Shalom, St. Ignatius Church, Concord United Methodist Church, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Christ the King Church, Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church, Baha'is of Pleasant Hill, St. Francis Church, St. Agnes Church, Congregation Beth Chaim, Temple Isaiah, St. Catherine's Church, Walnut Creek Unity Center. There are more, and you know who you are.

The above congregations and SHELTER, Inc. (who operates the Mountain View shelter) would welcome your congregation to this special group of providers. Whether you can prepare a five-day week of dinners or

even just one day, you are needed. In fact, there is still an open week in February, and the calendar is wide open after the middle of March. To find out how to be Meal Angels, please call Gloria deVries at 925-228-6920. She will be very happy to talk with you.

On another topic, we are now in a season of national reassessment regarding the **war in Iraq**. President Bush wants one more chance to stabilize the region with a greater military presence. Others—including myself—think last chances have come and gone in this ill-conceived and ill-fated venture. My prayer is that our nation's people would realize that it is no longer possible for one country to impose its will on another in such a grandiose manner, that occupation is a product with a short shelf-life, and that military power, essential as it is in today's world, is no substitute for diplomatic relations of state or for the building of mutual respect and understanding.

A writer in the latest issue of The Christian Century magazine, Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz, who happens to be leader of a house of studies in Germany, fantasizes about how an American president might have responded to the 9/11 attacks. He seizes upon the idea of our country's vulnerability, how that characteristic alone has contributed so much to our national vitality. There is tremendous free exchange of ideas, peoples, dreams, and yes, money across our borders. That vulnerability also carries significant risk. The trick is to live with a certain amount of risk so as not to compromise the very benefits of being so open. The writer's argument is not based on national self-interest, but truly on the good that the United States can be for the world.

We are challenged in this new year, seven years removed from the changing of the millennium, to be open to our local and international neighbors. We owe it to them not to be harsh in half-informed judgments, but to be willing to learn, and to consider that even those we deem to be our enemies are also human beings. It's a simple gesture, with profound implications.

May peace prevail on Earth,

Chaplain's Corner



Ryan is a remarkable young man. Abandoned at birth by his father, mother in and out--mostly out, of his life, he has spent considerable time in foster care and in group homes. Other family members have tried to step in, maybe reluctantly, on occasion, but they are occupied with their own lives and activities. He reached his eighteenth birthday midyear 2006. A sharp and intelligent young person, Ryan graduated from high school eight weeks after his birthday. His future, was, from his perspective, uncertain--at best. With *minimal* family support, *no* home to go to, *no* money, *limited* wardrobe, acquainted with, and accustomed to, a lifetime of rejection, abandonment and neglect, it was no wonder that the kid responded to my discussions about the future, immediate and long-term, with stark incredulity.

All of his teachers, including Sojourner Truth Presbyterian Church, (Richmond) member, Gwendolyn Shelton, frequently and enthusiastically told me of Ryan's scholastic potential and intellectual prowess. I began to speak with him on a regular basis about the idea of going away to college, about what he might wish to do with his life and how I could help him go about achieving life goals and objectives. Initially, and for some time, it was as though I was simply "talking at" him. "Rev, this ain't possible," was a common refrain. The several hundred kids I have had the same discussion with over the years, almost to a person, have responded similarly, nearly identically.

As usual we must not be deterred, by them or anyone else, when the very lives of our young people are in jeopardy. For the past one dozen years, a bible in my office has been opened to Proverbs 22:6, "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray." [NRSV]. Sometimes we must simply

pick up the slack, because too many of our children are *untrained*, *poorly* trained, *mis*-informed, *mal*-nurtured and *mal*-nourished, *have not been* loved, encouraged or respected...

Ryan did indeed go away to school, to Butte College. First semester was a tad *rocky*. Although eighteen years of age, his short stature and particularly young look attracted the attention of overzealous police in Chico. The young man was stopped on several occasions, was compelled to produce identification, because, "you don't look eighteen." An overzealous response on Ryan's part to being shoved by another student, landed him in more than a bit of hot water. Thank God, we have, for the most part, put that to bed. Yes, the first semester was interesting...

Nevertheless, the day after Christmas, a week into the winter break, I took Ryan to the Sacramento airport (at 4:30 a.m. ouch!) where he boarded an airplane to Houston connecting to a flight to San Jose, Costa Rica. Yes, the now *seasoned* college student has gone to Central America to study Spanish language and local culture for three weeks in a school sponsored class/program.

