



M inistering Together

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

The Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County

October-November 2007

Coming Events

❖ **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.

❖ **Author's Event.**

Saturday, October 13, 2-4 p.m.,
Lafayette United Methodist Church, 955 Moraga Road

This Winter Nights fundraiser will feature a reading of *Heroes Arise*, a novella and parable by **Laurel Anne Hill**. Refreshments will be served. Registration for individuals, \$30; Couples, \$45. Advance registration can be sent to LUMC, Attn: Winter Nights, 955 Moraga Road, Lafayette, CA 94549.

❖ **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 homelessness, 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 ProjectHomelessConnect@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. All are welcome

Mark Your Calendars!!!

❖ **Interfaith Council Annual Meeting**

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

❖ **Memoir Writing Workshop**

Friday, November 9
San Damiano Retreat, Danville

"Recalling and Feeling Memories: Encouraging the past to tell its story" with Ursula Caspary Frankel, MS, MFT. For information call Lorraine at 925-837-9141, Ext.306 or check the web site: www.sandamiano.org

❖ **Veterans Day Concert**

Sunday, November 11, 2:00 p.m.
Grace Presbyterian Church
2100 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek

You are invited to this musical program in honor of all veterans, performed by the Ashmolean Singers of Rossmoor, Conducted by Gordon Addison, with Dr. Steve Crain at the organ. Contact Chariereid@earthlink.net for more information.



Dear friends,

I hope you're making plans already to attend our **Annual Meeting** on Sunday, November 4th at Congregation B'nai Tikvah in Walnut Creek. It starts at 7:00 p.m. and finishes at 9:00 p.m.

We are instituting (or re-instituting) a new format this year. After gathering and dealing with our joint business in a brief manner, we will be hearing from two local attorneys — **Joshua Safran and Nadia Costa** — about their work over the past five years to free a woman from the women's prison in Chowchilla. The woman, Deborah Peagler, was sentenced to 25 years to life, for the murder of a man who brutally abused her for six years. In her trial, no expert testimony was allowed regarding the abuse itself.

Safran is an orthodox Jew, and Costa does not participate in a religious community. They will speak of why they are motivated to help Peagler, an African-American Christian.

Also at the Annual Meeting, we will have a **silent auction**, with religious and spiritual items donated from local organizations and individuals. (If you would like to donate something yourself, please give the office a call.) You are encouraged to come with your checkbook, to purchase that unique item or service, as well as to help the ongoing work of the Interfaith Council.

Invitations will go out to congregations, but for all of you families and individuals who receive and read the newsletter, please consider this your formal invitation! You may reserve spots for \$10 apiece by calling 925-933-6030.

In other news, I commend all of the leaders of **East County United**, the new organization which planned and put on the recent march in Antioch in response to the arson of the Islamic Center of the East Bay in August, and the subsequent burglary and vandalism of the Golden home in Brentwood.

While it is unfortunate that tragedies such as these are what it takes to bring us together, I am very pleased that religious and other leaders in the area (and beyond) have met to broadcast the message that such acts of apparent hate will not be tolerated. It is a message against victimization and for civility and respect. I see persons who have not yet been involved in public interfaith work joining with some of the old hands. It is very encouraging.

A committee has been formed for the "future education" about various faith groups, helping the Antioch and surrounding communities to understand that we are all one in our humanity and our seeking for truth. Please watch for announcements of events.

I spoke with and heard about folks from congregations that are not in the Highway 4 corridor who were sending delegations to the march and rally. It seems that there is a ready response among many of you to assist in such events and efforts. Thank you.

It is an honor to serve the Interfaith Council, especially with your great support for this work. Martin Buber, the famous Jewish scholar, said "All life is meeting." I am grateful for the old friends and new ones that I continue to meet as we strive to make Contra Costa County a place of ever more love, service and cooperation.

Bryan

Volunteers Needed

Loaves and Fishes needs more volunteers. Can you help? We need groups of four that will come on a designated day of their choice. We especially need "chop and chat" crews on the first Monday, Wednesday, Friday of each month or the second Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday of each month and the fourth Tuesday, Wednesday of each month.

Loaves and Fishes Catering Kitchen is open for food preparation 8 am to 1 pm Monday through Friday. The kitchen is located at 510H Garcia Av. in Pittsburg. We need people mainly to prepare fresh fruits and veggies so that they are ready when the chef needs them to prepare the meals. We provide approximately 750 meals daily, Monday through Friday, from that kitchen for our six dining sites.

Please call Sue Phalen, 925-935-2586, or e-mail at suephalen@earthlink.net.

Chaplain's Corner



What follows is a letter I wrote to a young person I once worked with here. He left California, returned to his native state, and proceeded to get into rather serious trouble. He currently resides in a "juvenile correctional facility" of that state's equivalent to California's Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) (formerly CYA). Embarrassed, he hesitated to write to me for almost 18 months. Finally he swallowed his pride, put pencil to paper and asked for my assistance, present and future...

