



*M*inistering Together

Interfaith Council
of Contra Costa County

◆ November 2004 ◆

C o m i n g E v e n t s

Interfaith Council Annual Meeting
Sunday, November 14, 7:00 P.M.
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
Pleasant Hill Ward
555 Boyd Road, Pleasant Hill

We gather again on November 14th to conduct the business of the Interfaith Council. Our main business will be to kick off the Winter Nights Rotating Shelter, which is scheduled to start on the following day. We will celebrate the saving of the North Concord and Martinez family shelters through generous support from the community. We will welcome new congregations, vote on new Executive Committee Members, hear from our Social Justice Alliance and Health and Faith-in-Action committees, celebrate Chaplain Tinsley's ministry in the juvenile detention facilities and the ministry of the Singing Messengers, hear an address by our executive director, and even pray and sing a little ourselves.

❖ **Church Women United**

World Community Day

Friday, November 5, 10:30 a.m.
San Ramon Valley United
Methodist Church
902 Danville Blvd., Alamo

All women are welcome to attend this special day and worship of celebration for the diversity of the world's people. For more information, call Lenita at 925-672-1053.

❖ **Spiritual Grounding**

Thursday, November 11
9:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon
San Damiano Retreat, Danville

All are invited to this regular Interfaith Council event that combines eclectic spiritual practices with discussion and a warm soup lunch. On this day, we will be reading and discussing insights from Yann Martel's novel, [The Life of Pi](#). Call 925-837-9141 for directions.

❖ **How Imperfect Parents Raise Self-Reliant Kids**

Sunday, November 14, 4:00 p.m.
Temple Isaiah
3800 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette

Psychotherapist Jill Shugart will give this presentation on helping parents overcome the pressure, excessive demands, lack of downtime and lack of operator's manual in raising children today. This is the Frances Bobbie Collen Lecture for Healthy and Creative Living. There is no charge. Call 925-283-8575 for more information.

Director's Letter

I'm hoping that many of you will be able to attend our **Annual Meeting** on November 14th at the Pleasant Hill Ward of the Church of Jesus Christ, Latter-day Saints. Among other things, we will be kicking off a re-established **Winter Nights Rotating Shelter** among congregations. As of this writing, there are a dozen or more congregations that have indicated their willingness to host a group of thirty persons in their buildings for a week or more this winter. It is very gratifying to have you all respond so quickly to this idea. You are turning our frustrations into joy. Note in the SoJA report how you can participate.

The Interfaith Council is also poised to help SHELTER, Inc. with the "**saved**" **shelters in North Concord and Martinez**. (Thank you to all who have and will contribute generously. As of this writing, enough funds have been donated to carry these shelters through the end of June. But keep on sending donations so that we can ensure their future beyond that time.) Our organization will be recruiting you to continue your fine work in supporting the work at those shelters, through providing meals and other services, and in donating needed materials and equipment. It is very important that all the

shelters in our county continue to receive this crucial congregational support.

On another note, the Interfaith Council will shortly be re-instituting its **e-mail distribution list** of upcoming events. Since we are with America Online, we are subject to their ever more stringent guidelines concerning spam, and are having to apply for bulk sender status. If you would like to be on this list, to receive occasional notices of events, please e-mail us your address at eye4cee@aol.com.

And finally, this month marks our important **national elections**. Four years ago, just after I had begun this work, our nation was confronted with the mess in Florida. It appears that the election for president will be just as close this time – and perhaps just as messy – which means we will need to be especially prayerful. Pray that election officials would be honest and open, that all persons will find it possible to exercise their franchise to vote, and that, no matter what outcome there is, that we may learn to work together across political lines on the issues that matter most to our nation.

Meanwhile, know that I treasure your support and good wishes and partnership.

Middle East Dialogue Group

The situation in the Holy Land and the need to establish peace and justice in the Middle East are of great concern to Americans of all faiths as well as peoples all over the World. A group of men and women of various faiths and backgrounds from Contra Costa County has established the Middle East Study Group.

The main purpose of the Group is to contribute to peace and justice in the Holy Land and the entire Middle East through the exchange of information as well as encouraging serious and honest discussions on these issues with a view to find peaceful settlements of these crises based on mutual respect and understanding.

