



M inistering Together

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

The Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County

September 2006

Coming Events

❖How To End the Wars in the Middle East and Iraq

Tuesday, September 12, 7:00 p.m.
Mount Diablo Unitarian Universalist Church
55 Eckley Lane, Walnut Creek

❖Rabbi Michael Lerner, of the Tikkun Community and the Network of Spiritual Progressives, and author of The Left Hand of God, will be the speaker. Suggested donation is \$10-20. Sponsored by the Mt. Diablo Peace and Justice Center and others. For more information, contact 925-933-7850 or mtdpc.org.

❖Caring Hands Volunteer Caregivers Training

Saturday, September 16, 8:45 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

John Muir Health, Brentwood Campus
And Friday, November 17, 8:45 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

John Muir Health, Walnut Creek Campus

If you would like to volunteer to help seniors in need, for tasks of friendly visiting, transportation, errands, respite care, minor repairs or the like, come to one of these orientation events. Contact Carol or Linda at 925-952-2999 to reserve your space.

❖Dying and Grieving Retreat

Saturday, September 16
Awakening Retreat Center
9701 Deer Valley Rd., Brentwood

Ronald Valle and Mary Mohs, co-authors of *Opening to Dying and Grieving*, offer this retreat to all professionals who work with the dying and grieving. More workshops to follow throughout the year. To reserve your space, contact 925-933-7171.

❖We Declare: Songs, Chants, Dances and Multimedia Projects

Saturday, September 20, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon

St. John Vianney Catholic Church
1650 Ygnacio Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek

Workshop facilitator Merrill Collins will acquaint attendees to artistically creative interpretations of “Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration” by Hans Kung. Educators and teachers of all kinds will appreciate the themes of Humankind is Our Family, We Are Interdependent, Golden Rules, Cause and Effect, Non-Violence and Opening Our Hearts. The workshop is free. Books and CDs will be available for sale. To register, contact 925-939-7911 x10 or mcollins@sjvianney.org. Deadline is September 20.

❖CROP Walk

Sunday, October 1, 1:00 p.m. registration
Walnut Creek Civic Park
Corner of Civic and Broadway

Be a part of this 4.2-mile walk to raise money for world hunger and the Winter Nights Shelter. Sign up as an individual or congregational group and get sponsors. Sponsored by Church World Services. For more information, contact www.cropwalk.org.

❖Holy Convergence II

Sunday, October 22, 2:00 to 5:00 p.m.
Peace Lutheran Church
3201 Camino Tassajara Rd., Danville

Join many Contra Costa congregations for this family event celebrating the many fall religious celebrations in October. There will be music, food, crafts, discussion, dancing, music, labyrinth walking and more. For more information, contact 925-648-7000.

❖MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW!

Interfaith Council Annual Meeting
Sunday, November 5, 7:00 p.m.
Sikh Temple in Pittsburg

Mountain View Family Shelter Still Welcoming Cooks

The family shelter in Martinez, run by SHELTER, Inc., still needs congregational groups who are willing to cook weekday evening meals for their site. Dates are currently open in November. If you have never done this before, you will find it rewarding. Volunteers provide the food and labor to feed up to 30 persons, the majority of whom are children. To help, contact Gloria at 925-228-6920.

Thank you to congregations who have helped out **recently**: Danville Congregational Church, Church of Santa Maria in Orinda, Concord United Methodist Church, St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Concord, St. Isidore Catholic Church in Danville, St. Ignatius Catholic Church in Antioch, St. Agnes Catholic Church in Concord, Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church, Shell Ridge Community Church in Walnut Creek, St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Walnut Creek, Christ the King Catholic Church in Pleasant Hill, St. Catherine's Catholic Church in Martinez, St. John's Episcopal Church in Clayton and Congregation Beth Chaim in San Ramon.

Local Scholar Available for Speaking

Dr. Charles Burack is available to give Sunday sermons as well as weekday talks and workshops on a variety of Jewish subjects and spiritual topics. Charles is passionate about interfaith education and arts, and welcomes invitations from churches, ashrams, mosques, temples, synagogues, and other spiritual centers.

Dr. Burack is a professor, writer-poet, counselor and scholar specializing in Jewish Studies and personal/professional development. He holds a Ph.D. from UC Berkeley and Master's degrees from the University of Chicago and Northwestern University.

Topics for his sermons, talks and workshops can include introduction to Jewish thought and practice, Jewish mysticism (such as Kabbalah and Chasidic teachings), Jewish holidays, creative power, healing and meditation. Dr. Burack comes highly recommended. His availability is a gift to the wider community. He may be reached at cmburack@sbcglobal.com or (925) 377-5214.

Director's Letter

Dear friends,

It is perhaps the premier privilege of mine as your executive director to be working with the high quality of leaders in the religious communities of Contra Costa County. What a pleasure to be meeting with you and organizing events, and sometimes talking heart to heart with you all. I don't know if it is coincidence or what, but I have found the persons involved with the Interfaith Council – on the Executive Council, on special committees, in ad hoc efforts, with other affiliated organizations – to be so inspiring to me.



