



M inistering Together

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

The Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County

September 2007

Coming Events

❖ **Beginning Chan Meditation**

Classes start on September 18 Tuesdays and Wednesday
Buddha Gate Monastery
3254 Gloria Terrace, Lafayette

All persons are welcome to practice this Chinese predecessor to Zen. To sign up, contact 925-934-2411 or mail@buddhagate.org.

❖ **Dialogue on the Death Penalty**

Tuesday, September 25, 10:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Walnut Creek Holiday Inn
2730 N. Main St., Walnut Creek

Clergy are invited to this luncheon sponsored by Death Penalty Focus and others. To RSVP (by September 20) or for questions, contact 415-243-0143 or stefanie@deathpenalty.org.

❖ **Holy Convergence III**

Sunday, September 30, 2:00 to 5:00 p.m.
Peace Lutheran Church
3201 Tassajara Rd., Danville

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

❖ **CROP Walk**

Sunday, October 7, 1:00 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 or to get materials, contact the Interfaith Council office at 925-933-6030.

❖ **Project Homeless Connect**

Tuesday, October 16, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Willow Pass Center
2748 East Olivera Rd., Concord

Your help is needed for this one-day, one-stop shop to offer a variety of services to people experiencing home-

lessness, by connecting them with benefits, medical care, counseling, social services, shelter and other services. You can complete applications, greet and route people, provide translation, serve food, or provide services. To volunteer, contact 925-313-6124 or ProjectHomeless-Connect@hsd.cccounty.us.

❖ **Screening of “Ghosts of Abu Ghraib”**

Week of October 21 to 28
Your congregation

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) is making this documentary by Rory Kennedy available for congregations to show in their own halls. They will provide the film and guidelines for facilitated dialogue following the showing. To participate, contact www.tortureisamoralissue.org/spotlight.aspx or 916-730-3801 by September 15.

❖ **United Nations 62nd Anniversary Banquet**

Wednesday, October 24, 6:00 to 8:45 p.m.
International House
University of California at Berkeley

All interested persons are invited to attend this event sponsored by our local UN Association. The theme is “Water for Life: the link with global warming and food, and prospects to achieve UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).” Tickets are \$30 (discounts for seniors and students). To reserve a space, call 510-643-8300.

❖ **World Community Day**

Friday, November 2
Shell Ridge Community Church,
200 La Casa Via, Walnut Creek
(across from John Muir Hospital)

Church Women United invites you to attend World Community Day. The theme is “Embracing Justice under God’s Tent.” Registration at 9:30 a.m. with coffee and breakfast breads. The program begins at 10:00.

Mark Your Calendars!!!

❖ **Interfaith Council Annual Meeting**

Sunday, November 4, 7:00 p.m.
Congregation B’nai Tikvah
25 Hillcroft Way, Walnut Creek

Director's Letter



Some things are made too much of by public opinion. Take the recent "Clarification" document put out by the Vatican. **Rev. Brian Joyce** of Christ the King parish in Pleasant Hill makes some cogent comments about the matter on page six. I appreciate his commentary and similar ones made by others which put the document into perspective. (A response by **Natalie Russell** of St. Stephen's parish in Walnut Creek will appear in the next issue.) Surprisingly, I heard of more upset among Catholics themselves than I did among other Protestant Christians who might have felt "dissed." This is a positive development, signaling that more and more people of good will are genuinely concerned about how their religious group is perceived by others.

Conversely, some things might not be made enough of. One case in point is the burning of the building of the Islamic Center of the East Bay in Antioch in August. It has been determined that the act was intentional, that it was arson, and in my mind it is only a matter of time before the act is determined to have been hate-based. It is a terrible, terrible thing that there are still citizens who need to fear for their well-being based solely upon their religion.

I am occasionally shocked that there is so much prejudice against Muslim people as a group. Needless to say, these prejudices thrive the most on a lack of real information, and upon an isolation from Muslim people themselves, the vast majority of whom are respectful, kind, remarkably tolerant folk. (It seems sometimes that those who have mourned the loss of the former Communist enemy horde are now fixing on the Muslims of the world. What a mistake.)

In answer to a recent question about how to overcome prejudice against Muslims, I responded that one should try to make more Muslim acquaintances.