Three days after his arrival, Ryan called me. Of course, I had specifically asked for a call *upon* arrival. Oh well! Anyhow, I was just thrilled to hear the enthusiasm in his voice as he described the activities of the preceding days! I particularly enjoyed, "Rev, I thought they made a mistake when I (exchanged) \$20.00 and they gave me 10,000 (Costa Rican Colon)...I thought I was rich..."

My child, you are. More than you know.

Rev. Dr. Charles Tinsley
Juvenile Detention Chaplain

Greetings from the chaplains of Hospice and Palliative Care of Contra Costa! We have begun this New Year with the hope of connecting more fully with our colleagues in ministry in this community, and we wish begin by introducing ourselves to the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa. Rev. Laurie Adams has been with HPCCC for almost three years, and Revs. Asher Catalan and Nancy Bancroft joined us in the Fall of 2006. Together, we provide a balance of different religious, educational and cultural backgrounds to our patients, their families and staff. We share a commitment to serving the spiritual needs of this community through our work at hospice but also through continuing to support opportunities for ecumenical and interfaith reflection and relationship.

After a helpful meeting with Rev. Brian-Stein Webber to learn more about the work of the Interfaith Council, we have begun to envision a couple of ways we might support our shared ministries: We hope to convene a regular gathering of hospice and hospital chaplains from the East Bay/ Contra Costa County to provide mutual support and resources; We are also looking for opportunities to provide leadership or participate in conversations on spirituality and end-of-life in congregational settings. If there are other avenues for learning and growing in faith together, we welcome your ideas and hope you will call us!

We would also like to share information about two relatively new and perhaps unknown resources available to this community. The Bruns House is an in-patient hospice facility that Hospice and Palliative Care of Contra Costa has been running since 2005. Located in Alamo, this home provides patients with private rooms and care from nurses, physicians, home health aides, social workers and chaplains as well as a beautiful setting in which family members, friends, and pets have unrestricted access. These resources ensure that patients receive relief from difficult symptoms and peace of mind at the end of life.

Your Words – Windows on each other's lives of faith

The Rev. Renae Extrum-Fernandez **Walnut Creek United Methodist Church**

Practicing the Presence

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the people; but the Lord will arise upon you and God's glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
Isaiah 60:1-5

Each year as Christmastime begins to emerge in the stores, the streets, and our conversations, my heart suddenly hears its own longing for peace. In the cacophony of holiday noise, I find myself straining, hoping to hear the voices of angels: "Peace on Earth" "Fear not" "Emmanuel – God with us." The promised coming of the Light makes me keenly aware of the pervasive darkness and my spirit reaches for hope.

The winds of change for U.S. policy in our war in Iraq carry my renewed hope that hearts will respond to God's leading toward swift and constructive resolution to that tragic conflict that will serve first and foremost the interests of the Iraqi people.

My heart also hopes for an end to the culture wars that dominate our religious holidays. How sad that as soon as the rancor of negative election campaigns fades, it is quickly replaced by the rancor of Christians who insist that the world pay homage to Jesus' birth in gaudy and triumphalist ways. Aren't you tired of attempts to establish a Christian supremacy over the witness of divine Truth in other traditions? Cautic and coercive Christianity drives the Gospel right out of the Christmas story. Celebrating the One born in a manger doesn't pair well with conversion by domination.

Christmas doesn't arrive because we put decorations up and sing carols. Christmas belongs to God. The point is hardly to blind the world with the light of His glory! The call of our discipleship is to live in the spirit of Christ so that we can be His Light that shines in the darkness. Mary consented to being a God-bearer. The angels served as message-bearers. We, the Body of Christ, are called to be the light-bearers of the Risen Christ to those who sit in darkness. God's peace comes as we bear the Light of Christ to the dark places in God's world.

The Rev. Roger Reaber **Grace Presbyterian Church, Walnut Creek**

Every once in a while we are lucky to run across real-live heroes. That was my experience as I volunteered with the

Project Homeless Connect on December 7 in Richmond. On that day, various service agencies gathered at the Richmond Auditorium to offer guidance, care, and resources to the homeless in our county. Along with [200] others, I volunteered to welcome the homeless guests and direct them from one service to another. That is when I met Gilbert and Irma, two amazing heroes of the county.