At its first public event, the Group convened a meeting on October 9 and showed a video on the coverage of the media in the United States of this conflict. The group has met every month on the fourth Thursday at the Peace Center, 55 Eckley Lane, Walnut Creek. For more information call Kathleen Nimr at 228 5746

Chaplain's Corner

Eleven years ago, it seemed that a group of rather rowdy, loud, vulgar, misbehaved gang members were appearing daily on the steps of Donaldina Cameron House (San Francisco). The kids, all recent arrivals primarily from Southeast Asia, were following girls to Cameron House. The girls were inside Cameron House involved with the program, a highly structured Christian program. The "gang boys" were not Christian, not well disciplined and they were scaring Cameron House's Nob Hill neighbors, not to mention many of the second and third generation Chinese-American Cameron House staff, several of whom were elderly. This group of kids became known as "ma fawn," translated at the time for me from the Cantonese, as "the essence of danger."

Folks at Cameron House were literally pulling out their hair as they sought a solution to the presence of the "ma fawn." Cameron House had always worked with "at risk" kids in the past. Some of them had become Presbyterian ministers. But "these kids" were of a new generation, from places other than Southern China. They were not responding to the old tried and true methods of the past, recent and distant past. And, most on the Board of Directors were opposed to calling the police. But a solution had to be found *soon*. An *ad hoc* committee of the Board met to discuss options. The question came up (although I was a member of the Board at the time, I was not present), "Who is best qualified to work with *this* kind of kid?" I don't know if mine was the first name mentioned, but I am the one they asked to work with the "ma fawn."

"When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien.

The alien...shall be to you as the citizen among you:

you shall love the alien as yourself,

for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God."

Leviticus 19:33, 34

The first kid showed up at 8:30 in the morning and promptly sat down on the sidewalk in front of Cameron House, thereby blocking the tourist trade coming from Nob Hill into Chinatown along Sacramento Street. I sat down with him. Undoubtedly Cameron House staff were watching from several vantage points in the building. The kid was probably surprised, as the staff were when I sat down on the sidewalk with him. The "novelty" or the "thrill" of being a nuisance very quickly wore off for him; we proceeded to a place on the front steps where we could continue talking.

Others began to show up. Within about ten minutes, six or seven kids appeared. Their pants were sagging, they had to spit every few seconds, all were chewing gum, several reeked of marijuana, it was obvious some had not bathed, at least not properly. I found out in short order that most had not been in the United States long (this was "third country"), yet they had been in trouble with the law, were not attending school regularly, and really had no place to go. They were born in places where they could not return. In all instances, their parents spoke little or no English and they worked all day (and part of the night) with little time to "supervise" their teenage sons. "These kids" were headed down a path of ultimate destruction.

Nevertheless, I became tired of sitting on the stone steps of Cameron House. I was a member of the Board of Directors, so-o-o, I invited them into Cameron House, right into the room Mrs. Cameron had used as her "parlor". Mouths of the staff dropped when I brought the "ma fawn" into the sacrosanct Cameron House. They just could not believe I would do such a thing. The kids were sort of shocked too! (At least now "they" weren't bothering the neighbors!) We all sat down to chat, a chat that lasted about two hours.

They were told, that first day, that they could not just hang around the outside of the building doing what they had been doing. The Cameron House club program was described to them and they were asked to consider participation "inside" rather than causing problems out in the street. In exchange for their better behavior they were told that the staff would be informed to no longer refer to them as "ma fawn". As a matter of fact, in anticipation of their agreement to become part of the program, they would need to choose a club name. Ironically enough, by unanimous choice, they chose the name: JUST US!

Work with the "Just Us" kids lasted a very short period of time. Rev Dr. H. Eugene Farlow called. He told me that the long-time juvenile detention chaplain in Contra Costa County was retiring, and the position was open. "I think this is something you should look into," I was told. My initial response was a resounding **no**. Neither did I want to work on an on-going basis with teenagers, nor did I wish to work in a locked facility. I had "graduated" from these things a long time ago. I was merely helping out at Cameron House. "Hard-headed" teenagers, especially those in trouble, no way! Once again, God had other plans...