There are many other under-emphasized matters, some of which are being remedied. One is global warming. Al Gore's movie, An Inconvenient Truth, has had much to do with recent higher levels of attention. (If you would like to show another environmental movie, Green: the New Red, White and Blue, you may get a copy through The Regeneration Project to show in your congregation, courtesy of columnist Thomas Freidman.)

We could go on: health care reform, prison reform, the abolition of state-sponsored torture, race-related discrimination. Each of these matters alone deserve more press than all of the tabloid-oids put together.

Thanks to whatever, we are well into the next election cycle. Please, if you can, encourage discussion that makes mountains out of true mountains, and leaves the molehill issues for the water cooler.

Important Notice!

We are still seeking someone to take the position of treasurer within the Interfaith Council. Our faithful Hal Foster tells us that he must "retire" by December 31st. If you or someone you know can do double-entry accounting and can volunteer about three hours a week, please contact the office right away! (925-933-6030) or eye4cee@aol.com



Welcome, Brentwood CUMC!

A warm welcome to Brentwood Community United Methodist Church, as it joins the Interfaith Council. The congregation is pastored by the Rev. Alexis Easton. This congregation is 140 years old this year, and have the longest ongoing ministry in Brentwood.

They have recently begun the study of healthy organizations, using materials from family systems theory as applied to churches. They are learning how to practice difference without division and to create a healthy, discerning balance between boundaries/accountability and nurturance/inclusion. When they've made some progress, they will start having conversations about some tough issues, including social justice and interfaith relations.

Chaplain's Corner



The following is an excerpt from a recent letter of appeal to a state licensing agency submitted by a system "alum", one of "my kids" who is working hard to get things on track in his life and the lives of his children:

Nearly five years ago when I was nineteen years old, I was arrested and charged with four felony counts...the Office of the Public Defender... successfully advocated in my favor before the Court, and with the district attorney reached an agreement where two of the counts were set aside and the remaining counts were reduced to misdemeanors. I served 27 days in custody and I served the remainder of a six month sentence on county parole, home detention, under the supervision of the sheriff's office alternative detention unit. I resided in the home of my surrogate parents...Upon the successful completion of county parole, it was determined by the Court that I serve a period of two years of summary (court) probation. Over that two year period I had no contact with any police agency, went to school part-time, but had, because of my record, few employment offers. If not for the patience and generosity of my surrogate parents, who supported me financially and allowed me to continue to reside in their home rent free, I don't know where I may have been. The Court had also stipulated that once I successfully completed the two-year informal probation, I could petition the Court to have the

record of the misdemeanor convictions expunged.

The record remains because sometime prior to the conviction, I had had a traffic ticket. The fine now is over \$1,500. Since I have been unable to work on a steady basis, I have been equally unable to pay the ticket off. I have found myself in a "catch 22" situation, no work--I cannot pay off the ticket, I do not pay off the ticket, I will not be offered employment.

I am working very hard to support my four children. And, I am preparing to be married. Mine was a difficult childhood. However, I have had opportunities none of my numerous siblings have had. I seek to continue to be a positive role model for my children and in the community for other children less fortunate than my own. I want to give my children more than I had as a young child because, I once was among those who are less fortunate. I seek to give back to the community, ultimately through a career in law enforcement. I simply need a chance.

I made a mistake once that I had sought to make right. I got burned and I learned from that experience. I humbly request a reconsideration of the bureau's decision to deny my ability to function in the capacity of _____ in the State of California.

Rev. Dr. Charles Tinsley
Juvenile Detention Chaplain

At-Risk Children Get Meals Through Food Bank Programs

Soon, children all across the Community will return to school. While many children will complain about losing their summer freedom, for others, school is the only place where they are guaranteed a meal. "Child hunger is a serious problem in our community," says Larry Sly, Executive Director of Food Bank of Contra Costa & Solano. "Each year, 33% of those served by the Food Bank are children."

According to the US Department of Agriculture, more than 12 million children are at-risk of hunger. Nearly one in four people in a soup kitchen line served by the America's Second Harvest Network is a child, as are 36.4 percent of the more than 25 million served annually by our network.