My job was to escort guests from a class on HIV to a van behind the auditorium where Gilbert and Irma offered HIV screenings. The rapid test takes only 20 minutes for results. After collecting the mouth swab, they sat with the clients, reviewed their history that may have put them at risk, and then told them the results. A "negative" result was celebrated, the bullet had been dodged! A "positive" result suggested further testing and possible illness and treatment. Marcos, the first man out of the van, was beaming from ear to ear. "I'm negative!" was his greeting to me. I do not know the results of the other dozen who were tested that morning, but as the guests moved out of the van, I could see the stress wearing on Gilbert and Irma.

Gilbert has been working with the homeless population for eighteen years, offering care, finding those who are sick, and getting them to programs of treatment. He knew many of the people coming for services and greeted them warmly, often with big hugs. As one woman emerged from the van, he instructed me to take her to the Alcohol and Drug Service providers, saying, "She is ready to enter a program today and we need to get that moving right away." Later, as he was "decompressing," he told me that the only way he is able to do this work is by his Christian faith. Then he pulled a Bible out of his backpack and told me about the man who taught him to pray.

I do not know how long Irma has been providing this care. I did appreciate how she welcomed each person with dignity and respect. She provided a sacred service as she heard and valued each person's story. A couple of times, between seeing clients, I saw tears well up in her eyes, as she obviously carried the people's pain. She then brushed them aside and welcomed the next person warmly and with a smile.

Before I left, I thanked them both for their tremendous service. Irma had a simple request: "Would you pray for us?" How could I do any less? Would you pray for them as well?

Rabbi Judy Shanks, Temple Isaiah, Lafayette
A Brighter Flame for Chanukah

Whether we like it or not, Chanukah has become a significant holiday for Jews. You notice I do not say “a significant Jewish holiday,” because the holiness of Chanukah has not increased over the millennia. Compared to Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, Pesach, Sukkot, Shavuot, and Shabbat, Chanukah is still a “minor” observance that does not mandate a cessation of our normal work or extensive liturgical or ritual obligations at synagogue or home. It is not a *chag*, a holy day based on a Torah commandment that once brought Jews on pilgrimage to Jerusalem when the Temple stood.

The story of Chanukah does not even appear in the Hebrew Bible. We celebrate Chanukah to mark the military triumph of the Jews over the Hellenized Syrians in the year 164B.C.E. – an unprecedented and unexpected victory against all odds. Six hundred years after the events, the rabbis of the Talmud sought to downplay the military focus of Chanukah and highlight instead the God-centered story of the miraculous oil that burned eight days to rededicate and resume Jewish worship in the recaptured Temple. Two millennia later, American culture has pushed us to think again about the place and meaning of Chanukah in our lives. Ask many of our Jewish children to name their favorite Jewish holiday and they will answer: Chanukah. Ask them to name the most important Jewish holiday and they will answer: Chanukah. Ask non-Jewish Americans to name a Jewish holiday and they will answer: Chanukah. We Jews have done a remarkably successful job of educating our communities about the “other” winter holiday, and our multi-culturally-aware communities have joined us in getting the word out about Chanukah.

Unfortunately, for many of us, Chanukah has only “risen” to the somewhat dubious “status” of a holiday centered on lavish gift-giving, parties, and home decorations designed to make sure our children feel as feted in the winter as their non-Jewish friends.

If we acknowledge, as I believe we must, that Chanukah is BIG for us modern Jews, then let us use this BIG opportunity creatively and thoughtfully. The Chanukah story and its relevant themes need to become part of our Chanukah conversations and our Chanukah celebrations. The Maccabees dared to be different, to be openly, boldly Jewish, in a culture dominated by the Greeks. Let us modern Jews dare to highlight and celebrate our differences, our unique rituals and customs, even as we model respect for different faiths in our society. Let us discuss with our children the differences in belief between Jews and Christians so that

they know *why* we do not celebrate Christmas in our homes.

Eight nights of celebration give us eight opportunities to “perform miracles” before and after lighting candles. With a little planning ahead, each night could include a chance to learn, to teach, to celebrate who and what we are as Jews in America in 2006: a people connected to an amazing history, a people optimistic in the face of challenges, a people dedicated to work for justice and peace, a people whose holiday celebrations at home and at the synagogue can fill every week and almost every month with special joy and the strength of community.

**The Rev. Greg Ledbetter,
Shell Ridge Community Church, Walnut Creek**

...I’ve always appreciated the etymology of the word “holiday.” It’s an old English word meaning “holy day.” A holiday was a time set aside to experience and celebrate the holiness of particular days. It might have been a feast day for a saint or a harvest festival. In any event, the day was one that had sacred overtones. It was a day important to the particular cultural and/or faith practices of a community or a congregation.