Rev. Charles Tinsley
Juvenile Detention Chaplain

Your Words (Cont'd)

While framing the issue in this manner may ultimately serve their purpose, one should remember that “those who frame the question ultimately help determine the answer.” I think that framing the question in this manner really misrepresents the issue.

It is interesting to note that the separation of church and state is **not** a constitutional precept. The First Amendment to the Constitution secures an individual’s right to pursue faith and to practice it. When Thomas Jefferson coined the phrase “wall of separation” in private correspondence with the Danbury Baptist Association, he was not seeking to disable or reduce religion’s contribution to the public good, but rather to safeguard it! Interesting how every time **that** has been so reinterpreted to say the opposite!

In our country, church and state are institutionally separate **but faith and life are not**. Jesus taught that there is no area of our life separate from our faith.

Isn’t that why he criticized the Pharisees? “You lay burdens on others that you yourselves do not keep.” A compartmentalized faith is not faith. Certainly it is not the Catholic Faith that begins with the belief that Jesus is risen from the dead and that we are supposed to work out the implications of that in every area of life.

There is a separation of church and state. The king is not a priest. The priest is not a king. But there can be no separation of faith and life for either priest or king. To reduce faith to a “private matter” and to say it has no right to speak on moral and social issues, or to say, when it does that it is getting involved in “politics” where the church has no business, is to miss an essential dimension of what Jesus taught.

Faith is supposed to shape a believer’s political conscience, whether he or she is a voter or an officeholder. To take the position that “I am personally opposed, but will not impose my beliefs on others” is intellectually dishonest. Every person with responsibility for the good of others does that all the time.

We live in a pluralistic society. No church will be completely satisfied with the laws. However, the church can expect politicians who belong to it to work out their political positions in light of their professed faith and to act accordingly. Faith, not to mention integrity, would seem to make that demand.



Albert Einstein

More and more I come to value the charity and love of one’s fellow beings above everything else...all our lauded technological progress – our very civilization – is like the axe in the hand of the pathological criminal.

[Thanks to the newsletter of Peace Lutheran Church, Danville.]

The Rev. Adrian Doll, First Presbyterian Church, Concord

Longing for a Place of Belonging

Gazing over the landscape of contemporary society, I am struck by the deep hunger of so many people for a place of genuine community. We live in a world that fosters independence but we’re starving to connect with other people. We can pay our bills on line, order our groceries on line, and place orders over the phone all without making a connection with another person. We value the conveniences of a technological age, but we deplore their ability to disconnect us.

This was all brought home to me several weeks ago while I realized that I had done all of my business without engaging in a single conversation with another person. When I filled my car up with gas, all I needed to do was slip my credit card into the fuel pump, and my bill was paid. When I wanted to make a deposit in my bank account, I was able to avoid a long line by using my bank’s ATM. On the way home, I stopped at our local grocery store to pick up a few items. No one greeted me when I walked in the store and no one asked if I needed assistance the entire time I shopped. When it came time to make my purchase, the only line available was one of their new self-checkout lines. Perhaps the best thing about that new checkout machine was that a “real” computerized voice greeted me and blurted out directions as I learned how to scan groceries. We live in a world where connections with other people aren’t easily made.

The other day, I was talking to a gentleman and he said, “I don’t know what I would do without my AA group. It’s where I go to connect with other people.” Unfortunately, this man wasn’t the first person to tell me that he’s found more community in his support group than he ever found in his church. People gravitate wherever community and relationships are fostered. This has always been true.

The Early Church grew, in part, because it was recognized as the best care-giving society that the world had to offer. In the Book of Acts, we’re reminded that the Early Christians shared life together. They met daily for prayer, study, encouragement, support, and care (see Acts 2:42-47). When one person was in need, others shared from their wealth. They embraced the responsibility and joy of caring for each other. They treasured their relationships as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

Genuine community is marked by three important things: **authenticity, fellowship and care**. Our Church must be a place where we build authentic relationships. We must be willing to share our stories with each other and to share our vulnerabilities with each other. When we do, we encourage people as we share what God has done to strengthen us on our road to recovery and healing. Our church must be a place where friendships are easily made and community is celebrated. Faith is not an individual effort. God calls us to be part of a community of faith that nurtures and disciples each other. Our church must be a community marked by concern and compassion for each other. When one person hurts, the entire community should reach out in prayer, concern and help. These are hallmarks of Christian community.