What you have created through this organization and beyond is a cadre of believers that is equally passionate about your own faith traditions and those of others. Your enthusiasm for ministry doesn't stop at the doors of your own place of worship, but spills out across the street, out of your neighborhoods, into other beating hearts. This is faith-based power. Thank you.

I am particularly thankful for one person, who is retiring from one of her interfaith assignments. **Beverly Bortin**, a member of Mt. Diablo Unitarian Universalist Church in Walnut Creek, has been doing the lay-out of our newsletter since before I began in 2000. When we changed from five issues to nine issues a year, she didn't complain.

When we went from eight pages to ten pages, she didn't

complain. When we handed her more articles than could possibly fit in those pages, she made them fit. When we laid a time crunch on her, she finished in half the time. All this when she was not only involved in many other activities, with travels and care of family, but was also laying out several other newsletters!

Beverly, your generous, willing and loving spirit has infused these pages between the lines, and for that I am deeply thankful. I will miss our collaboration.

On another note, it is impossible to provide commentary or guidance on all of the world and national events that touch our lives. But one special effort we will be making at the end of October will be to elucidate the stories of persons in the Middle East. During the last weekend in October, we will be inviting **Mr. Ron Young** of the United States Inter-religious Committee for Peace in the Middle East to come moderate a series of discussions at different faith communities in Contra Costa. We will hear from Jewish, Palestinian Orthodox and Muslim voices. Our efforts will be to bring mutual understanding, more light than heat. That might not be easy in today's circumstances, but it is our goal. Look for more details once they are established.

I remain your servant,

TRANSITIONS

Farewell now to **Rabbi Gordon Freeman** of Congregation B'nai Shalom of Walnut Creek. He writes, "It all began in the Rothenberg's living room in December 1967 when I was interviewed by six people. Who would have believed what we have accomplished together? Thirty-eight years have gone by very quickly... We have laughed together and cried together. We have stood together during solemn occasions and danced together during happy moments. And you have allowed me to... grow. I am a different person than when I arrived at the age of twenty-eight. Along the way I have made mistakes, and you have been forgiving. When I arrived I was just a father of one, and now I am a grandfather. You have celebrated my scholarly pursuits. Other congregations would have been jealous of any time spent away from the four corners of the synagogue. You have encouraged me to develop my calligraphic skills.... There are no words to describe those sacred moments when we sat together in the hospital waiting for the surgeon's results, or witnessed the miracle of birth and were humbled by the ending of life... May you be blessed

with continued success in all of your endeavors. May our B'nai Shalom community go 'from strength to strength.'"

The Rev. Linda Vogelgesang is making a transition within our county. She is leaving Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Concord and becoming pastor at St. John's Lutheran Church in Antioch. So good-bye and hello!

Welcome to **the Rev. Stephen Hinerman** as Associate Pastor at Lafayette Christian Church.

Welcome also to **the Rev. John Weems**, as Associate Pastor for Mission and Evangelism at Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church. He writes, "I feel like the Holy Spirit has led me to life experiences directly related to mission and evangelism in a community full of thoughtful, successful, busy people seeking to understand God's will. I look forward to the possibility of serving the Lord at LOPC."

And farewell to Rev. Kevin Scherer, who leaves St. John's Orthodox Church in Orinda to do Campus Ministry in Spokane, Washington.

Chaplain's Corner



Routinely I receive telephone calls from parents who report their children are out of control. Invariably they come to me seeking assistance after first calling upon staff in juvenile hall or the Orin Allen facility in Byron. Most have watched the "scared straight" programs on television; they are searching for similar type programs and comparable results with their children. Unless the kid has had contact with the police or probation, usually, with my encouragement and blessing, the parent is referred to the chaplain for support and aid.

A couple of weeks ago, I answered a call from a "loss prevention specialist" at a local department store. A young person had been caught, first time at that location, shop lifting. The former police officer, his employer not wishing to prosecute, called the ranch. They, in turn, referred him to me. I welcomed the call and I invited the gentleman at the store to have the mother call me. We made arrangements to have her bring the kid to me, at a restaurant near his home. The self-described "frazzled" mother left the fifteen-year old youngster with me.

As we ate lunch, I described for him in graphic detail the dreary, dull, yet attention-grabbing world of juvenile detention. The theme, simply put, is, "Let me tell you about where you really don't want to go!" Secondly, equally provocative, "Just what do you need to do to ensure that you never go there!" I much prefer to speak with the kids in the community setting, hoping and praying they never come to the hall. Some, however, have not paid attention and ended up in Juvenile Detention. Many with whom I have spoken get the message. *Good thing!*

A day or two after I spoke with this kid, I ran into another kid and his mother at the courthouse. I was surprised not only to see her there with her son, but also to see how much he had grown since I last saw him as a pre-teen. Congratulations were in order, as, following a short term on probation for a relatively minor offense, mom and son were going to court to have the probation vacated. *Another good thing.* Mother and son exited the courtroom with huge smiles on their faces.

Recently I sat down to listen to voicemail. Only fifteen messages since the day before--not bad. Two messages though, were from mothers. One was the mother of the kid who had successfully completed probation a few weeks before. I could hear her choking back tears as she asked me to go see her son and to pray with him. I had learned earlier when I read the intake list that he was in the hall, so I *expected* the call from his mother.