Over the years I have received and responded to hundreds of letters from young men and women, once here, who have been unfortunate enough to have "gone on" to other unpleasant places for long periods of time.

January 20, 2007

Dear V,

I hope this finds you well. As you can see I have received your letter. I am still a bit surprised that you actually thought I could have forgotten you. All those early morning community service activities, the court appearances, meetings with your family members, time in Martinez and Byron, numerous conversations with the probation officer and teachers--I would have to be absolutely senile not to remember you and your hard-headed self!! ☺

I am so very glad to hear you are working on the GED. I do hope you are able to get that, and then continue with your education. You know, V, right now I have six kids in school at Butte College. As a matter of fact, one of the kids at Butte actually went to Costa Rica

over the Christmas break to study Spanish language and Central American culture. A whole lot better than what the streets, Rapper MacStupid and Thugston B. Dummy have to offer. I do hope and pray that you have figured that out. There is indeed no future in the kinds of activities you have engaged in to get yourself into the position you are in presently. You just simply are not very good at being bad. The good news is this situation is not forever. It is likely that if you pay attention to the folks there, learn as much as you can, take advantage of all the opportunities offered you, you will be able to get your little butt in gear and become a contributing member of society, an asset rather than a liability. This is my hope and my prayer for you. I offered my assistance to you (and to your family) a long time ago. That commitment is still good.

Your brothers here have asked about you at times. They knew you had gone (out-of-state). When I was (there) last year (I had two kids with me), we wondered about your whereabouts. Many of the ones here are really starting to put their lives in order -- many who have not are no longer with us. As a matter of fact, Son, I lost a record five in five consecutive months last year. I do pray that that is not repeated, not this year, not ever! I don't want this for you either. Keep that hard head up high. Behave yourself, pay attention, do a good program and be careful.

Grace and Peace!

Love, Rev. T.

Rev. Dr. Charles Tinsley
Juvenile Detention Chaplain

NEW DIRECTIONS

New Directions Counseling Center is a non-profit counseling center that has been providing affordable counseling for children and families for the last 35 years. New Directions accepts Medi-Cal and we provide a sliding fee scale so we see clients for what they can afford. No one is turned away due to lack of financial resources.

We are the only counseling Center in Contra Costa County that provides such a low sliding fee scale. Some people only pay \$10 per session. We are also the only Center in Contra Costa County that provides Anger Management for adolescent boys and girls. These groups are desperately needed in our county. New Directions also treats over 250 children per month. The research indicates that children who need therapy and do not receive it are three times more likely to commit a crime in adulthood.

The County Hospital only has 30 psychiatric beds to serve all of Contra Costa County. It is not uncommon for a suicidal person to be turned away because there are no beds, even though the number of people needing treatment is at an all time high, making our services at New Directions desperately needed. We are the only place of therapy available for many people. If we did not exist, at least 250 children would not be getting therapy.

While we love the work we do, it does take money. Unfortunately, due to a slowing economy and State and Federal cutbacks, raising money for mental health is becoming harder every day. Please call (925-798-7500) or check out our web site www.ndcounselingcenter.org for more information or to find out how you can donate to New Directions Counseling Center. New Directions Counseling Center is located at 2118 Willow Pass Road, Suite 500 in Concord

□ **Ven. Jian Hu**
Sunnyvale Zen Center

Q1: Does Buddhism encourage fasting; if so, for what reasons?

Occasional, short-term fasting can be useful to the Buddhist cultivation, to train our minds to not crave for food. Most Buddhist monks during Buddha's time did not eat after midday. The "Eight Precepts" Observance (which the Zen Center just held over the past weekend), which includes no food after midday, is recommended for lay Buddhist six times a month.

The reasons for occasional fasting: reduce craving for food, cleansing the body to have more time for meditation and Buddhist studies, to not indulge in physical pleasure. A body less burdened with food (especially sweet or fatty food) is more conditioned for calmness, fitness, and can actually be more energetic. However, Buddhism does not encourage extreme forms of austerity, such as barely eating for extended periods of time; instead, we recommend the "Middle Way" approach.

Q2: How can I reconcile living in a fast-moving lifestyle and career, which emphasizes desiring more money and more possessions and applauds ambition, with Buddhism? I feel stuck between the two. I want to continue being ambitious and setting higher goals, yet are these desires or greed that will contribute to suffering?

Buddhism, which encourages calmness, compassion, and non-conflict, is not in contradiction to setting and achieving high goals nor against making money. Buddha was certainly a high-achiever, and extremely "ambitious" in wanting to bring anyone to enlightenment. The key is intention. Have we set our goal to achieve personal fame, pleasure, or power? Then we'll never be satisfied or happy for long. We'll deepen our delusion and be further away from seeing our true nature. We'll suffer more and make others suffer.