On the first day of school in our community, children experiencing hunger will have already fallen behind their classmates. These children will have more difficulty concentrating in class, be sick more often during the school year, and be less likely to excel academically. The consequences of child hunger extend far beyond this school year. Children who grow up poor are more likely to be unemployed and to receive public assistance as adults, continuing the cycle of poverty.

Through programs, such as the Farm 2 Kids program, the Food Bank provides additional food for children whose families cannot afford to keep food on the table. Every week, the Food Bank provides fresh produce to 8 schools in Contra Costa County and 12 schools in Solano County in partnership with participating after school programs. Research shows that increased consumption of a variety of fruits and veggies over a lifetime reduces risk of chronic disease. Farm 2 Kids is an excellent way to get more produce out into a community that could really use it, since over 50% of the students in these schools are on school lunch programs.

The Food Bank of Contra Costa & Solano, a member of America's Second Harvest – the Food Bank Network, is committed to ending childhood hunger in America. Learn more about hunger in your community by visiting www.foodbankccs.org and clicking on the Hunger 101 button.

Rabbi Dan Goldblatt
Congregation Beth Chaim, Danville
[On his congregation's new building]

For as long as I can remember, one of the central dreams of this community has been to end our state of homelessness and have our own synagogue home. At last, we have arrived in the promised land of this dream: God willing, we will never again be in the position of having to receive permission from others or clear with anyone else but our own schedule the dates and times of our services, programs, events and life cycle moments. We will no longer have to adjust to anyone else's sound system, gymnasium, rules and directives regarding lighting of candles, drinking of wine, or adjust to symbols that are not our own. Our teachers will be able to decorate their own walls, be able to have access to supplies and books, and all of our children who are visual and tactile learners will no longer be compromised or limited by the restrictions of the learning environment.

There are so many ways in which having our own home will radically improve the life of our community that it boggles the mind. The possibilities are so dramatic that it will take us quite some time to begin to even wrap our brains around them. This is such a blessing for all of us. We are going to experience "shehechyanu moments"- -the profound blessings of experiencing something for the first time - so often that we will probably need to remind ourselves not to take these blessings for granted (which is ironic since blessings are all about reminding us not to take for granted moments of meaning in our lives)...

Dreams can inspire us to illuminate our lives. They can give us purpose and be a source of boundless blessings. So, let us shed our old mentality of what we couldn't do and why we couldn't do it and move into this new and delicious reality of the wonder of the possible.

Rev. Matt Prinz
Ygnacio Valley Presbyterian Church, Concord

Imagine that you walk up to the church building at 9:45 on a Sunday morning. What do you hear? Most likely the sound of music would be trickling out of the church, whether it's the men's choir, the piano, or the voices of the congregation. We are accustomed to hearing music on Sunday mornings emanating from the Ygnacio Valley church building.

I was deeply moved on a recent Saturday to hear another music inside and outside of the church building.

The Saturday music sounded a bit different, being comprised instead of the sound of water sprayed on dirty cars, the buzz of a pressure washer, the "vroom" of vacuums, and the laughter of youth and adults as they washed cars.

In the midst of raising money to send youth to camp this summer by washing cars or bringing dirty, needing-to-be-scrubbed cars, the conversations between long time members and new friends added to the tune.

Inside the church building, another melody played: the splash, chop, and clatter of food preparation joined Saturday's song, and soon, the percussion of loading tables, and coolers of soda amplified these weekend sounds even more.

The sounds within the church building would soon overflow from the building and parking lot into a local park, as members went to eat a meal with homeless friends.

Saturday's music, the tune consisting of conversations and activity, was the song performed by our church community. It was the music of seeking out people in our own church and city who are often forgotten and not heard. Saturday's refrain, blends in with Sunday morning's prayers, hymns, and praise. Both of these harmonies, Saturday and Sunday, outside and inside the church sanctuary, are worship of the God of creation. The worship of the God who calls us, forgives us, and sends us out to live in his kingdom.

Fr. Richard A. Mangini
St. Bonaventure Catholic Church

I want to be clear that psychotherapy is very important and helpful. It is not a question of the spiritual being more important than the psychological. In fact, it is clear from my many years of experience that many Catholics and Christians from other denomination can use spirituality as an excuse from facing serious, psychological issues in their life. And St. Thomas of Aquinas would agree that very often the work of trying to be fully human through facing family systems and histories, addictions, fears, and insecurities is necessary first in order to be able to grow spiritually whole. It is one thing to confess one's sins and to confront one's selfishness and sinfulness, but it is not a substitute for serious therapeutic work. Both are "tools" to enable a person to be psychologically and spiritually whole.