The other mother, via voicemail, expressed her concern and that of her husband that their fourteen-year old son was spinning out of control and they needed *help*. I agreed to see them. In the meantime I went, as requested, to see the kid already in custody. His first time in the hall brought

lots of tears, lots of fear and understandable distress. About an hour into our conversation I asked him how he might describe this place to other kids. Specifically I asked him to address those kids seemingly hell-bent on coming to juvenile hall. I told him I was to meet with "Bobby," a kid whose misbehavior could soon warrant an extended visit to juvenile hall. I asked the kid to write an anonymous letter to Bobby, telling him just what juvenile hall is all about. The kid wrote most eloquently, as follows: (shared with his permission.)

Dear Bobby,

I can't tell you my name because I am in juvenile hall, where you don't want to be.

This is my first time here and it's horrible. The rooms are tiny with no windows, the beds are hard and uncomfortable and the food is disgusting.

You wear other people's clothes and don't change your pants (daily). You wear underwear that someone else wore yesterday, and the day before that, probably for years.

From the time I got arrested, they sent me to a holding cell in the police station for hours while they talked about my fate right in front of me. They drove me here, took all my clothes, made me shower, searched me and gave me my bedding. After that I went to my room and did absolutely nothing for the first time, because I couldn't.

My mom came to visit me a few days ago. It was the hardest part of being in here just seeing the look on her face. She couldn't believe I was here and couldn't stop crying and hugging me.

Watching her leave and not being able to go with her made me feel like a prisoner. It made reality sink in that I actually couldn't leave and in fact was a prisoner.

When Rev. Tinsley came to see me and told me my mom had asked him to come see me I couldn't help but cry. I felt so bad about being here that I hated the idea of having to talk to a friend of my mom's. I felt like a little girl for crying, but he told me if they water-proofed the door (of the room we were in) we would be drowning (from the volume of the tears) from all the boys he talked to that cried. I'm sixteen years old crying like a little kid.

Just a few weeks ago I saw Rev. Tinsley outside and met him for the first time I remember, but he knew me as a little boy when I was around ten. I never thought I would see him in here, under these circumstances.

From what I hear you need to get your act together so you don't end up here. I don't know exactly what you're doing but believe me when I say, its not worth it.

Your Friend.

Clever kid. Too bad this wisdom had to be learned the hard way. Maybe Bobby will pay attention--and I will need to see him only once. That would be a *good thing*. Peace!

Rev. Dr. Charles Tinsley
Juvenile Detention Chaplain

Rabbi Roberto Graetz, Temple Isaiah, Lafayette

A Time for Reflection, Reapproachment

Early August this year finds us marking the ninth day in the month of Av. The date has historical significance in that it reminds us of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The First Temple fell in 586 BCE, the Second Temple in the year 70 of the Common Era. It was a day of mourning and continues to be for many a day of remembrance. In an attempt to keep the calendar free from an excess of mourning, tradition maintained that on this day in ages past, the Crusades started, the Inquisition reached its peak, and the Laws of Nuremberg were sanctioned. The Book of Lamentations is read in a mournful dirge and traditional Jews observe a full fast.

Rabbinic sources indicate that the fall of the Temple was brought about not by an outside force, which triumphed over us, but was instead caused by baseless hatred among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. On the Shabbat prior to Tisha B' Av, the text chosen for the Haftarah reading is the vision of the prophet Isaiah of destruction to come. The Shabbat following the day of mourning is known as Shabbat Nachamu, for on this day we read not a menacing message from the prophet but his warm message of comfort as Israel faces a long exile.

Besides the historical significance of the day, the ninth of Av marks a change in the rhythm of the calendar. We leave the quiet weeks of summer to walk into the ever intensifying preparations for the High Holy Days. Seven weeks separate Nachamu from Rosh HaShanah. How much work needs to be done on a personal level and a communal level to be ready to usher the solemn Days of Awe! Realizing the dire consequences of "baseless hatred," we are invited to re-examine all our relationships: the energy wasted in silly arguments, the bitter taste of walking through life with rancor, the debilitating effect of feeling guilty, the chances missed to say "I love you" to someone we now miss, or "I forgive you" to someone no longer within our reach. Every year we are urged to engage in this *cheshbon ha-nefesh*, this soul searching exercise, for every year – no matter how hard we try – at some point we hurt or we are hurt.

The dates in the calendar give life a rhythm. They are recurring in perfect sequence. Life is rarely that simple. Today together, tomorrow on our separate ways; today full of healthy energy, tomorrow bed ridden with some devastating disease; today fully alive, tomorrow... "Repent," said the sage to his pupils, "an instant before you die." "But how will we know?" asked the disciples. "You don't," said the sage. "That's why you must do it every day!" Let us deepen our study and our spiritual practice so that we may walk in greater harmony with each other and with more integrity in each of our lives.