If we set our goals (whatever they are) to help living beings, bring them happiness and wisdom, then we can, and should, be ambitious! If you want to make lots of money (the right way) to help more people, by all means! However, we should also know that while working hard on our goals, it is still possible to maintain a calm and clear mind, to maintain integrity and compassion and achieve success. Our December 2nd workshop "Buddhism and Successful Careers" will cover this in detail.

Q3: Monks seem to live very simple lives, dedicated to study. What is the purpose of this? Is this related to the Middle Way?

We live simple lives because that is the way life is. It is our delusions that make things unnecessarily cluttered and complicated. The monk's purpose is to discipline the mind, achieve great clarity and insight to reality. The Middle Way is a view that encompasses all views, thereby avoiding all biases and extremes. In other words, to attain the Middle Way is to see the entire truth. To see the truth is to be truly free. And then everything in life becomes profound yet simple.

Q4: I cannot believe people get born in the world with so much to do and so many senses, but the goal in life is to shut everything down. Why?

If we can "shut down" our desires, that is great self-control, which is great power. The Buddhist practice is not to shut down everything, but to not cling to anything. That way, we can use all the resources of the world for the benefit of sentient beings without becoming enslaved by them. That is true freedom.

□ **Rabbi Michelle Fisher**
Congregation B'nai Shalom, W.C.

"Live long and prosper." So speaks the Jew/Vulcan Star Trek hero Leonard Nemoy/Mr. Spock, paraphrasing this week's Torah reading. (Yes, really; Leonard Nemoy consciously added many Jewish nuances to his TV/movie character.) Twice in Parashat Ki Tetze we are promised a long life for fulfilling a mitzvah, a reward attached to only three of the 613 mitzvot. We are told that, "If along the road, you happen upon a bird's nest," chase away the mother bird before gathering from her nest her eggs or young, "in order that you may fare well and prolong your days" (Det. 22:7). We are also commanded to only use and have completely honest weights and measures, "in order that your days may be prolonged" (Dt. 25:13-15).

These are beautiful blessings promised for the fulfillment of relatively easy and everyday acts—be humane and be honest. But most of us probably have some theodicy issues with "do this and you will get this reward" - with the seeming guarantee of a reward for the performance of any particular mitzvah, or even all the mitzvot. Harold Kushner's book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* would never have become a best seller if life always worked out fairly. In fact, two millennia ago our Rabbis struggled with the same questions of good and bad, of promise and reward, and concluded that all these Torah rewards of "long life" must refer to the world to come.

Another take is given by the Kedushat Levi, the 18th century Berdichev Rebbe. He understands “long life” in the context of these mitzvot as a paradigm for the spiritual principle that “there are two ways in which God’s action towards humankind is motivated: one which comes from within God and one which comes in response to the actions of human beings. It is, however, not permitted to rely totally on God’s acting from God’s own will. Rather, a person must try to arouse him or herself to act in a way that stimulates a gracious and just response from God.”

The Kedushat Levi is saying that we cannot rely simply on God to bring us long life. Long life is also in how we make use of and fulfill our days. When we make the mitzvot and God’s path to holy life a central part of our lives—as we work in our jobs, as we simply walk and “happen along the way,” as we interact with family and friends—we are enriched and blessed. When we see God as an ongoing presence in our lives—One to whom we have responsibilities as well as One from whom we receive blessings—we develop an extended, more full awareness of God’s presence. That is well-being and length of days. As we move evermore-closely to a New Year, to reflecting upon our acts in the past year and our hopes for change in the new one, may we all embrace such a unified, whole life. May we thus “Live long and prosper.” Shabbat shalom.

□ Natalie Russell

St Stephen’s Catholic Church, Walnut Creek

Catholic or catholic? A response to Pope Benedict XVI

As a member of the Catholic Church for nearly 80 years, I wish to share some feelings about the recent comment of Pope Benedict XVI about our being the “one true church.” I am particularly saddened because this is a time when Catholics have been experiencing the gentle work of the Holy Spirit moving us to realize that we have but one God who calls us to gather together as one human family however diverse we are. All believers (and non-believers) in God’s beloved community are included, no matter which spiritual path we follow. Regardless of which religion, race, gender, ethnicity, economic or political status, etc., we are all called to live together in peace and understanding so that justice will be possible. Whatever name we use for the common source of our being (and becoming), we are meant to actively care for each other and our earthly home without prejudice against the uniqueness of individuals or communities of faith. We must tap into our own souls, cherish and care for our collective planet and find our way “home.”

