



M inistering Together

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

The Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County

March-April 2007

Coming Events

❖ **Interfaith Lenten Series**

Wednesdays, February 28 through March 28,
April 18 through May 2, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.
Community Presbyterian Church
200 East Leland Rd., Pittsburg

Speakers from many different religious traditions will make presentations, including Rabbi Pamela Frydman Baugh for Judaism, Mohammad Chadrhy for Islam, Rakesh Kumar Bhargav for Hinduism, Dr. Harmesh Kumar for Sikhism, Dr. Bahram Shahmardaan for Zoroastrianism, Dolores White for Baha'ism, Venerable Jian Hu for Buddhism and Father Tom Bonacci for Interfaith Encounter. On February 21, Rev. Margaretmary Staller will lead an Ash Wednesday Communion Service at 7:30 p.m. On April 5, Rabbi Ira Book will lead a Jewish Freedom Seder at 6:00 p.m. For more information, contact 925-439-9361.

❖ **Starve War/Feed Peace March and Rally**

Saturday, March 17, 11:00 a.m. march, 12 noon rally
Walnut Creek BART for march
Civic Park (Civic and Broadway) for rally
The Mt. Diablo Peace and Justice Center is organizing this

event on the 4th anniversary of the Iraq war. Speakers include Elizabeth de la Vega, Jeffrey Ritterman, Steve Morse and Louise Clark. Religious congregations are encouraged to carry banners and wear red prominently. For more info, contact 925-933-7850.

❖ **Experiencing the God of Hope**

Monday to Friday, April 23 to 27
San Damiano Retreat, Danville

Sister Ishpriya, a student of both Christian and Eastern religions, is offering this silent retreat. She has a special gift for teaching profound truths with clarity, simplicity, conviction and humor. For more information, contact Lorraine at 925-837-9141 or www.sandamiano.org.

❖ **4th Annual Diversity Vaisakhi Festival**

Saturday, April 28, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Todos Santos Park, Downtown Concord

This festival usually welcomes in the new year in the Punjab region of India. Come for colorful musical and dance performances, free ethnic foods, and a variety of booths. Admission is free. For more information, contact harmeshkumar@sbcglobal.net or 925-356-0122.

Transitions

Congratulations to **the Rev. Renae Extrum-Fernandez**, who has been appointed by Methodist Bishop Beverly Shamana to the position of District Superintendent of the Bay View District. She has served as pastor of Walnut Creek United Methodist Church, and succeeds the Rev. James Lockwood-Stewart, who has been DS since 1994. The announcement made at her church on February 4 was met with an ovation. Pastor Extrum-Fernandez said, “Walnut Creek has been such a wonderful learning congregation for me. I’ve learned so much about leadership and about myself. They have loved me into a real partnership of leadership.” About the appointment, she says, “There are some really wonderful people on the bishop’s cabinet and how they live out a real covenant together – to be part of that is a real humbling honor.”

Welcome to **the Rev. Gerald Chinnen**, who is the new Parish Associate at Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church. He is a native of Hawaii, and a graduate of the University of Hawaii and Fuller Theological Seminary. Recently, he served as senior pastor of Sturge Presbyterian Church in San Mateo and hospital chaplain in several locations.

Welcome also to **Father Van Dinh**, who comes to St. Bonaventure Catholic Church in Concord to replace Fr. Peter Son Vo. Because of allergy and climatic conditions, Fr. Dinh and Fr. Vo have switched assignments. Fr. Vo goes to St. Anthony Parish in Oakland.

Our condolences to the family and congregation of **the Rev. David Fewins-Pittman**, who passed away on January 23 from complications of pancreatic cancer. Rev. Fewins-Pittman most recently served Tice Valley United Methodist Church in Rossmoor. Before that, he served parishes in Middletown, Mill Valley, Berkeley, Vacaville, San Rafael and San Jose. Memorial gifts may be sent to: Heifer Project International, One World Avenue, Little Rock, Arkansas 72202.

Best wishes to the **Mt. Diablo Affiliate of Habitat for Humanity** joining with the East Bay Affiliate to make one organization.