I’ve always thought it odd, insensitive and inappropriate to greet someone in a way that was particular to one’s own experience while the experience of the one being greeted was not known – or known to be different. I would not, for example, greet my rabbi friends with a greeting that meant: “Happy Celebration of the birth of our Messiah, Jesus.” I would be far more inclined to say to them, in this season, “Happy Hannukah,” which for me would be a way of saying, “May this time of YOUR celebration be a joyous one.” By saying “Happy Holidays” to these same friends or anyone else that I was not confident was sharing my celebration of Christmas, I would be saying to them, in effect, “May whatever days of celebration and holiness you have be happy ones.” For my own practice, “Merry Christmas” is what I joyously say to those whose Christian faith is known to me and “Happy Holidays” is what I say to those whose practices are not known or not shared by me...

**Rabbi Raphael Asher
Congregation B’nai Tikvah, Walnut Creek**
Gan Shalom – Garden of Peace

Jews of all stripes and denominations were present for the groundbreaking of our new cemetery on Bear Creek Road in a bucolic setting near Briones Nature Preserve. Although there will likely be separate sections for each of the synagogues based on differing criteria for burial (e.g., cre-

mation and Gentile spouses), it marks the significance of the occasion that Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Renewal and unaffiliated were all on hand to grab a shovel for the first of many spades of dirt to be turned.

Jewish tradition acknowledges that the deceased can no longer perform mitzvot [good deeds], but they are still an integral part of the community. It is custom that the fringes of the tallis [prayer shawl], reflecting the mitzvot, be removed and distributed to the mourners; nevertheless, the tallis itself can be part of the shrouds or burial clothing as a recognizable

part of the “threads” of the Jewish community, the warm feelings it extends to the deceased and the warmth it receives in return from their memory.

When I now visit Oakmont or Colma, I indeed sense the previous generations as still an integral part of who we are today. The line between living and dead blurs when a visit to the cemetery reminds us of the abiding influence those who came before us still emits. We, the living, are now entrusted with the mitzvot, the fringes, that our predecessors held dear.

Point of View—Risking Conversation

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

Why I admire the United States of America

Being here with our faith community that is working tirelessly for peace and justice in this country and all over the world is a blessing from Allah. Worshiping, ministering, communicating and providing help and comfort to the poor, the sick and the needy represent high spirit and commitment.

Despite the sad news of the war from Iraq, the Baker-Hamilton report recognized that the war was wrong as the faith communities stated from the beginning. There are aspects of the report which I don't agree with, but its essence will hopefully push for ending the war, bringing home American troops and ending war and violence as means of conducting international relations.

On a personal level, I am grateful for the members of the Interfaith Council and many congregations as well as friends and individuals who conveyed their condolences or performed prayers for the sake of my brother-in-law who was murdered in Iraq. I apologize for not being able to respond to all the messages and I hope that you will accept these words of acknowledgment and thanks. The decision adopted by the Social Justice Alliance on Iraq and endorsed by the Executive demonstrates the commitment of the Council for the cause of peace and justice.

The bleak pictures of the miseries of the Palestinian people under the Israeli occupation always torment the conscience of Muslims and, I believe, all believers, and they ask why the world is not able to end their sufferings by enabling them to establish their own state on their own land. President Jimmy Carter a man of faith, dignity and honor. His new book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, represents the outcry of all peace-loving peoples in the world to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of peace and justice. Unfortunately this man who pushed and

succeeded in achieving the first peace treaty between Israel and the first Arab state to do so, Egypt, is unfairly criticized. It is not only him but also Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Americans, Europeans and even Israelis have come to the conclusion that the Israeli authorities are treating the Palestinians with same degrading policies adopted by the apartheid regime in South Africa.

A Jewish friend whom I highly respect wrote to me saying “when I say the word “apartheid” to Israel it is hurtful...” The comparison between Israel and South Africa is aimed at avoiding more tragedies on the Palestinians than were inflicted on the people of South Africa before, and that by ending the Israeli control and confiscation of Palestinian land occupied in 1967 we will achieve peace as the case in South Africa. Some indicate that the Israeli Arabs, who comprise about 20 percent of the people of Israel, are participating in the Israeli elections. But the Israeli Arab members of the Israeli Knesset are under constant threat and intimidation. Furthermore the Israeli Arab areas are not receiving the same services and resources as the Jewish neighborhoods. Notwithstanding what is stated above, the occupation and the usurpation of Palestinian lands are the major obstacles to peace, and in order to achieve it the occupation must end. That was the aim of President Carter when he wrote his book.