There are many psychotherapists who encourage their clients to experience the Sacrament of Penance. And the Sacrament of Penance is more than confessing "sins". And there are many confessors who encourage their penitents to seek help of a therapist because they will never conquer or rid their life of bothersome, sinful patterns and fears without therapeutic-psychological help.

Be very clear that there is no contradiction between the world of religion and the world of behavioral science. There may be opposition, but that does not happen if both areas of life compliment and work together. After all, God created the human being, the human mind, the human environment with its history that is inherited through grace, prayers, study, psychotherapy, living life, the sacraments. We can grow, change and become a new person.

Robert Stranathan
First Church of Christ Scientist, Danville

They express the eternal wisdom and love of God to all humanity. They will never be outdated. They apply to solving every discordant human condition. Ideally, people follow the Ten Commandments not out of fear of what would happen if they disobeyed them, but because they naturally love God, which comes from God. People follow what they know and love.

The First Commandment acknowledges only one Mind or God, and disputes the validity of the material sense's assertion of many conflicting minds. As individuals think and act under the guidance of this Mind, they inevitably will help heal society worldwide because our thinking determines our experience. Mary Baker Eddy wrote, "Jesus urged the commandment, 'Though shalt have no other gods before me,' which may be rendered: Thou shalt have no belief of Life as mortal; thou shalt not know evil, for there is one Life, -even God, good" (Science and Health, pp.19-20). Jesus called this "the first and great commandment." And the second, he said, was "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. 22:38, 39).

When we accept that God is Spirit, we see that the First Commandment is a call to know life as spiritual, not mortal, and certainly not in a material body. Relying on the fact that God is all-powerful and always present, we are free to trust that He is in control of every aspect of our lives. We are released from the bondage of sickness, sin, and death. This spiritual awareness helps us to heal ourselves and others. Strengthened by this conviction, the Psalmist could say, "In God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me" (Ps. 56:4). He knew that Spirit determined his – and everyone's – life, not matter.

Let me share some of the ways in which I apply the commandments in my own life. You will no doubt have equally valid applications of your own.

Having absorbed the God-inspired validity of the First Commandment, I often use the Second Commandment as a reminder not to make a god (a graven image) out of material

possessions. Also, not to give undue attention to the physical body. This helps me appreciate my spiritual identity.

The Third Commandment counsels us not to say or do anything false or treacherous, and associate God's name with it. Jesus prohibited oaths completely, letting a man's word be his bond.

The Fourth Commandment prohibits rituals on the Sabbath that shut out the spirit of Christ. Jesus later endorsed this shortly before he was accused of healing on the Sabbath, when he said, "It is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days" (Matt. 12:12). I love Sundays because they provide a little more time to think about the truths I've heard in church and consider fresh ways to put them into daily practice.

The Fifth Commandment requires us to honor our parents, to see them, along with others, as God's children, respecting all the good they express. Also, I might add, caring for their needs when or if they can't take care of themselves, as Jesus encouraged his followers to do (see John 19:25-27).

The Sixth Commandment insists that we respect all of life. As I see it, we should rejoice in what is good, and not destroy it. This might be extended to include, for example, a good idea, or even someone's successful career.

The Seventh Commandment deals with respect for the sanctity of marriage. We should not defile our own marriage, or someone else's, by being unfaithful. This requires not only physical sanctity, but also mental sanctity, which preclude even unfaithful thoughts.

The Eighth Commandment says, Do not steal another's property, physical or intellectual. This could include theft in the realms of authorship, artistic achievement, or scientific discovery.

The Ninth Commandment asks that we tell the truth about others and not lie about or slander anyone's character or reputation, audibly or within our own thinking.

The Tenth Commandment says we should not covet anything that belongs to someone else. This would keep us from a full appreciation of the good God gives to us all, impartially.