As a Christian, I'm getting a little confused. Is it the season of Lent that is just beginning, or is it election season? With many presidential aspirants having declared their candidacies, we are already engaged in making predictions and showing predilections. Who will be our new president in 2008? How will she or he lead us? What kind of hope and real help will our new American president bring?

There are many extremely important matters that our new president will need to pay attention to. We will need to turn the tide on addressing global warming (yes, it is more than "climate change"). We will need to figure out how a capitalism-based society can be turned toward reduction of consumption. We will need to seek some very necessary answers on becoming a sustainable society.

We will need to understand how nations can live together (and, according to author Jared Diamond, the preceding paragraph has a lot to do with it). We need to understand the proper and productive role of military power. We will need to understand the dreams and concerns of peoples even more than nations.

Then there is health care and housing. Is it possible to establish each of these as basic human rights in a meaningful way? And even if that is done, can we figure out, at long last, how to help poor people not be poor?

Can we fix an electoral process that increasingly favors the corporately and personally well-off? Can we create

a political climate that rewards moderates and narrows the "aisle"? Can we start to realize that in a "winner take all" system, the winner can really be the loser?

And importantly, for me and you, can we learn how people of faith may live together peacefully? There are religious divides and divisions everywhere. But even without bridging doctrinal differences, it is possible to create camaraderie and respect. To these ends, I commend two programs to you. It just so happens that both are billed as Lenten series. (So the two seasons ARE connected.)

The first is detailed on the front page of this newsletter, the extraordinary effort by Community Presbyterian Church in Pittsburg under Rev. Will McGarvey's leadership. If you can take time to participate in this interfaith effort, please do. Or else go to one of the Friday evening programs at Christ the King Catholic Church in Pleasant Hill (199 Brandon Rd.). From March 2 to 30, there will be accomplished speakers on the subject of Jerusalem. Subtitles include "City of Three Faiths," "Is Peace Possible in the City of Peace?," "Could it Be in Dublin?," "Could it Be in Sundance?," and "From Holy Land to Holy People." Call 925-682-2486 for more information. Soup supper at 6:30 p.m., program at 7:15 p.m.

Presidential candidates might not routinely stop in Contra Costa County for events. But they would do well to do so, and to meet committed people of good will and good faith who are making a difference, here and now.

"God Is Not Abusive: Three Faiths Address Domestic Violence"

According to the 2000 report of findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey, 25% of American women and 8% of American men report being physically or sexually assaulted by a current or former partner at some point in their lives. Studies show that domestic violence crosses all lines, including religion, which means that many of those who are abused are members of faith communities, and many will seek help from a clergy person before they will call a hotline, call the police, or turn to another professional for help. But are faith leaders equipped to handle such requests for help? Many in the faith community are recognizing that there is a need for domestic violence education and prevention in their congregations. STAND! Against Domestic Violence and the Faith Community Task Force to End Domestic Violence are committed to making sure clergy and faith communities have the tools and resources to break the silence surrounding this issue and to respond both faithfully and effectively.

STAND! runs a 24-hour toll-free crisis line, an emergency shelter, transitional housing, provides counseling, support groups, batterer intervention groups, and community outreach and prevention services. In 2006, the Task Force published "God Is Not Abusive: Three Faiths Address Domestic Violence," a twenty-page booklet which addresses the Torah, the Christian Bible, and the Qur'an, in order to provide guidance for clergy, lay leaders, and those in their congregations affected by domestic violence.

As the booklet says in conclusion, "This publication marks a beginning step in addressing the significance of religious and spiritual beliefs and practices in situations of domestic violence. We hope readers find that it helps to fill the gap in the ways that faith communities understand, teach about, and respond to domestic violence."

To purchase copies of "God Is Not Abusive," please contact Jennifer Joslyn-Siemiatkoski at 925-603-0103 or at jenniferjs@standagainstdv.org.

Chaplain's Corner



Recently I shared in this space a note from one of the kids who is currently residing in Byron at the Orin Allen facility. I understand many callers to the Interfaith Council office have expressed heartfelt sympathy and concern for the young man. This was, of course, not the first time over the past dozen years I have reprinted letters written to me by hurt and haunting young people in our midst. What I shall now share are excerpts from a letter I received in the mail just a few days ago. Dated January 9, 2007, the correspondence comes from a young man in another state, a couple of thousand miles away.