My earnest hope is that many more Americans will raise voices to bring peace and justice to the Holy Land. They should admire President Carter and disregard the attempts by his detractors who are unjustifiably throwing unfounded accusations to prevent the American people from knowing the truth about what is going on in the Palestinian occupied territories. I have confidence that the more people learn about the sufferings of the Palestinians, the more they will agree with President Carter's vision for peace and justice in the Holy Land. I wish to assure my Jewish friends that peace and justice in the Holy Land is not only in the interests of the Palestinians or the Arabs, but it is in the interest of the Israelis too.

**Professor Abraham H. Miller
Contra Costa resident**

Religion and Politics: Theology or Hubris?

After the 1983 bombing of the French and American peace-keepers in Beirut, Sheik Fadlallah denied responsibility for the carnage. Fadlallah said such allegations of responsibility totally exaggerated his role in the suicide bombings. He merely blessed the suicide bombers. A similar justification was made by the recently released Muslim cleric Abu Baku Bashir, who blessed the first Bali suicide bombers. When clerics bless men who are about to take innocent life are they acting as clerics or as men in religious garb with a political agenda?

The issue is seen in its most extreme forms among fundamentalist Islamists. But in lesser relief, the issue of how politics and religion have become mutually corrupting forces is to be seen across all religions.

Take the reaction of some of our own religious leaders to the events of 09/11. David Griffin's conspiracy theory characterizing the attack on the World Trade Center as being not the work of Islamic terrorists but a false flag operation orchestrated by the Bush administration is published by Westminster John Knox Press, an organ of the Presbyterian Church USA. Why Griffin's inane speculations would be published by a church press is unclear.

Too often the clergy wrap their opinions in clerical garb when they are speaking not as religious leaders but as private individuals espousing lay opinions colored by hubris.

You don't have to travel to the Middle East to see such displays. In Walnut Creek last May, the unrelenting two-plus hours of Israel and Jew bashing known as the divestiture forum possessed all of these elements. The forum's major thesis, as prominently enunciated by the Reverends McGarvey and Lawson, was that if Israel would withdraw from the disputed

territories, Palestinian terrorism would cease. To them, terrorism is justified.

Well, long before there was an Israel there was organized Arab terrorism against the Jewish population of the British Mandate. Indeed, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, the Arab religious leader, spent World War II in Berlin as the personal guest of Adolph Hitler. There, he fantasized with Nazi mass murderers how he would bring Hitler's final solution to the one million Jews of the Arab world. Israel left Lebanon and Gaza. Did the terrorism cease? On the contrary, these became strategic bases for increased terrorist attacks against Israel.

The Rev. Lawson says he supports whatever the Palestinians do. So, he supports suicide bombing and Iran's development of Hamas as a military force to destroy Israel. The Rev. McGarvey repeats the canard that Israeli policies have transformed Bethlehem from a Christian city to a Muslim city. A prudent man would ask: Why did the Christians flee Bethlehem while the Muslims stayed? The answer is readily available to anyone who wants to spend twenty minutes on the Internet. Yassir Arafat changed the boundaries of Bethlehem to incorporate heavily Muslim areas. Then local militias affiliated with Arafat's Fatah viewed the Christians as undefended targets. Rape, murder, and property seizure against a backdrop of a government that sided with the militias pushed the Christians to flee.

Fadallah's and Abu Bashir's blessing suicide bombers and the pronouncements of the Reverends McGarvey and Lawson are virtually indistinguishable. All sanctify violence. But do any of them do so as men of God? "Adonis," the prominent Arab literary figure, notes that nowhere in the Muslim world are people free because they cannot criticize their clergy. Fortunately, we in the West have a long tradition of being free to criticize the clergy. As some clergy embrace their personal politics with the absolutist mindset and justification of theology, that

**The Rev. Phil Lawson
Retired United Methodist Church pastor**

The article, *Religion and Politics; Theology or Hubris?* by Professor Abraham Miller, is such a scattering of tendentious themes that they are justified to be published only from the viewpoint of free speech. The article does not contribute to civil and thoughtful discussion concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, not to mention the real purpose of the forum in Walnut Creek last May. It was to discuss the USA Presbyterian Church's proposal for a divestment campaign against Israel and its occupa-

tion of the Palestinian peoples.