Rev. Lori Sawdon

Lafayette United Methodist Church

Seeds of a Sower

Now taking second stage to The Da Vinci Code is the Gospel of Judas, a newly released document originally written in Greek in the mid-second century. A Coptic translation of the gospel dating from the fourth century was found in Middle Egypt in the 1970s. Before it came into the hands of scholars who recognized its contents and value, the papyrus deteriorated into nearly 1,000 fragments. This discovery is one of the most important contributions to our sources for early Christianity since the discovery of fourth-century manuscripts near the Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi in 1945. These writings include previously unknown gospels that allegedly record the teachings of Jesus himself, in words quite different from those of the New Testament.

The Gospel of Judas is not a gospel in the familiar sense of a narrative of Jesus' life or earth. Its genre is one of dialogues between Jesus and his disciples, with the emphasis on dialogues between Jesus and Judas (the "thirteenth" because he was replaced by Matthias), who is portrayed as superior in understanding to the twelve apostles. Much of the dialogue addresses the theology of good and evil. The writing redeems Judas, long condemned for betraying Jesus, an act which led to his crucifixion. In this text Jesus chooses Judas to be the recipient of secret revelations and Jesus commissions Judas to hand him over to his death.

The Gospel of Judas does not provide additional evidence about "the historical Judas" nor about "the historical Jesus." Like the Nag Hammadi manuscripts, all these early Christian texts offer differing positions in the same debate. They reveal the diversity of early "Christian" communities, world views and corresponding "gospels," long before the church councils chose those that would be included in the canon of scripture. Perhaps this discovery will help Christians recognize and accept that there have always been varying interpretations of Jesus' ministry. Much of the faith yet remains a mystery. None of us can be absolutely certain that our version is the one and only. We may be able to learn and grow from one another's experiences. In considering Judas, it is most important to remember Jesus' statement at the Last Supper, "One of you will betray me," and join the disciples in asking, "Is it I, Lord?"

Pastor Eric Strom

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Author, speaker, and pastor Bill Hybels has a very thought-provoking phrase: "**The local church is the hope of the world.**" Interesting thought, isn't it? A pretty bold statement as well, considering the size of our congregation and the size of the city of Concord – not to mention the world.

If I were to go on to tell you that Pastor Bill Hybels is senior pastor of one of the largest churches in the country, you might think to yourself, "Easy for him to say. They have resources we can only dream of." While it is true they do have a lot of resources, that misses the point.

He's not just talking about one church, his or ours. He's talking about all of us. Good Shepherd, the Salvation Army down the street, First Lutheran over on Concord Blvd., Light-house Regional Church where I preached when we did Trading Pastors. All of us. There was once a cartoon that shows hundreds of people looking slightly distressed, each of them thinking, "What can one person do?" Have you ever seen it? Obviously the point is that if they all worked together they could make a huge difference.

Think about it. What if every church took it's calling to impact the world in a positive way for the sake of Christ, rather than circling the wagons in fear? What if every church in Concord was doing Joyful Serving events, feeding the hungry once a month, sharing the hope that we have in Jesus Christ? What if every church was joyfully and enthusiastically answering God's call to serve the way each church is uniquely gifted to serve? Can you imagine it? Together we would be unstoppable! And not just because we're together, but because we'd be working by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I think Pastor Hybels is right. The local church is the hope of the world. I love it. I want us to be a part of it. Don't you? We've got some wonderful ministries going on here at Good Shepherd, so in some ways, we're already out there. Ask yourself for what kind of ministry are you uniquely gifted?

Jan Sechrist, Walnut Creek United Methodist Church

On the morning of April 30 an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 people spanned the Golden Gate Bridge for a silent vigil, with an estimated 15,000 attending the afternoon rally on Crissy Field. In Washington D.C. that same day, 760,000 postcards were delivered to the White House with an estimated crowd of 75,000 showing up for the rally there. Eight members of the Save Darfur Coalition also met with President Bush on the previous Friday. As my high school son, Chris, and I joined hands and raised our arms in silent vigil with the thousands of others on Golden Gate Bridge, the full impact of what we were representing and standing for hit me. I wept with a suffering heart, realizing I was being a voice for victims in Darfur who desperately needed the world to know their story and not be forgotten. As cars whizzed by, many honking in support, and as people not part of the vigil walked by, it created a visual analogy of how easy it is for us to go on in our day-to-day lives and not think about what is happening to others who are not part of our immediate sphere of existence. Only a few weeks earlier I was among those oblivious to Darfur until God put a flyer in front of me as I casually perused the ushers' desk. From there I found myself standing on the Golden Gate Bridge understanding and experiencing fully what the body of Christ

looks and feels like, and what it is that Christ calls us to do--care for and tend to his flock.

Walnut Creek Church members and friends added nearly 100 voices to that body of Christ through postcards. These rallies, vigils and postcards did not go unnoticed. The Monday following these activities, the White House sent Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick to Nigeria to help salvage peace negotiations. On Friday, May 5, the government of Sudan and the largest of the rebel groups in Darfur came to a peace plan which paves the way for the United Nations peacekeeping troops to come in. Before this, the Sudanese government has steadfastly refused to allow any UN forces in.

This is a fragile peace plan and does not mean the threat of genocide is over, so please visit WWW.OurPledge.org to see what you can continue to do and stay informed. To see what United Methodists are doing, please go to gbgm-umc.org/umcor/emergency/sudanact.stm.