Some years ago, when the writer of the letter was thirteen or fourteen years of age, (he will soon be 20) I was contacted by a great-aunt and her brother, the young man's grandfather. The kid to whom I refer, and his younger brother, had been "rescued" from his parents at a tender age by the great-aunt. She brought, I seem to recall, the kids to California and raised them as her own. When this kid reached puberty, he became defiant, went out into the streets and proceeded to get into trouble with the law. Somebody at juvenile hall gave the family my phone number.

The kid performed community service under my direction while on the electronic monitor, came to church with me--certainly enjoyed going out to eat after both activities. Still he seemed committed to continue to get into more trouble. The Court rewarded his unacceptable behavior with periods of confinement in juvenile hall and at the Orin Allen facility. I remember he generally behaved himself abysmally. His issues could have been or might have been addressed more effectively and successfully in a different setting, but...

Anyhow, once the kid "finished" that program, and completed parole, he left California and went back to find his parents in another state. I knew where he was, I am native to the area as well, and therefore quite familiar

with the place where he had gone. The kid called me shortly after his relocation and left a message. I returned the call. The father took my call but did not communicate to the kid that I had called. "He don't like positive people..." I was told by the kid over the phone from a "juvenile correctional facility" operated by that state's equivalent to our Division of Juvenile Justice (formerly, California Youth Authority).

"Rev, can I write to you?" he asked over the phone. Excerpts of the first letter, just as he wrote it, follow:

Rev,

Wat up? Not too much. I'm happy I can hopefully stay in contact with you. Your all my hope. Thank's for helpen me Rev. that really mean's a lot. Its been a long time. I thought you forgot about me. I'm happy you didn't. God got his reasons, rather good or bad. This jail life is old. Some people just don't listen. I miss you Rev. I hope I see you again. Soon as I get off parole, I'm movin back to California. I'm working on geting my GED. It aint lookin so good as of this moment. I'm gon call you most likely every Tuesday around 2:00 pm are time...I'm homesick. I miss California. I still talk to my family out your way. Sometimes my family seem's like there threw with me. I don't blame them. All I've put them threw. I'm learning Rev. It aint easy but life aint easy eather. I aint movin wit my family in [this state]. They failure. I really need your help on that...I'm tryin to start a new life. My family done wit me and I'm done wit them. It's my falt. I man up... Send me some pictures. We can have only 5 at a time. If you can, send me a picture or postcard of the Bay and one of you. Can you send me some money? It has to be sent by money order. I hope I aint asking for too much. If I am just don't send those thing's to me. I love you Rev. And I miss you. Thank's for everything...I'm going to talk to you soon and I will keep in contact...I promise.

Shalom,

Rev. Dr. Charles Tinsley
Juvenile Detention Chaplain

A Blessing

(Author unknown) submitted by Linda Doran, St. Mark's United Methodist Church, Orinda

May God bless you with a restless discomfort about easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships, so that you may seek truth boldly and live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with holy anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people.

May God bless you with the gift of tears to shed with those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy.

May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you really CAN make a difference in the world, so that you are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.

Rev. Brian T. Joyce **Christ the King Parish, Pleasant Hill**

To Live or Let Die

In late December an Italian poet, quadriplegic and suffering from muscular dystrophy, Piergiorgio Welby was granted his explicit request when a doctor turned off the ventilator that has been keeping him alive. The Diocese of Rome proceeded to deny him a Christian burial. In my humble but fairly well informed opinion, that was a serious violation of pastoral care and ministry and a clear contradiction of traditional and official Catholic teaching that there is no obligation to use extraordinary or disproportionate means to prolong life.

Welby had penned an eloquent letter to the president of Italy pleading to be allowed to die. "I love life, Mr. President," he wrote. But after 40 years of battling muscular dystrophy and nine years attached to a ventilator and now losing the capacity to speak or to eat he wrote, "What is left to me is no longer life. It is an unbearable torture." He then asked to have the ventilator removed. That request, honored on a regular basis in hospitals across the world was denied, causing an uproar in Italy, it was denounced as a demand for suicide and was refused by the Italian courts.