In setting the stage for his delivery of the Ten Commandments to the people, Moses spoke of God's transcendent love for the Israelites, reminding them how He had brought them out of slavery in Egypt. From the beginning, the Ten Commandments were to be looked upon not as limiting dictatorial demands, but as loving admonitions on how to remain free, and live according to God's Word.

I've found that when I obey a commandment, especially when under stress, a warm feeling fills my heart – a "well done" from the Father of us all.

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Fr. Brian Joyce
Christ the King Catholic Church, P.H.

Pope Benedict XVI's recently published "clarification" on five theological questions about the Church has certainly muddied the waters for many Protestant Christians and Catholics alike. It's interesting that within days the Vatican, through Cardinal Kaspar, had to describe it as really "an urgent invitation to continue peaceful dialogue"!

Three quick examples of the "muddied waters": 1) To the question "did the Second Vatican Council change doctrine on the Church?" the text replies, "it neither changed nor intend to change this doctrine, rather, it developed, deepened and more fully explained it." Fair enough, but when something is developed in a new direction, deepened in a different way, and leads to a brand new set of behaviors, that is what most thinking people call "change"; 2) The Vatican text says "these separated churches and communities are deprived neither of significance nor importance in the mysteries of salvation. In fact the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as instruments of salvation" – despite that positive statement, all the qualifiers along the way have led the media and most reasonable readers to conclude the implication is that only Catholics are really saved! ; 3) In another reply the text says that other Christian Communities cannot be called Churches"!! Making a very technical, theological point and using "Church" in the narrowest possible way theologians can define "Church" results in a misuse of ordinary English, an offensive way to speak of fellow Christians, and an easily misunderstood and inaccurate view of standard Catholic belief, a belief and teaching which was already well stated with no need for clarification, in the official teaching of Vatican II on other religions including those that don't even claim to be Christian.

"Other religions, found everywhere, try to answer the restless searching of the human heart by proposing 'ways' which consist of teaching, rules of life and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. It regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from what it holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect the way of the Truth which enlightens all people". (Vatican II, 1965)

Rabbi Raphael Asher
Congregation B'nai Tikvah, Walnut Creek

"A people who dwells apart." (Numbers 23:9)

This is how the Moabite prophet, Bilaam, characterized the Israelites as they made their way back to the Land of Ca-

naan. The words implied a blessing of distinctiveness and an independence of spirit, but they also portended Israel's future isolation amidst a sea of Arab nations. So has another visionary arisen in our time in the person of Sari Nusseibeh, a Palestinian academic and statesman with a long family history in Jerusalem, who also has many potential blessings to offer for a future peace in Israel.

His autobiography, *Once Upon a Country*, was at the top of my summer reading list; and at the same time as Gaza was imploding and a Middle East peace seemed less likely than ever, his depiction of a confrontational but nonviolent two-state solution gave me a glimmer of hope for the future. Both Israel and the Palestinians have many amends to make for a history of terror, encroachment, and just wishing the other would disappear; but, Nusseibeh contends, Jews and Palestinians are natural allies in their love for the land and in their combined passion to imagine their world differently.

We are certainly aware in a post-9/11 world of a growing and insidious network of radical Islam. Hamas counts themselves among throngs of Arabs who can see their redemption from suffering only in terms of Jihad, Holy War. However, there are hundreds of millions of Muslims who foster a much nobler understanding of their faith and destiny. Many Palestinian Christians and Muslims can be counted among these faithful who have grafted their culture, like we Jews, with a deep appreciation of secular learning. And there are many Israelis who are eager to meet them halfway.

If Hamas and the other holy warriors choose to secede onto the streets of Gaza, Damascus, and Baghdad, there may emerge a real partner for peace on the West Bank. Israel and the World Jewish Community need to be eager, like Bilaam, to confer blessings upon the Palestinian people. In the same way as Israel stands apart with the support of our people and others around the world, so may the Palestinians stand apart and independent of the belligerence of others and share in the blessings of the ancient prophets from Bilaam to Isaiah to Mohammed.

Rev. Rick Mitchell
Shell Ridge Community Church, W.C.

There are many differing voices and opinions on most subjects, and it can be baffling to be confronted with so many competing points of view. We all differ in our approaches; Sandy Mitchell reads everything that might have any bearing on heath, and I read about larger issues of international politics, global warming, and what new stars are rising in the worlds of acting, film, etc. Sandy's research may often yield more personally useful results!