Jurgen Schwing, Kaiser Spiritual Care Manager

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

It's time to say hello again from the Spiritual Care Department at Kaiser Permanente in Walnut Creek. It's been six years since this program started on May 29, 2000. Before that time, nurses went to the yellow pages when a patient made a request for spiritual or pastoral care. When I was first hired, I was the only chaplain covering the hospital as well as hospice patients in their homes throughout the county.

We have since grown and are better able to meet the needs of our patients. We now have four full-time chaplains, a part-time intern, and a part-time administrative assistant. My role is spiritual care manager, and I feel blessed to work with a great team. Our full-time hospice chaplain Carlyle Coash is an endorsed and board certified Buddhist chaplain, serving people of all spiritual traditions. He is also the chair of the spiritual care committee of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. Our full-time palliative care chaplain Paul Honigs is endorsed by the Mira Vista United Church of Christ in El Cerrito and he comes to us after a career with Habitat for Humanity. Until recently our hospital chaplain was Marilyn Ericksen, a United Methodist minister. She took a position in Sacramento and we are in the interviewing process to hire a new chaplain. Rev. Scott Rilsback is an ordained interfaith minister currently serving as our intern, and Anne Mackey is our administrative assistant. You can reach us at 925-295-6259.

We have about 20 spiritual care volunteers from many traditions, and we are grateful for all the services they provide our patients and families. Until last year, they provided after-hours and weekend coverage and we are especially grateful for their middle-of-the-night and weekend responses. Our on-call program is now covered 24/7 by our staff chaplains.

October 23 to 27, 2006, will be National Spiritual Care Week. We will celebrate at the Kaiser Hospital with various activities, including a Healing Wisdom Exhibit in our Meditation Room that will be open 24/7. Feel free to stop by.

Point of View—Risking Conversation

Abraham H. Miller, Emeritus Professor of Political Science

Response to Dr. Amer Araim

I was delighted that “Ministering Together” arranged for Dr. Amir Araim to have a copy of my rejoinder to his article so that he might respond.

Three generations after the 1948 Arab invasion of Israel, the plight of the Palestinian refugees still persists. In the course of history, no other people have remained refugees, unabsorbed into the neighboring communities, for this long.

Dr. Araim tells us that the plight of the Palestinians is what shapes the politics and ideology of the Arab world. If only that were true, the Palestinian refugee problem would have long ago been solved. Only two Arab states, Lebanon and Jordan have permitted Palestinians to obtain citizenship. The remaining Arab states prefer that the Palestinians seethe in poverty, providing a human face for the permanent war against Israel and a breeding ground for fighters and suicide bombers.

Of all the world’s refugees only the Palestinians have their own dedicated refugee organization, UNWRA, largely funded not by Arab or Muslim countries but by the American taxpayer.

For years, no Arab government contributed anything to the UNWRA budget. This is a testimony to the widespread disregard for Palestinians in the Arab world. In recent years, Saudi Arabia and the oil-rich Emirates have been shamed into making contributions. Saudi Arabia contributes one-twentieth of the budget contributed by the United States. And the rest of the Arab world contributes so little

Fr. Ray Bucher, San Damiano Retreat

Though not of immediate concern to San Damiano, the issue of immigration is still a *deep* concern. This concern comes from a Franciscan heart – trying to live out Gospel values--especially Matthew 25.

The Jewish faith, especially among the prophets, championed the rights of the widow, the orphan and the foreigner (Isaiah 1: 10-17; Amos 5: 21-24). Jesus comforted, praised and dined with gentiles. Francis cared for the entire universe as part of the human family.

The Church, especially through recent pope’s and bishops’ conferences, has championed migrant’s rights. Our

that each individual, state contribution would not buy you a new Mercedes convertible on North Main Street in Walnut Creek.

The Saudis at lat count contributed an annual budget of 5.8 million, far and away less then the three hundred million one of the Saudi princes spent on a family vacation in Spain. In contrast, the American taxpayer spent over one hundred and twenty million to improve the lives of Palestinians refugees.

Where Arab states have been generous to the Palestinians is in having telethons to raise money for the families of suicide bombers. One such Saudi suicide-bomber telethon raise in excess of 100 million dollars.

The young Palestinian who blew up Sbarro Pizza in Jerusalem was one of twelve children growing up in a refugee camp amid poverty. By turning himself into a mass murderer, killing eight children, along with fifty others, he instantaneously transformed the lives and opportunities of his parents and eleven siblings. He responded to a cruel and inhuman system of incentives: one that provided economic largess for death but not for life.

When the oil-rich Saudi and Emirates and the rest of the masses truly value the lives of Palestinian children as much as thy value their deaths in martyrdom, the Arabs will have taken the first steps toward peace and justice in the Middle East. And you’ll know that historical moment has arrived when the Saudis raise a hundred million dollars to improve the lives of Palestinian families without demanding the deaths of their children as collateral. If Dr. Araim will use his intellectual talents to achieve that moment, then indeed he will make a contribution toward peace and justice in the entire middle East.

own bishops in their Strangers No Longer document offered guidelines out of which just immigration reform might emerge.