After a doctor turned off the ventilator, Welby said "thank you" three times to his wife and friends and his doctor. After forty-five minutes he was dead. At least one legislator has called for the physician to be charged with homicide and Cardinal Ruini of Rome forbade a Catholic funeral; since then Cardinal Martini, former Archbishop of Milan and once leading papal candidate, criticized the decision claiming that because of new technology much greater wisdom is needed in order "not to prolong life when it is no longer to a person's benefit."

In its 1980 Declaration on Euthanasia, The Vatican officially states, "One cannot impose on anyone the obligation to have recourse to a technique which is already in use but which carries a risk or is burdensome. Such a refusal is not the equivalent of suicide; on the contrary it should be considered as an acceptance of the human condition, or a wish to avoid the application of a medical procedure disproportionate to the results that can be accepted."

Back in 1950 Fr. Gerald Kelly, the foremost moral theologian in the U. S. taught "no remedy is obligatory unless it offers a reasonable hope of checking or curing disease...no one is obligated to use any means – natural or artificial – if it does not offer a reasonable hope of success in overcoming the patient's condition." The fact that Welby had also been a public advocate of Euthanasia

should in no way change Church teaching or pastoral practice on the subject; the request and action taken was precisely the kind of decision that has been explicitly allowed by Catholic moral theologians since 1587!

At the end of this long journey towards death, Pope John Paul II declined the option of returning to the hospital where a respirator had assisted his failing breathing and nutrition was supplied through a tube. He said, "Let me go to the house of the Father." No one confused the Pope's action with suicide; nor should they, with Welby's refusal to endure what he described as "the unbearable torture" of being attached to a respirator. Fortunately the Pope was not refused Christian burial too!!

The Rev. Will McGarvey **Community Presbyterian Church, Pittsburg**

Last week, one of my distant cousins sent me an email warning against the possibility that a U.S. Presidential candidate had grown up in a Muslim household and attended a Muslim school as a young boy. There was a considerable amount of fear-mongering in the text, and it is reminiscent of the false accusations of those anti-Semitic diatribes of a generation of two ago.

Regardless of the fact that our nation's constitution states that there should be no religious test for public service, the contents of the email reminded me of the kind of religious freedom that many of our fore parents sought when they came to this land. Sadly, it is primarily anti-Arab, anti-Muslim discrimination that continues today. But other minority faith groups tell similar stories.

...This year...consider giving up paying attention to those television or radio shows that generalize anything about any one faith or cultural group. Whenever you hear someone lump all Jews, or Muslims, or Sikhs, or Buddhists together in any way, consider the way you would feel if someone were to connect you with the thoughts, actions, or beliefs of every other Christian in the world....

The Ven. Jian Hu, Sunnyvale Zen Center

The Key to a New Future

The Buddha once said, "If you want to know what you have done in your past (including past lives), just look at what has happened in this life. If you want to know what will happen to your future, just look at what is being done in this life." There is not need to go to a fortuneteller. All we need to do is to look at this life's experiences. Has it been good? Has it been bad? Has it been mixed?

If it has been mostly good and happy, then that means that in the past you have done many good deeds. You made others happy, you created good karma between you and other people. If most of our life has been unhappy and unfortunate, then that means that we have not planted good seeds previously. We created a lot of bad karma....

You cannot change what has already occurred. However, when you change your *reactions*, you change the future outcomes. If someone treats you badly, that means that somewhere along the way, bad karma was created between the two of you. If you react to things in the same negative way and think, "He treated me badly, I will get him back, fair is fair," then you have created the same cycle over again. This is *samsara*. It is like playing ping-pong, hitting back and forth. The same situation happens over and over again. A predictable pattern forms.

If we understand this, we should be determined to change our reactions. Instead we say, "He treats me badly, I will forgive and forget. I will be like the vast empty space and let go." Immediately the karma between the two of you changes for the better. Bad karma turns into good karma.