Professor Miller simply "proof-texts" various charges and statements made by the Jewish right over the past few years in order to drive a wedge between peace-loving peoples who want to seriously discuss the Middle East situation. I'm surprised that Professor Miller does not also accuse me of being anti-Jewish. However, let me address the places where I am mentioned in the articles.

"The forum's major thesis, as prominently enunciated by the Reverends McGarvey and Lawson, was that *if* Israel would withdraw from the disputed terri-

ories, Palestinian terrorism would cease. To them, terrorism is justified.”

Terrorism that is violence against civilians--women, men and children--is never justified, according to international law. More importantly, according to the One I call Lord, Jesus of Nazareth, all killing is forbidden. For that reason, I have been a non-violent warrior for justice ever since the 1950s, when I was a conscientious objector to the Korean War. Professor Miller either did not hear my comments, or deliberately mis-stated them. I indicated that the prerequisite for peaceful negotiations is for Israel to end the occupation of Palestine. It is not "disputed territories" as characterized by the good Professor, at least not according to the international community and the United Nations. I made, perhaps the very bad analogy, "when one is raping another, the correct response is not negotiation, but withdrawal".

“The Rev. Lawson says he supports whatever the Palestinians do. So, he supports suicide bombing and Iran's development of Hamas as a military force to destroy Israel.”

Of course, my passion for justice demands that I stand with the victims. I am a strong supporter of Israel as a People and a Nation. I do not like what the Israeli government is doing to an essentially weak, powerless people, whose lands are daily being taken for a wall; whose families are being sepa-

rated by discriminating, bias policies; whose children are being denied educational opportunities; whose pregnant women are being forced to wait at check-points unmercifully, causing the births of over 500 still-born babies.

Professor Miller should know, as I remember, that it was Israel who secretly assisted Hamas to become a military force in the 1980s as a counter-force to Chairman Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Finally, Professor Miller states, “Fadallah's and Abu Bashir's blessing of suicide bombers and the pronouncements of the Reverends McGarvey and Lawson are virtually indistinguishable. All sanctify violence. But do any of them do so as men of god?”

Professor Miller should know that Hebrew Scriptures indicate that to profane another's good name is the same as murder. I have never, and would never attempt to sanctify violence. In fact, I'm not able to. Only the Holy One can sanctify. I am not familiar with the gentlemen with whom the Professor connects me. I have not read their works. However, if they are believers in the One God as I am, and as I suspect the good Professor is, then we are indeed in a ONENESS that should allow for civil discourse, without wild charges or attacks, or wide-ranging, unrelated themes. Our ONENESS should compel us to be seekers of truth for both Israeli and Palestinian peoples.

The Rev. Will McGarvey Community Presbyterian Church, Pittsburg

It has been some time since I participated in the forum conversation with many others about the controversial topic of divestment as it pertains to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While Professor Miller is a well-respected teacher and writer, I do not know him personally. Nor did I get the chance to speak to him the day of the forum, so I don't know if he was in attendance or asked questions of any of those on the panel after our presentations.

Imagine my surprise, then, months later, at being mentioned in the same breath as those who have publicly encouraged suicide bombings and other forms of violence. I accepted the invitation to speak at the forum because of the amount of misinformation about the 2004 decision of the Presbyterian Church (USA) to study what was then called “phased selective divestment” of companies profiting from the occupation of Palestinian lands. Since that fo-

rum, the church's 2006 General Assembly apologized to the Jewish community for the misunderstanding which resulted from the 2004 decision, and has clarified our position as one of corporate engagement with such companies, with the possibility of divestment in the future only after another vote of a future General Assembly.

My denomination has a 58-year history of support for the existence and security of the state of Israel. We also have a historic presence in the Middle East since 1823 through educational and medical missions. Over the last six decades, the PC (USA) has consistently encouraged a two-state solution to the conflict. In addition, since the 1980s, the Presbyterian Church has made eight statements against the occupation of Palestinian lands – specifically encouraging the green line as the border between Israel and Palestine – while simultaneously calling on the Palestinian resistance to end terrorism. The church has taken these positions because our faith compels us to work for peace, justice, and reconciliation in the world.

Included on this page are the generous congregations, organizations and individuals who have supported the work of the Interfaith Council in 2006.

We are very grateful for you, and for the ministry you make possible. Please accept our thanks. If there is any correction to be made to this list, please let us know. (Winter Nights contributors will be listed in the March-April newsletter.) Here's to a fruitful 2007!