I was especially proud of Los Angeles’ Cardinal Roger Mahoney’s unequivocal rejection of one of the Federal bills for criminalizing aid to those who are undocumented (Go So Cal!)

Do we need border security? Yes. Does the issue awaken cultural insecurities as well? Yes. Yet assimilation is taking place (I was surprised to read that the 2000 Census showed that 71% of third generation Mexican-American immigrants speak only English!) Are there economic implications? Sure. The cost of

food is kept down by the low wages garnered in backbreaking work that most of us would never do. And yes, there are also added expenses in the educational and health-care fields. Finally, does there need to be respect for the law? Absolutely, but the respected tradition of civil disobedience has always had a place in our Catholic tradition.

We have just left Paschal Season, yet we need to live as Alleluia people **All** year round. We can't limit our veneration of the cross to Good Friday, where the most powerful chose to identify with the most powerless. That veneration invites imitation, imitation of Christ's love for those living in the margins.

Today's immigrants are without power. If they find work, they are often at the mercy of their employer. They are often separated from their families and "exempt" from the human rights that are such a proud part of our great American tradition.

One of our own friars, Bro. Ed Dunn was one of the founders in 1994 of an organization called the Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights (ICIR, www.icir.igc.org). ICIR has grown into a network of 1000-plus congregations, denominations, and organizations, lay and religious leaders throughout the state. In February of this year, we lost Brother Ed to cancer. But he will be long remembered for his efforts on behalf of immigrants. Ed enjoyed helping people connect to their own stories of immigration, whether one, two or several generations back. For we were strangers, too.

Aware that I am the grandson of four immigrants, I cannot forget their courage in surrendering the familiar and facing the unknown. I can't walk with them, but I can walk with today's immigrant...and so can you. In this season of Pentecost, let's invoke the Holy Spirit for renewed courage and solidarity. Paz y bien

Tom Conrad, Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church

Dear Brian,

It has now been over three weeks since your *Ministering Together* newsletter (July/August edition) arrived in our mailbox. I must admit that I am still dismayed and disappointed that you would consider printing the divisive Op/Ed piece from Rev. Mary Naegeli, the Senior Pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Concord. I do not know which one of you I am more upset with – you for printing it, or her for thinking and doing what she did in writing that piece so full of rancor.

Rev. Naegeli's piece was entitled *Eyewitness Guide to the Presbyterian Church/USA: What Can the Local Church Do?* It was the Interfaith Council's decision to reprint her piece under the heading *Point of View – Risking Conversation*. What Rev. Naegeli's piece does is to tell all local Presbyterian Church (USA) congregations exactly how to go about leaving (or at least severely damaging) our National denomination. This article or hers is very destructive and divisive. It is a parallel to the article which *Mother Jones* published about 17 years ago, describing in great detail exactly how to build a nuclear weapon! In my opinion, that is just what Rev. Naegeli did with her piece – and you have helped her by broadcasting the word and the thoughts behind it! This kind of negative commentary is not helpful to any sense of interfaith understanding and/or cooperation.

What Rev. Naegeli was trying to convey is, in fact, basi-

cally an in-house issue among Presbyterians and would not have any interest to those Interfaith Council subscribers from other faith communities. Her detailed litany goes to the issue of attempting to undo the decision of the Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly gathering in Birmingham, Alabama this past June. One of the most heated topics, which that General Assembly dealt with, was the issue of gay/lesbian persons seeking to be ordained in our denomination. The General Assembly decided to maintain the current rules and regulations on peace, unity and purity within the structure of the denomination, but to allow some exceptions to those standards to be made at the local level. These exceptions are to be granted on a case-by-case basis and those decisions are to be made regionally for clergy and locally for lay leadership. This is probably all very boring to non-Presbyterians – and most people reading the newsletter were probably thinking...Who cares about his and why did they reprint this kind of stuff? Well, that is exactly my opinion of this piece.

Brian, I would request that you not print this kind of negative, hurtful journalism in the future. This type of commentary is not helpful to anyone. It is divisive, destructive, subversive – and I would consider it to be a rather subversive act!

I have always considered the Interfaith Council to be an interconnective, supportive, collegial and helpful organization – not one to be destructive or divisive. Please do not spread this kind of contempt in future issues of *Ministering Together*.

Social Justice Alliance-SoJA

Special SoJA Meeting September 13

Carolyn Krantz, Pastoral Associate at St. Peter Martyr Parish in Pittsburg and a specialist on immigrant rights, will speak on the subject of immigration in Contra Costa County at the next Social Justice Alliance meeting on Wednesday, September 13, at 7:00 p.m., in the Interfaith Council Office, Room 205, 1543 Sunnyvale Avenue, Walnut Creek. All are welcome and encouraged to join us for this talk and participate in small-group discussion on this important topic.

Winter Nights' Quick Facts

Winter Nights Rotating Shelter will open October 16, 2006, at a congregation in Antioch. Closing Day is April 30, 2007. As we go to press, only three weeks remain open: November 6-13 and 20-27; and April 2-9. If your congregation can host any of these weeks, give the Interfaith Council office a call.