Reprinted from ONE COUNTRY, the newsletter of the Baha'i International Community

Although it has often been relegated to second-class status among human rights concerns, the issue of freedom of religion or belief today stands at the center of many of our most pressing global challenges...

Experts are also increasingly making connections between religious freedom and other fundamental rights – such as freedom of expression and assembly, equal protection before the law, and rights related to the family, marriage and children. The rights of women, for example, are often particularly affected by religious belief, as is the status of children.

Most important, perhaps today there can no longer be any doubt that matters of peace and security are often directly related to freedom of religion or belief...

On 25 November 2006, the world observed the 25th anniversary of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief...

The 1981 Declaration indicates...that the right to freedom of religion or belief includes the right to "establish and maintain" places of worship; to "write, issue and disseminate" religious publications; to "observe days of rest and to celebrate holidays"; and to "establish and maintain

communications with individuals and communities in matters of religion and belief at the national and international levels."

At the same time, however, the 1981 Declaration falls short, inasmuch as it fails to elaborate on the right to "change" one's belief...

As specialists in the field of human rights well know, that simple word – "change" – was removed from the 1981 Declaration at the insistence of some countries. Those who opposed the term saw the right to "change" one's religion as a threat to the established order – or even as an apostasy....

Our view...is that a greater emphasis on this right – along with the other rights encompassed under the rubric of freedom of religion or belief – can contribute greatly to combating religious extremism and its accompanying threats to global security...

In a statement to the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, the Baha'i International Community noted: "Many believers find it difficult to reconcile deep religious conviction with tolerance of other beliefs. It is tempting to insist that one has discovered the one and only truth and to relegate the remaining masses of humanity, adhering to other beliefs, to the status of apostates or unbelievers, spiritually doomed, deserving pity at best, or outright ridicule and persecution at worst. Throughout history too many sincere people in every part of the world have fallen victim to this thinking.

"In the Baha'i view, such attitudes are, in part, the product of ignorance. If other religions are shrouded in mystery, then they become an empty vessel into which the individual is tempted to pour fears and fantasies. Experience shows that ignorance breeds superstition and perpetuates religious prejudice and animosity..."

In its 1989 statement, the Community observed: "The spiritual basis for religious tolerance is the recognition of the common source of all the world's great faiths. A fair-minded examination of the actual utterances of the Founders of the great religions, and of the social milieus in which they carried out their missions, will reveal that there is nothing to support the contentions and prejudices deranging the religious communities of mankind and, therefore, all human affairs."



The Migration of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina by Dr. Amer Araim

Prophet Muhammad received the first revelation from Allah through the Archangel Gabriel at the age of 40. He began his mission by calling people to worship Allah and spreading the commandments he received. He, as the case had been with all the Prophets and Messengers of God, was persecuted and attacked by the Meccan society. Though he had been trusted by them and called truthful and trustworthy, they rejected his message and even conspired to kill him. This is not only the Muslim view about Prophet Muhammad, but non-Muslim historians also affirm his high moral character. The Prophets and Messengers of God, despite the threats to their lives, waited for His commands. Therefore, after thirteen years of hardships and struggle through peaceful means to convince the people of Mecca to believe in Allah, the Prophet Muhammad was commanded by Allah to migrate from Mecca to Medina. A hypothetical question is raised concerning the persecution of Prophet Muhammad and other Prophets and Messengers of God: Why did not God render His Prophets and Messengers victorious without passing through persecution and hardship? The answer is that despite God's miracles and help to all His Prophets and Messengers, He wanted the natural law of life to take its course. Furthermore, the believers should learn the lesson that they might be subjected to persecution and hardships just like the Prophets and Messengers, and that the only way for salvation is patience, endurance and perseverance.