The question of whom to listen to can be life-changing, depending on how we respond to it. Like many such questions there may not be any “right” answer, but there are wrong ones. There is a saying, attributed to Buddha, that says “believe nothing, no matter where you read it, or who said it, not even if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense.” For many of us, that’s the final test of what we may accept as truth or fiction, tempered with our religious or philosophical understandings of truth from a “higher source.”

In our human state, there will be no consensus, but sometimes certain voices will stand out as reasonable and relevant to current problems and issues. One such voice is Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, a forty-year-old ordained Orthodox rabbi who produces a TV program called “Shalom in the Home.” The rabbi has been a rather controversial figure because of his innovative approaches, but his TV program and many books have often been characterized as “good advice.” While I don’t always agree with him, I’m quite comfortable in recommending his thoughtful and caring suggestions regarding children and family life.

If you are interested, you can catch his program on TV at 10 p. m. on Monday nights (TLC channel) or 2 p.m. every weekday on the Discovery Channel. The format is a “reality show” and is similar to that of “Nanny”, another current show. The episodes deal with a variety of issues, circumstances, and backgrounds – as do the anecdotes discussed in his books.

I would paraphrase or recast the Buddha’s advice as “Never discount or dismiss something before considering it – just because of who said it.” A case in point is Michael Moore, who may tend to be overly sensational – but much of what he has to offer in his new movie “Sicko” is basically very true and appropriate for questioning and reviewing our national health services and priorities.

The same applies, in my opinion, to messages from psychics or clairvoyants. We do not need to understand -- or even necessarily accept – the process by which someone arrives at a truth. We need only to be open to a thought that may have deep significance for us, sent perhaps by means that do not conform to our usually conventional or traditional channels of information. “Could this be true for me?” is quite different than “This came from a powerful and all seeing Spirit, and I must heed and follow its instructions.” The latter may or may not be true, but one can gain from a truth that is shared from unknown or even unfriendly sources. Wisdom, in other words, is self-sustaining and self-rewarding. And – its own reward!

Dr. Amer Araim, Dar Ul-Islam Mosque, Concord Religion, Politics, and Human, Social and Political Rights

Religion for Muslims includes the relationship between the individual and the Almighty. Allah (God) controls the behavior and the conduct of the individual within his/her family, community and the society as a whole. The believer, while appreciating the creation of Allah, should take care of the environment and develop the earth resources, as well as exert every effort to preserve the ecosystem. There are strict commands in Islam that human beings should not destroy or bring corruption to earth. While human beings are encouraged to enjoy the earth and its resources, they are commanded to preserve it. All of us are aware of the fact that all religions are calling on us to also show and exercise mercy toward our fellow human beings as well toward animals. Even plants should not be uprooted except to maintain life on earth.

Humanity has suffered from wars and conflicts. The reference in the Holy Scriptures of our three monotheistic religions, Islam, Christianity and Judaism, to the story of Abel and Cain is a reminder to all of us that even within the family, conflict might happen if individuals forget the commands of Allah and let their selfish and uncontrolled desires govern their conduct. As a matter of fact, politics is defined by a political scientist as “the exercise of influence to affect the distribution of values such as power, prestige and wealth” and in the words of another, “Who gets what, when and why?” In both cases, politics mean the settlement of dispute. The people of faith are in a position to be involved in the settlement of disputes because of their attachment and commitment to justice, which emanates from their deep respect for and obligation to see that the commands of the Almighty are fulfilled. The basic principles of these commands are peace, justice, equality and prosperity for all.

Since I began my journey in Contra Costa County six years ago, I have been speaking, lecturing, writing and working on these basic principles with special emphasis on condemning terrorism, and in particular, the despicable attacks against the United States of 9/11. In the meantime, I have been calling for the elimination of the main causes of conflict between the Muslim World on one hand and the United States and other Western states on the other. In addition to the main contentious issues which have been discussed repeatedly here, the Muslim world is part of the Global South, which is suffering from poverty, malnutrition, disease and other calamities. In accordance with statistics, the Global South represents 80 percent of the people of the world and gets 20 percent of its resources and the Global North represents the remaining 20 percent and controls 80 percent of the resources. In addition, the Global South is suffering from the international debt crisis. Instead of spending the resources of the world on wars,

weapons and other military means, all peace-loving peoples should unite their efforts to see to it that the socio-economic problems everywhere be given the utmost attention.