Our van, which Valerie drives to transport the children to school and their parents to BART and bus, has served us well, but it has over 160,000 miles on the odometer. We are looking for a new or used van to help with transportation. Mattresses are also needed. **Lorri Gazzano**, our grant writer, has applied to eight foundations for funding. The feedback has been encouraging. Right now we have some \$22,000 in the bank. Our budget is \$122,000. Special thanks to the **Firedoll Foundation** and **St. Monica's Parish** for their support so far. Read on for several creative fundraisers for our family shelter.

Winter Nights Inspires Creative Fundraising

CROP Walk on October 1

An easy 4.2 mile walk on the Iron Horse Trail on a beautiful fall Sunday afternoon is a delightful way to help Winter Nights reach its budget goal. The date for this year's "walk for the hungry" is October 1; 1:00 p.m. registration. Walk begins at 1:30 in Walnut Creek Civic Park, goes to Pleasant Hill BART, and back to Civic Park. The Contra Costa CROP Walk, **Sponsored by Church World Services**, is an event to raise money to ease world hunger. Twenty-five percent of the proceeds remain in Contra Costa County **and will go to the Winter Nights Family Shelter**. Hope to see many of you on the trail—it's good for your health. It helps the hungry of the world and helps homeless families and children in our County. Information: www.cropwalk.org.

How About These Ideas?

Two friends of the Winter Nights Shelter are celebrating significant birthdays, and have requested that their well-wishers donate to WN as a gift. **Sandy Anderson**, from Temple Isaiah, reports that Winter Nights Shelter will be the designated charity at Mitzvah Day in October. **Sandy** is also the source of an idea that will be the hit of the shelter season—hibiscus-colored aprons with "**Winter Nights**" embroidered on each. We know each volunteer will want to wear one. **The Interfaith Peace Concert** in November will dedicate its free-will offering to WN. We are pleased to be recipients of funding from these creative ideas.

Hot August Days for Winter Nights

The Interfaith Council and Winter Nights Rotating Shelter were the star attraction at the Treat Plaza Faire on August 12. The Winter Nights booth was centrally located, and the well-publicized event, with 35 booths displaying everything from jewelry to banking services, promoted the shelter every hour with raffle drawings. All proceeds of the Faire went to Winter Nights. Thank you, **Jacki Vigil** and **Jo Sciarroni**, for your generosity in helping homeless families with children.

CNWS Interfaith Task Force Tour

The CNWS Interfaith Task Force will sponsor a bus tour to Point Alameda on Saturday, September 9. The purpose of the tour is to learn about the conversion of a closed military base in Alameda County to a spot for civilian use. The bus will leave at 9:30 a.m. from the Concord Senior Center and return there by 3:00 p.m. Lunch will be provided. This tour is sponsored by **East Bay Housing Organization (EBHO)** and the **Social Justice Alliance of the Interfaith Council**. If interested, please call 925-933-6030 to reserve a seat.

Faithful Citizenship

September is the month to begin learning about the issues and candidates for office on the November 7 Ballot. You will find on your ballot thirteen State Ballot Measures, Candidates for U.S. Congress, Governor, other State Constitutional Offices, State Assembly, Community College Boards, County Board of Education, School Districts, City Councils, Health Care Districts, Fire Protection Districts, BART Districts, Municipal Utilities Districts, and Local Ballot Measures. For Nonpartisan Information, check out these sites: www.SmartVoter.org; Legislative Analyst's Office www.lao.ca.gov; www.EasyVoter.org. The League of Women Voters of Diablo Valley will send speakers on the Pros & Cons of the State Ballot Measures to your congregation. Call 925-283-2235.

Band Aids and Scalpels

Healing has been on the minds of a suffering world community that wants everyone to enjoy at the very least basic human needs. Who but the faith communities all over the world should step into the leadership role and insist upon it?

One such individual who has administered band-aids all his adult life is Fr. Louie Vitale OFM, a Franciscan Friar who recently retired from his role of Pastor at St. Boniface Church, San Francisco, in the heart of the Tenderloin. The acclaimed St. Anthony's Dining Room serving thousands of meals daily to the hungry is part of the St. Boniface Community. At night the pews of the church are filled with tired and destitute homeless who can sleep safely until morning. During those days, Fr. Louie could be found advocating for whatever cause might bring a little kindness, a little dignity, a little hope to the lonely and suffering homeless on the streets. All the while Louie administered an active and sustaining parish.

Previous to his pastoral assignment, Fr. Louie helped lead the Santa Barbara Province of Franciscans as Minister General.

So much for Band-Aids! Why have we so many hungry and homeless? There is no excuse in this wealthy country for such a disgrace! Major surgery is needed if the growing separation of "haves and have-nots" continues. And here comes Louie looking for a scalpel! Arrests at the local, state and federal levels for the nonviolent protesting of injustice have landed him in jails and prisons in various locations. Interrupting "business as usual" at weapons factories, nuclear labs and weapons testing facilities (he follows the money) are his crimes.

Healing cannot happen in a world where torture, disappearances and death are acceptable methods of gaining power. Louie is right there to stand up for the person of conscience who refuses to cooperate with what he/she now sees as evil. He follows in the tradition of Martin Luther King, Jr., Mohandas Gandhi and Jesus of Nazareth.