Before migrating, the Prophet Muhammad made arrangements to return all the valuables of the Meccans because, as stated before, they trusted him and left their valuables with him. So he asked his son-in-law Ali to stay in his place in order to return all the valuables. He asked his companion Abu Bakr to prepare for the journey. Abu Bakr asked a trusted person to prepare the all requirements of the journey without letting any one knowing about the plan. Abu Bakr's daughter was given the task of providing the food and water. They decided to take differ-

ent routes to Medina. The Prophet Muhammad and Abu Bakr left at night and the pagans came and discovered that the Prophet had left and decided to follow them. The Prophet and Abu Bakr went inside a cave, and the pagans reached the entrance of the cave but did not enter. At that moment, Abu Bakr was worried that the Prophet would be killed. The Prophet calmed Abu Bakr as narrated in the Quran: "If you do not help the Prophet, it does not matter, Allah did help him when the disbelievers drove him out of his town; the second of the two while the two were in the cave said to his companion (Abu Bakr) 'Do not worry Allah is with us.' So Allah sent His serenity on him and strengthened him with forces you cannot see. Thus, He made the word of the unbelievers lowest, while the words of Allah remain supreme."

They continued the journey to Medina. The people welcomed the Prophet and spontaneously began singing the following song: "The moon is rising from a long distance. Therefore, thanks are incumbent on us whenever a call is made for Allah. You who have been sent a messenger to us, you are coming with an obeyed matter and you are bestowing honor on Medina. Welcome, you are the best caller for the religion."

Every household in Medina wanted Prophet Muhammad to be their guest. He told them that wherever his camel stopped he would be the guest of that family. A great number of Muslims followed the Prophet and migrated from Mecca to Medina without any wealth or means of subsistence and they were called the migrants. The people in Medina were called the partisan, and they shared with migrants their houses and wealth. There were two tribes in Medina called Al-Ous and Al-Kzraj, which had been fighting for many years. Both tribes embraced Islam and immediately stopped their fighting and became like brothers. After the death of Prophet Muhammad, Muslims were discussing which year should be the beginning of the Islamic Calendar. Would it be the year of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad or the year of his miraculous journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and from their his ascension to the Seventh Heaven or his migration from Mecca to Medina? The last was chosen because it represented a very important lesson and inspiration for Muslims. Even today it has a special meaning for Muslims.

Point of View-Risking Conversation

We have received many comments regarding articles that have appeared in the Point of View section over the past months. Our original intention was that opinions that were expressed here might provoke conversation and dialogue that, though there might be disagreement, would also be respectful and civil. What we have discovered is that, despite best intentions, there has been more hurt and misunderstanding than is tolerable.

Therefore, we are taking a pass on Point of View articles this month. What we request in the future is that articles in this section would indeed show respect for real and potential dialogical partners. It is our intention to invite articles on selected topics. Articles on the Middle East and on Israel/Palestine in particular will proceed from a dialogue group which is beginning at the end of February.

The Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County seeks to be a vehicle to bring people together, to get people talking, to be able to address difficult issues. Please bear with us as we continue to work toward these goals.

Brian Stein-Webber
 Executive Director of the Interfaith Council

WINTER NIGHTS OVERVIEW

Program Manager, **Mahmood Barakzai**, reports that between October 16, 2006, and February 5, 2007, 79 individuals (28 families, averaging 2-3 persons/family) were admitted. Thirty-one individuals are currently residing at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Orinda. Nine individuals have transitioned into apartments; thirty-three exited to non-specified residences. The largest census on a single night was 37 persons.

St. Timothy's Episcopal, St. Stephen's Episcopal, and St. Perpetua's Catholic hosted our families and elderly during the month of February, which had many cold and rainy days and nights. We are grateful for the warm church facilities, home-cooked meals, and many caring volunteers.

Winter Nights Shelter Will Reopen in October

The Homeless Summit, the board that oversees the Winter Nights Shelter, made the decision to re-open the shelter on October 15, 2007, and operate until April 28, 2008. As *Ministering Together* goes to press, twenty of the twenty-eight weeks have been reserved by host and partnering congregations. Partnerships are strongly encouraged.

Lorri Gazzano has begun writing grant proposals for next session. **Sandy Anderson** is designing new aprons. With the hundreds of volunteers and the conscientious staff members working together to serve our guests, many additional children, their parents, and senior citizens who find themselves homeless will be able to move into housing.

Family Support Groups Forming

April 30, 2007 looms large in the consciousness of those associated with the Winter Nights Shelter and the Homeless Summit. That's the last day the shelter is open until Monday, October 15, when a new session begins.