Social Justice Alliance - SoJA

HAVE COTS AND MEALS... WILL TRAVEL

For the third year, I4C's Homeless Summit has searched for a vacant building that could be leased as a Winter Nights Shelter for families with children and ambulatory elders in Contra Costa County who are experiencing homelessness--to no avail.

After nine months of preparation and three town meetings in Orinda church facilities, the Homeless Summit decided to organize an oft-suggested program: a rotating Winter Nights Shelter in the faith congregations. Modeled on the FERST (Families Employment Resources Services Together) Program, sponsored by the St. Vincent de Paul Society in the late 90s, faith congregations will host families for two-week sessions (or one, if necessary) from November 15, 2004, until March 31, 2005.

Winter Nights' Business Plan and Quick Facts can be found on our website. A team of speakers will be available to meet with your staff or other congregation leaders to answer questions and provide information. Sue Phalen, a member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Walnut Creek, is in charge of scheduling host sites. Please check with Sue which weeks are available, and try to sign up as soon as possible. The weather is already cold at night, and we can protect eight homeless families and seniors from winter weather by providing shelter in a clean, safe, and warm environment. Call Sue at: 935-2586 or suephalen@earthlink.net.

We are in the process of hiring a Program Manager and Overnight Supervisor. Employment Application Forms and Job Descriptions and

can be downloaded from the Website: www.ccc.winternights.org, or requested by phoning the Interfaith Council Office at 925-933-6030, or Gwen Watson at 925-930-9965.

HOMELESS AWARENESS MONTH

November has been proclaimed Homeless Awareness Month by the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors. The Homeless Continuum of Care Board has given this year's events the title, "Ending Homelessness, Not Just Managing It."

Why Are So Many People Homeless?

Homelessness arises from the unfortunate intersection between personal hardship and systemic breakdowns.

Personal hardships include: Generational Poverty. . . Lack of Family and Social Networks. . . Lack of Education and Job Skills. . . Domestic Violence or Divorce. . . Serious Illness. . . Mental Health Conditions and/or Alcohol or Drug Addiction.

Systemic breakdowns include: The Lack of Affordable Housing. . . Cutbacks in Health, Mental Health and Alcohol and Drug Treatment Services. . . Lack of Other Key Services, including Affordable Child Care, Transportation, Education, and Job Training. . . Lack of Living Wage Employment Opportunities.

Contra Costa's Invisible Homeless

Annually an estimated 15,000 people experience homelessness, and on any given night, more than 4,800 people are homeless. 23,861 calls were received by the Homeless Hotline last year from homeless families and individuals seeking shelter in our communities.

What Can People of Faith Do?

They can become advocates for homeless issues, "Voices for the Voiceless." They can offer to host eight homeless families with children in the Winter Nights Program; provide meals and supplies at the two County family shelters; and invite speakers to help educate the people in the pews and in the community about the myths of homelessness that lead to unfounded fears. They can pray for a just and equitable solution to the problem.

SCHOOL OF AMERICAS WATCH

About 75-80 people in the Bay Area are gearing up to arrive in Columbus, Georgia for the 14th annual rally and solemn funeral vigil at Ft. Benning to close the SOA.

The School of the Americas is the flagship U.S. Army school that trains Latin American soldiers in terrorism with U.S. taxpayers' money. It's not too late to join this contingency during the weekend of November 19 - 21.

It's an experience that becomes etched in the minds and hearts of those who participate.

If you would like to learn more about this school, call the Social Justice Alliance or invite someone from SoJA to speak and/or show pertinent videos to your group. It's not too late ---- yet!

Call Natalie Russell, 925-934-0759 or Gwen Watson at 925-930-9965.