Fr. Louie and a few others started a 30-day fast on the 4th of July in protest and prayer that a cease-fire would occur and that the troops could return home. During this time Louie, representing Pace e Bene (an organization dedicated to the practice and teaching of nonviolence) and a few other advocacy group representatives, traveled to Jordan by invitation, to broker a cease-fire agreement in Iraq. Upon his return to the U.S., he and four others expected to conclude their fast at the White House. They prayed at the entrance and asked for President Bush and Tony Blair to come out and speak with them. They requested that the two leaders of the war in Iraq not conclude their talk until they had agreed upon an exit date. Of course, Fr. Louie and the others were arrested and fined. At this writing, Louie had not agreed to pay a fine (jail time instead of any dollar contribution preferred).

The Social Justice arm of the Interfaith Council of CCC administers Band-Aids and also sponsors various activities attempting to address the root causes of suffering. Gwen Watson and Natalie Russell co-chair SoJA. Band-Aids are absolutely essential and most capably handled by Gwen. She,

along with her invested Homeless Summit, are preparing for the Winter Nights Program to open next month. Another group is meeting regarding the use of the Concord Naval Weapons Station for homeless and for young people aging out of foster care. The huge issue of health care led by Pat Snyder is also of prime concern at this time.

Natalie, reaching for a scalpel, is preparing to organize the annual trek to Fort Benning, Georgia in November to end funding for the School of Americas supported by our taxpayer money. The SOA (renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) prepares soldiers in the use of psychological interrogation, torture, disappearances, assassination and much more. More information about this nonviolent and very moving vigil will appear in next month's issue of this newsletter. Call the Interfaith Council office for Natalie's or Gwen's phone number if you need information for planning.

Other SoJA issues such as nonviolence, foreign policies, juvenile justice, prison reform (death penalty) center around lectures, forums, DVD viewing, etc. followed by discussion. Gwen and Natalie realize that both band-aids and scalpels are essential in social justice work and both support and participate in each other's thrusts all the way.

SoJA welcomes everyone to our meetings, whether you carry band-aids or scalpels, or just your ears and voice. At our next meeting immigration will be discussed. Carolyn Krantz will speak at 7:00 p.m.

Interfaith Prayer of Unity For Peace
St. Stephen, Church, Walnut Creek
September 14, 7:00 p. m.

Not on the list

War Toys & Clothing for Holiday Gifts.

Next meeting: Wednesday, September 13, 7:00 p.m. at the Interfaith Council Office.

Interfaith Reading Room

A member of the Interfaith Council would like to host an Interfaith Reading Room in a central county location. Do you own an unused storefront property or home on a busy street that you would be willing to let the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County use as a tax write-off? We are looking for a place that is easily accessible and preferably not affiliated with any one faith tradition to preserve its neutrality. If you would be willing to be so generous, please contact Brian Stein-Webber at the Interfaith Council office.

Calling All Contra Costa Residents

There is a wonderful resource guide right at your fingertips to help you find health and human services. It's called CORD, the County Online Resource Database and is located at www.cccord.org. Maintained by the Contra Costa Crisis Center, there are resources for all ages, from 0 to 100+ for health exams, grief counseling, transportation and much more. Check it out to-

Volunteer Opportunity

AseraCare Hospice located at 1470 Enea Circle, Concord, is now forming training classes. Become a trained hospice volunteer for persons with life-limiting illnesses. Hold a hand, listen to life stories, read a book, enjoy music together, bring your unique talents to a bedside. You can make lasting memories possible. Join us for our free training. Contact Josie Gillon, Volunteer Coordinator, 925-798-1014.

Legislative Alert!!

Pat Snyder urges us to contact Governor Schwarzenegger at 916-445-2841 (phone), or 916-445-4633 (fax) to ask for his signature on Senate Bill 840, creating universal health care for California. The proposed plan is comprehensive, secure, flexible and affordable. For more information contact healthcareforall.org

The Interfaith Council

We would welcome donations of a microwave and a very recent model desktop computer. Both of these items are failing.

In Memoriam

It was probably about 1994 when the Lamorinda Interfaith Ministerial Association began to revive. One of the first people I met at the table was a raw-boned Texan named **Tom Kilpatrick**, a retired professor and Baha'i. This one-time Episcopalian was an articulate convert for the newest of the world religions, and he was a willing participant in interfaith dialogues. Together with his wife Jaleh, he was present at the founding meeting of what became the United Religions Initiative in 1996 in San Francisco. Tom and Jaleh were active participants in the shared Thanksgiving worship services in the Lamorinda area, and traveled extensively to see their scattered children, to start up a new business, and to share in interfaith and justice-focused conferences. They were also key people in the founding of the Baha'i community of Orinda where they resided.

Tom died on June 17 of this year. Throughout these years we have bumped into each other in a variety of venues including the Annual Meeting for the Interfaith Council. Their faithful work towards a more just and accepting world has helped to plant the seeds for the future. I just wanted to say

Thank You,. Anne Roth

Next Deadline: September 15, 2006

Please send copy marked to the attention of:

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