In the meantime, we should not forget the homeless and poor in our community. I am proud to be associated with the Interfaith Council and the Social Justice Alliance for their great efforts in this regard. I wish to share the story of the cooperation between the members of faith communities. I received a call from a church in our area that their sister church in Virginia contacted them stating that a Muslim family would move to our area and they needed help. They asked me to assist. In the meantime, they would also like to provide help, but they wanted the representative of the Muslim community in the Interfaith Council to be involved. I thanked them and began contacts for that purpose. I am also giving thanks to Allah for providing me with the opportunity to serve others and to cooperate with the faith communities on these humanitarian issues.

The above-explained position is a message of peace and is consistent with basic tenets of all our religions.

Miracles

You don't have to be Catholic to believe in miracles

You don't have to be Hindu to believe in Karma

You don't have to be Muslim to believe in fate

My parents lived their lives as children of God.

Never practiced official ceremonies.

They created their own.

Praising each day they were alive;

Believing each moment a small miracle.

Jean Harris

TRANSITIONS

Last issue, we welcomed **Rabbi Alissa Forrest**, who comes to Temple Isaiah in Lafayette, where she was affiliated before attending rabbinical school. She writes to her congregation, "When I left Temple Isaiah six years ago, [I was presented] with a beautiful tallit [prayer shawl]. When you look at the tallit from afar, the design seems to be a blend of greens, purples and blues; but, upon closer inspection, the tallit is actually decorated by the outlines of dozens and dozens of hands, the handprints of the many children and teens with whom I had worked... The hands represent *chamsas*, a Middle Eastern symbol of protection. During my six years of study at the Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion, this tallit served as a shelter of peace and security for me. Each day as I wrapped myself in it, the hands became a source of inspiration and guidance for me... Seeing the handprints each day as I prayed reinforced my desire to be a rabbi with special interest in youth. This role is not only a calling for me, but also my sense of holy responsibility to our contemporary Jewish community... Ultimately, these handprints on my tallit led me back to Temple Isaiah to serve as an Assistant Rabbi with a focus on youth and young families."

We also welcomed **the Rev. Sun Hee Kim** to Walnut Avenue United Methodist Church in Walnut Creek. She writes to her congregation, "When I was a child, I used to hike with my dad. I can still remember the first time I was able to hike all the way up to the top of a sizable mountain. The view from the top took my breath away, and I felt the presence of God in the midst of the beauty of nature. As I look back on that moment, I realize that the actual journey that I took with my dad to the mountain is what made the mountain-top experience even more special. And certainly, the journey was not without its moments when I felt completely out of breath and almost wanted to give up on hiking altogether... These types of breathless moments are what I desire to experience with the people of Walnut Avenue, and I am so very eager to embark on this new journey with all of you. I am excited to share together in those moments that will take our breath away. Of course, in any journey, there will be times when we will feel like we are just holding our breath or even losing it... By God's grace, our journeys have crossed and now we are here together. I believe and trust that God will lead us towards a common future."

Mountain View Shelter Meals

The need continues for your good folks in congregational groups to provide meals at the Mountain View Shelter in Martinez. New and old groups alike are welcome. Thank you especially to those who have served recently, including St. Isidore's of Danville, Our Savior's Lutheran Church of Lafayette, Congregation B'nai Shalom of Walnut Creek, Lisa Sweet, St. Ignatius of Antioch, Concord United Methodist Church, Shell Ridge Community Church of Walnut Creek, St. Mark's Lutheran Church of Pleasant Hill, Concord Korean Church and St. Agnes of Concord.

If you can help, especially starting in November, please contact Gloria deVries at 925-228-6920.

CROP Walk. Sunday, October 7, at 1 pm, is the 2007 CROP Hunger Walk. 75% of the funds raised support humanitarian agencies in disaster relief, refugee resettlement, and self help development projects in more than 80 countries. 25% of the funds support the Winter Nights Family Shelter. Pick up your congregation's packet of registration documents Sunday, August 26, from 3-4:30 pm at the Interfaith Council Office. **Polly Smith-Telfer** and **Geoffrey Gaskins** are directing this year's Walk.