So that every family member and senior citizen has a housing unit to move into, and employment to assure funds for rent payments, by the end of April, **Family Support Groups** are forming. This is a program modeled on Catholic Charities' "Adopt A Family," which has been operating for several years: Several families join together to help the Winter Nights guests transition from the shelter to housing. **Rick Richardson** and **Ron Weston**, members of the Homeless Summit, have previous experience in this work and can provide information on how to start a Winter Nights Family Support Group. **Rick** can be contacted at (925) 785-0249, **Ron** at (925) 439-0124.

CNWS INTERFAITH TASK FORCE

CNWS Interfaith Task Force was advocate for the homeless on February 6, when the Navy gave a status report on the Reuse Project of the Concord Naval Weapons Station Closure. **Delores Loague**, Concord Methodist;

Susan Jaffe, Jewish Federation, provide leadership to the Task Force.

SOJA MEETING HOSTS RABBI ASHER

Members of the Social Justice Alliance welcomed **Rabbi Raphael Asher**, President of the Interfaith Council of CCC, to the February meeting. The highlight of the evening was a group discussion of the relationship between SOJA and I4C. A brief history of the founding of SOJA was given by **Dorothy Vance**. **Natalie Russell**, **Michael Fischer**, and **Dean Coons** provided additional details.

Natalie gave a report on School of the Americas Watch; **Pat Snyder** updated the group on the Single Payer Universal Healthcare legislation and the governor's bill.

Gwen Watson reported the good news that Winter Nights Shelter will be the recipient of a quarter of the funds raised locally at the 2007 Crop Walk next fall. She will be calling for congregations to increase the number of walkers for this enjoyable event, which focuses on worldwide poverty.

SOJA members present were: **Amer Araim**, **Natalie Russell**, **Michael Fischer**, **Dorothy Vance**, **Dean Coons**, **Chris Coons**, **Mary Silva**, **Pat Snyder**, **Gail Rodens**, **Carol Young**, and **Leslie Liscom**.

SOAW REPORT FROM FR. ROY

Fr. Roy Bourgeois, founder and leader of the School of the Americas Watch movement to close that school, visited the Bay Area in February. His lecture tour included colleges and high schools on the Peninsula, Oakland, San Francisco and Marin County. It is amazing that so many are hearing about this notorious school, now re-named the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC for short), for the first time!

Over 22,000 people gathered at the gates of Ft. Benning, GA, to protest the existence of this school financed by the U.S. Army with our taxpayer money. Many more students are joining with the Grandmothers for Peace, Veterans for Peace and people of all faiths to experience this event.

Fr. Roy, who worked in Bolivia during the '70s and witnessed first hand some atrocities there, and some staff members have been visiting various Latin American countries to ask their leaders to no longer send their young men to attend this training school that teaches torture, psychological interrogation, disappearance and other terrorism techniques. So far the President and/or other

(Continued)

SoJA - Continued

leaders of Venezuela, Uruguay, Argentina and Bolivia were convinced and agreed not to send students there. On the next trips they will visit Chile, Paraguay and for the second time, Colombia.

Some have asked, "What if the School of the Americas closes this year, wouldn't the location be changed, but the terrorist training continue?" Yes. The U.S. State Department has approached Costa Rica about opening a school called the International Law Enforcement Academy, or ILEA. Costa Rica clearly refused. Since then our Secretary of State, Condoleeza Rice, visited El Salvador breaking the wonderful news that El Salvador has been selected for the location of the new elite school for law and order called ILEA and funded by the United States. El Salvador is "thinking about it".

In April/May the McGovern bill, HR.1217, to close the SOA/WHINSEC will come once again before Congress. We MUST see that it passes, yet stay alert, be aware of the next new name and the next location. We taxpayers are paying for it. Aren't we in a war against terrorism? Who are the terrorists and where are they?

NEXT SOJA MEETING

SOJA will meet March 14 at 7:00 PM in the Interfaith Council Office, Room 205, 1543 Sunnyvale Avenue, Walnut Creek. All are welcome.