CONGREGATIONS

Baha'i Community of Danville
 Baha'i Community of Martinez
 Baha'i Community of Pleasant Hill
 Baha'i Community of Clayton
 Baha'i Community of Orinda
 Chestnut Avenue Community Ch. Concord
 Christ the King Catholic Church, P.H.
 1st Ch., Christ, Scientist of Danville
 Church of Santa Maria, Orinda
 Clayton Valley Presbyterian Church
 Concord United Methodist Church
 Congregation B'nai Shalom, W.C.
 Congregation B'nai Tikvah, W.C.
 Contra Costa Korean Church
 Danville Congregational Church
 El Cerrito United Methodist Church
 Episcopal Ch. of the Resurrection, P.H.
 First Congregational Church, Martinez
 First Presbyterian Church, Concord
 Good Shepherd Lutheran Ch., Concord
 Grace Presbyterian Church, Walnut Creek
 Hillcrest Congregational Church, P.H.
 Lafayette United Methodist Church
 Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church
 Mt. Diablo Un. Univ. Church, W.C.
 Orinda Community Church
 Pilgrim Congregational Church, Rossmoor
 Rossmoor Interfaith Council
 San Ramon Valley UMC, Alamo
 Shell Ridge Community Church, W.C.
 St. Agnes Catholic Church, Concord
 St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, P.H.
 St. Bonaventure Catholic Church, Concord
 St. Ignatius Catholic Church, Antioch
 St. John Lutheran Church, Antioch
 St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Rossmoor
 St. Mark's United Methodist Ch., Orinda
 St. Peter Martyr Catholic Church, Pittsburg
 St. Stephen Catholic Church, Walnut Creek
 St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Orinda
 St. Timothy's Episcopal Church, Danville
 Tice Valley UMC, Rossmoor
 Trinity Lutheran Church, Walnut Creek
 Unity Center of Walnut Creek
 Walnut Creek United Methodist Church

Individuals

Richard Abbot
 Paula Dodd Aiello
 John & Agnes Alden
 B. Allen
 Robert & Charlotte Anderson
 Robert & Mary Armsby
 Mima Baird
 Dr. & Mrs Francis Barham
 Kerstin Barnes
 Laura Barnes
 Hertha Basch
 Lynn & Jason Basket
 Paula Bishop
 Kathleen Bjork
 Beverly Bortin
 Mary Kay Breazeale
 Nancy Bublitz Smith
 Terry & Elizabeth Burch
 Wilma Burleigh
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 Rev. Robert E. Williams
 Larry & Linda Wilson
 Ruth Wittman

GROUPS

Church Women United
 Church of the Good Shepherd Women
 Concord United Methodist Women
 First Congregational Women
 Grace Presbyterian Women
 Hillcrest Congregational Women
 Kiwanis Club of Martinez
 Kiwanis Club of Walnut Creek

*SOJA meets Wednesday, Feb 7, 7 PM;
Rabbi Raphael Asher, Special Guest
All are welcome. Bring a friend.*

DEPARTMENT OF PEACE

Annette Schmidt, Unitarian Universalist Church,
Speaker,

co chair with Chris Coons, of the Department of Peace Committee at the Mt. Diablo Peace Center, was guest speaker at the January SOJA meeting. She reported that Representatives Tauscher and Miller have supported the effort in the past and will need encouragement to re-sign on as sponsors. Atlanta and Chicago have signed on, and Annette is attempting to find people who might have some influence on SF leaders to bring about support from the City.

Annette is willing to arrange speakers on the subject at the request of any congregation; contact her at 925.274.9244.

WELCOME, MICHAEL FISCHER

Dorothy Vance, SOJA Meeting Recorder

After a hiatus of several years, Michael has returned to SOJA, and we welcome him with enthusiasm. Michael said he is interested in helping people learn how to "grassroot" lobby; how to be more efficient citizens. The idea was met with interest and discussion. He was asked to bring more specific ideas to the next SOJA meeting.

CNWS INTERFAITH TASK FORCE

Delores Loague, Concord United Methodist, Co-Chair The CNWSITF, convened by SOJA, has been keeping watch over the outcome of the Reuse Project of the Concord Naval Weapons Station closure. In December members of the Task Force met with Barb Johnson Chief of Staff with Congress Member George Miller's office. Later a letter was sent in the name of the Task Force to the National Secretary of HUD, ascertaining that rights the homeless are granted in the McKinney-Vento Act will be enforced even if the Station is turned over to a developer.