Winter Nights. Plans and preparations are underway as Opening Night approaches—Monday, October 15.

Employment Opportunities—Please post an announcement at your congregation that hiring for job openings will take place in September and early October. Job Application forms are on the website www.cccwinternights.org.

We are pleased to announce that several of our Super Staff Members will be with us again: **Mahmood Barakzai**, Program Manager; **Joe Macaluso**, Social Worker; **Valerie Sloven**, Daytime Oasis Supervisor; and **Bob Russell**, Transport Supervisor. Screens—**Temple Isaiah** members are gathering supplies to build screens that will travel with the mattresses and bedding from site to site. Thank you, **Temple Isaiah**, for providing privacy for our families.

Back-Up Driver—**Bob Russell** has faithfully moved our shelter from one congregation to another on Mondays for three winters and is ready to begin his fourth year. **Bob** would like to have a back-up driver on standby. Please call **Gwen Watson** at 925-930-9965 if you can volunteer.

Creative Fundraising—**Sandy Anderson** held a designer purse sale, and the designer donated 10% of the proceeds to Winter Nights. Author **Laurel Anne Hill** and **Komenar Publishing** will host a book sale and signing of Laurel's novella, "Heroes Arise." in October, and a portion of the funds will go to Winter Nights. We are tremendously grateful!

Finances—The 2007-2008 Budget totals \$132,000. In a few weeks our annual Winter Nights Appeal Letter will be in the mail, and we know our contributors will be generous. Our magnificent grant writer, **Lorri Gazzano**, is busy writing grant proposals to foundations. The Firedoll Foundation was the first to respond. We received \$12,500, and want to express our thanks for

their continuing support.

Wish List—New Pillows, Pillow Covers (w/zipper), Twin Fitted and Flat Sheets, Bath Towels, Single Blankets. You can drop off these donated items at the Interfaith Office.

Brady Campaign. **Diane Bardi** and **Karen Arntzen**, President and Vice President respectively of the Contra Costa County Chapter of the **Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence**, have two requests for congregations. 1) Write letters in support of AB 1471, which requires that handguns have microstamping for the casing to help trace the gun to its owner quickly. 2) Participate in the *God Not Guns Sabbath* September 29/30. Check it out on www.GodNotGuns.org. You can email **Diane** and **Karen** at contracostammm@yahoo.com.

Health Care. **Pat Snyder** thanks all who participated in publicizing and leafletting the "Sicko" movie. **Pat** was in Los Angeles on August 11 for the final day of the Project 365. She said the yearlong activity was a great success. **Pat** reported that the Single Payer Universal Health Care bill, SB 840, will go forward in January. Six more Assembly Members and two more State Senators are needed to make the legislation veto-proof. She also explained that AB 8 which is a diversionary bill, and has some reform, but it doesn't make fundamental changes and lacks cost controls. Senator **Tom Torlakson** chairs the committee considering it. **Pat** urges letters of opposition be written to him—Room 2020 at the State Capitol.

S.F. FAITHS Foundation. **Dean Coons** invited members of the Social Justice Alliance to attend Immigration Training Workshops the last week of August.

CNWS Interfaith Task Force. **Delores Loague** described the workshop on August 4 and reported that a rally is being planned for August 30. September 4 is the date that the land use plan which resulted from workshops over several months will be presented to the Concord City Council. **Delores** also reported on the Community Advisory Committee meetings, which she attends.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, September 12, 2007
Interfaith Council Office
All are welcome

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Next Deadline: September 15, 2007
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Thank you corner:

Special thanks to our dedicated volunteers who gave up a beautiful June morning to collate, fold and label the July-August newsletter:

Sandra Ellingson, Jean Fadavi, Mary Hogan, Jan Ledbetter, Tim Michelson, Dick Shumaker and Dorothy Vance.

Please pray for:

Students going back to school
Bay area seminaries
Victims of recent flooding in the heartland
Victims of earthquake in Peru
First Baptist Church, Antioch
First Christian Church, Concord
Church of the Good Shepherd, Richmond