THANK YOU

The Winter Nights Shelter Program has been a wonderful and miraculous success these past few years. It has been mostly because so many of you have been committed to seeing it work. You have prayed for its success. You have opened your congregations' buildings. You have opened your hearts to new neighbors, wishing for them an increased well-being.

You have cooked delicious food, slept on cots in your social halls, read to children, sung Christmas carols, listened to stories. You have helped our clients make budgets, get connected with important social services. Your generosity has exceeded even what we have allowed to be given. Thank you all.

Here we list those persons and organizations who gave financial support to Winter Nights in 2006. Would that we could list everybody who has been involved, but then our whole newsletter would be filled! (If you are not on this list but should be, please let us know, and we will make amends.)

Congregations & Organizations

Blind Dog Band
Canyon Creek Korean Church
Central Labor Council of Contra Costa County
Christ the King Parish , Pleasant Hill
Church of Santa Maria , Orinda
Community Presbyterian Church, Pittsburg
Concord Korean U. Methodist Church
Concord United Methodist Church
Concord United Methodist Church Women
Danville Congregational Church
Diablo Business Forms
East Bay Catholic Charities
Firedoll Foundation
Hamonah Presbyterian Church
Hedco Foundation
Lafayette Christian Church
Lafayette United Methodist Church Women
Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church
Mt. Diablo Unitarian Universalist Church, WC
National Council of Jewish Women
Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Lafayette
Pletz Investment Company
Residential Builders
Shell Ridge Community Church, Walnut Creek
St. Bonaventure Catholic Church, Concord
St. Ignatius Catholic Church, Antioch
St. John Vianney Church, Walnut Creek
St. Monica Church, Moraga
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Walnut Creek
St. Perpetua Catholic Church, Lafayette
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Orinda
The Carl & Celia Gellert Foundation
The Lowell Berry Foundation
Treat Plaza Fair
Unitarian Universalist Church, Berkeley
Y & H Soda Foundation

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In Gratitude

Joe Kohlbecher, a member of the Singing Messengers, passed away on Christmas morning after a very brief bout with lung cancer. Joe had suggested donations in his honor be given to the Interfaith Council.

The following persons generously sent contributions in his name:

Leonard Albretch
 Constance Belka
 Robert G. Brelsford
 Louise Crow
 Roberta Gwynn
 Marily & Thomas Johnson
 Drew Minter
 Lawrence & Leona Seidell
 J. W. Silveira
 Angeline Tomsic
 Mariae Tumely
 Jackie Wan
 James Weston



Our apologies for excluding in our list last month of donors to the Interfaith Council, the faithful and generous congregation of **St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Pleasant Hill. (The mistake might have arisen from there being two "St. Mark's" churches in the county.)**

Page 10 **Thank You Corner**

We appreciate our newsletter volunteers. Thanks to those who collated, folded, and labeled February's issue: Betty Alton, Sandra Ellingson, Madeline Gomes, Mary Hogan, Edith Reed, Dick Shumaker, Dorothy Vance and our newcomer Trish Swanson. If you'd like to join the fun (yes, we do have fun!), call Lenita at 925-672-1053.

Please Pray for:

Community Presbyterian Church, Danville
Caring Hands
Meals on Wheels
World Leaders
Process of Converting Concord Naval Weapons Station to civilian use

FYI

As of this issue we are transitioning from printing nine to seven issues of Ministering Together a year. It is both a cost saving measure and a time saving measure. The new double issues will be March-April and October-November.

Thanks for your understanding

Opening to Dying and Grieving: A Sacred Journey

Congratulations to **Ron Valle and Mary Mohs** on the recent publication of their book with the above title.

The book:

- provides an inspiring look at death through the lens of spiritual growth
- offers a description of what lies beyond this realm of reality
- embraces a deeper understanding that eases the fears of dying and grieving
- includes exercises and other tools to help us to better accept and comprehend death
- has extensive footnotes and a comprehensive bibliography.

Ron and Mary carefully work with ideas initially published by Stephen Levine, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and others. The book may be ordered through Yes International Publishers at 1317 Summit Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55105-2602 or at 651-645-6808 or www.yespublishers.com.

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