Spiritual Direction

In our hectic, fast-paced lives, we tend to keep running, just to keep up with our overwhelming responsibilities. All that we attempt to fit into our days...can leave us little, if any, time to reflect on this life of ours. We can come to find ourselves exhausted physically, emotionally and spiritually...we may feel as if we are in a desert...dry, listless and most of all...alone.

Spiritual Direction offers you an opportunity to stop, sit, and reflect, with an individual trained to listen and discern God's presence in your life. Together with a spiritual director, you can begin to see where and how God is alive in your life...you may just have been too busy to notice.

However, it is not therapy, counseling or coaching, although these modalities may of course, happen concurrently. Spiritual Direction primarily is a journeying with a trained guide, walking with you along your spiritual path.

Sessions are usually an hour in length and usually focus on the current or most pressing issues affecting you, and can be scheduled once a week, once or twice a month, or whatever time interval you and your spiritual director agree to meet.

Think and pray about whether you might want to see a spiritual director. If you're not sure, call or schedule an informational interview. This can be a time to ask questions and listen to God help you discern if this spiritual director might be a friend in God, a friend of the heart and a person you might allow into the sacred space you share with God.

Typically there is a modest fee for on-going Spiritual Direction, and sliding scale fees are available based upon need. However, inability to pay should never keep anyone from seeking Spiritual Direction. Ask whether a sliding scale or financial assistance is available.

So, if you are experiencing a growing desire to reflect, discern, and become more aware of the presence of God in your life, Spiritual Direction may be the longing you are feeling.

Come... rest awhile...rediscover the God within...who has been longing for you... all along.

-- Spiritual Director, Victoria MacDonald, can be reached at (925) 820-2161 or victoriamacd@yahoo.com.

Dear Friends of Spirituality and Health,

Our next Spirituality and Health Dialogue is in the planning stage for October 2005, titled "Spiritual and Healing Practices". Our continuing goal is to foster communication between the emotional, mental and spiritual facets of healing, in both the person seeking healing and the healer or caregiver. This will be the third in a series of seminars.

Like last year, we are planning for different morning and afternoon sessions. With the goal of integrating body, mind and spirit, we would like to begin each session with a panel of experts who will present the history and philosophy of their practice. Then we will go into breakout sessions to experience their work. At this point we are calling these different sessions **Spiritual Practices with Healing Components**, and **Healing Practices with Spiritual Components**. We envision such healing/spiritual techniques as: yoga, meditation, prayer, Reiki, chiropractic, breath work, Feldenkrais, etc. We anticipate each break-out session will be thirty minutes long. We'd like participants to leave these sessions with hand-outs and a list of other available practitioners.

We are seeking your assistance in contacting a group of highly qualified practitioners from which to make a final selection of ten people. If you know of people who could well represent their field and provide leadership for a group of several hundred attendees. This will be one of the items to be discussed at our next meeting on December 2nd, so please respond at your earliest convenience.

Spirituality and Health Steering Committee

Our thanks to Lenita and the wonderful volunteers that helped to col- late and fold the October newsletters:

Millie Harris, Genevieve Carlson, Jane Orr, Helen Tousignant, Dorothy Vance, Gray Whipple, Betty Reinike, Jean Witucki.

If you wish to volunteer please call Lenita at: 672-1053

Thanks also to Nora Chuch for doing the layout for this newsletter!

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

It is not impossible that a military draft will be introduced in our country again. This is a serious decision for our young people just out of high school to make. Some 18 year olds see military careers in the armed forces as viable options for them.

Others find that they cannot in good conscience participate activity that requires carrying and using weapons or in "leasing their consciences" and become government property.

As recruiters invite our young men and women to join the military service, an alternative must be offered as well to those who cannot in good conscience participate in this service.

If a potential draftee wishes to sign on as a conscientious objector, he or she must provide some evidence that such a stance is consistent with his or her ordinary lifestyle.

It is important, therefore, that some evidence be available to verify the sincerity of such declaration. For information about conscientious objection to service in the military, call Natalie Russell, 934-0759 for referral to appropriate counseling.

Next Deadline: November 15, 2004

Please send copy marked to the attention of:

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

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