Jennifer Baha, Vice Chair of the Homeless Continuum of Care Board, was guest speaker at one of the two January Task Force meetings. A status report will be published in the next issue of Ministering Together.

WINTER NIGHTS

Gwen Watson, Executive Director

Cold Spell. When the mid-January below-freezing temperatures arrived, the Winter Nights shelter was at capacity—30 homeless individuals. Nevertheless, we decided we would welcome any family that was out in the cold. The number of guests is presently 32, over half are children (ages 1 year to 18 years old). We are

grateful to the host congregations who permitted us to exceed the 30-guest maximum.

Host Congregations. The following congregations hosted Winter Nights Shelter during December and January: Hillcrest Congregational Church and Church of the Resurrection Episcopal (Pleasant Hill), Pittsburg Community Presbyterian Church, Temple Isaiah (Lafayette), St. Paul's Episcopal Church and St. Stephen's Catholic Church (Walnut Creek). A heartfelt thank you to each of these generous congregations.

Some of the feedback we received: "I don't feel like I'm in a shelter" [one of our elderly guests]. "All the people were nice, Robert is great. He works hard and really has a great relationship with the people, young and old alike. [Temple Isaiah Coordinator]. "This has been a great learning experience for me. I know I will continue to be involved. [Resurrection Volunteer].

Homeless Court. Three Winter Nights guests took advantage of the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to appear before Superior Court Judge Steven Austin and have their traffic records expunged.

Parenting Classes. A teacher of parenting skills will be assigned to Winter Nights for Parenting Skill Workshops and Individualized Parenting Counseling. Brenda Sharpe, Contra Costa Department of Education, will direct the program.

Housing and Employment. Joe Macaluso, Winter Nights Case Manager, is connecting our clients to housing and employment opportunities. Two of our fathers have jobs which pay wages that qualify them for nonprofit housing. They are saving for the move-in and other expenses. One of our elders found an affordable apartment in El Sobrante, St. Vincent de Paul Society provided a bed and linens, and Valerie Sloven and her son delivered the furnishings. Other families are searching for employment to enable them to qualify for housing.

Funding. Lorri Gozzano continues to oversee the fundraising for Winter Nights Shelter. The John Burton "Children Without Homes" Foundation provided Winter Nights a grant of \$15,000. The Danville Congregational Church will dedicate its Easter Collection to Winter Nights. As we go to press, we can see our way to remaining open until mid-April. There are high hopes that enough funds will come in to meet our goal of April 30 as closing day. 2007 CROP Walk has chosen WN as recipient of part funds raised by its event. To all our generous donors: the clients, staff, and volunteers are most grateful for your financial help.

The film, "Pursuit of Happiness," based on a true story about homelessness, is worth your time and the ticket price at local theaters.

Transition

Farewell and Godspeed to the **Rev. David Fewins Pittman**, who for health reasons has resigned as pastor of Tice Valley United Methodist Church in Rossmoor. Our prayers are with you.

Thanks to the following volunteers who donated their time and energies so that you could receive this newsletter: Madeline Gomes, Diana Hill, Mary Hogan, Darby & Dudley Lockett, Dick Shumaker, Dolores White, Ruth Wittman, and our esteemed leader Brian Stein-Webber.

Please pray for:

Hope Lutheran Church, WC
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, WC
Tice Valley United Methodist Church, WC
Victims of winter storms across the country
Homeless people struggling to keep warm
CA legislature as it seeks answers for health care

World Day of Prayer: All are invited to attend World Day of Prayer on Friday, March 2, at St. Matthew Lutheran Church, 399 Wiget Lane, Walnut Creek. Registration opens at 9:30 a.m., with prayer program following at 10:00. World Day of Prayer, sponsored locally by Church Women United, is a worldwide ecumenical celebration calling people to prayer around the globe.

HELP US CELEBRATE

The Singing Messengers have been ministering in Contra Costa County to the seniors in convalescent hospitals and senior residences for **35 years**. We would like to mark this anniversary by honoring our faithful singers for their years of providing entertainment and inspiration with a luncheon to honor participants and alumni. Anyone wishing to help cover the expenses may make a special one-time donation through the Interfaith Council ear-marking your gift for 35th anniversary party.

Jackie Wan took over when Rev. Ginnie Siewert's ministry took her elsewhere and has served as Director more than 25 years. There are almost 50 members in three teams visiting almost 50 facilities three times yearly. Let's **THANK THEM!!!!** *The date will be in the next newsletter.*

Next Deadline: February 15, 2006

Please send copy marked to the attention of:

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