When the “leader” of the Catholic Church expresses exclusive rights to speak for God, I believe that we are off

track. It is good to be rooted in a belief system but not to separate ourselves from others. Another pope, Pope John XXIII, was a breath of fresh air in the minds and hearts of many. He called the Council of Vatican II in the early 60’s in order to address some much needed change.

Very succinctly, Vatican II initiated the first steps of the coming transformation for our church. The Council started by looking at three major areas: *Ecumenism*, *Legalism* and *Triumphalism*.

Ecumenical dialog and outreach began. And then with some shared experience of the work of the Spirit, some inroads were made into larger, more universal, spiritual family. This process is still working its way along and, of course, much growth is still needed. Later, efforts were directed toward appreciating faiths outside of the Christian experience. A narrow definition of faith gave way to a more expansive vision of God’s children. The more differences we find, the more we realize how much we have in common!

Legalism: our old Church had “the only true way,” and we lived by and applied the “letter of the law” and had specified worship at specified times for specified reasons. When the Spirit found the right times and enough awakened listeners to move among us, we caught the “spirit of the law.” We, the people in the pews, were to become “full, conscious and active” participants in all our liturgical celebrations. Our services were held in the vernacular (rather than in Latin). We began using contemporary music and employing other arts, opening our global church to rich cultural traditions. Because of the shift away from “legality” to more along the lines of “living spirit,” creative and energized worshipers were inspired and empowered to grow spiritually and thereby do much good. New strides were made toward social justice.

Triumphalism: in contrast to the past, the entire assembly participates (to a degree!) in celebrating the Mass with the Presider (priest), guiding the ecclesia (“the gathering of the faithful”). There was a focus on building community. The laity joined the clergy in studying the Sacred Scriptures and women began taking more visible roles.

I suppose in the scope of time (40 years now since Vatican II), one could say it was a sweet taste of what is possible in the modern world. But it has been half of my lifetime! And this Pope wants to go back to pre-Vatican II consciousness! I still appreciate many of the traditions of my Catholic Church and hold them dear. Nevertheless, the only sign of real life is change. Just ask the trees, the rivers, the butterflies and yes, each other!

A growing number of Catholics are becoming really catholic—universal, progressive and filled with Spirit! And we don’t plan to go backwards. So, here we are. Some Catho-

lics may return to age-old practice: Latin Mass, exclusivity, strict conformity and regulations, and returning to who we once were. Still some other Catholics will thrive in the spirit of community, full participation, openness and growing awareness of whom we are called to be. We love our church and commit to help it heal and grow. We will continue to be involved in our liturgies, in local and global politics, in the service of one another, in family issues, in social justice, education and in every other way in which the Spirit beckons. We will endeavor to be faithful to the spiritual values that Jesus taught and lived, and work hand in hand with friends, whatever true faith with which they identify. Hoping not to be divisive, I suggest that some Catholics prefer holding on to the proverbial umbilical cord of obedience to the institution or some other perceived sense of security. Other Catholics experience the growing pains of maturation yet loving the roots and memories from which they grew. They will continue to live in the joy and responsibility of self-determination and the grace of God's self-revelation.

I feel sorry that my traditional Church spoke as it did, but I am enthusiastic about my ever-growing spiritual life that guides my choices in all areas. I claim my catholicity while praying that the Catholic Church will revisit the "spirit" of Vatican II and see it as a beginning of what the reign of God promises for all of us. Let us enjoy all creation for the "kin-dom" of God is at hand.

N.B. Since the writing of this article, I have read that this declaration of Pope Benedict XVI was seen as taken out of context. Time will tell...

□ Guity Kiani Bahai's of Clayton

I just read your good newsletter. Seeing how everyone is so dedicated to the betterment of the world around them, I was moved to send you the following two quotations of Baha'u'llah. This, with the view that the solutions of all our problems are in the Unity of Mankind and in their Spiritual development.

"O Children of Men!

Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how you were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest. Such is My counsel to you, O concourse of light! Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory."

The Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah

"...It is binding and incumbent upon the peoples of the world, one and all, to extend aid unto this momentous Cause which is come from the heaven of the Will of the ever-abiding God, that perchance the fire of animosity which blazeth in the hearts of some of the peoples of the earth may, through the living waters of divine wisdom and be virtue of heavenly counsels and exhortations, be quenched, and the light of unity and concord may shine forth and shed its radiance upon the world.

We cherish the hope that through the earnest endeavours of such as are exponents of the power of God--exalted be His glory--the weapons of war throughout the world may be converted into instruments of reconstruction and that strife and conflict may be removed from the midst of men."

Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah.

□ Dr. Amer Arain Dar-ul-Islam Mosque, Concord

Muslims Observance of Ramadan

On Thursday September 13, Muslims in America and all over the World began the observance of the holy month of Ramadan. It is the month of fasting. Allah says in the Quran: "O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you (people of the scriptures), that ye may ward off evil." In addition to abstaining from eating and drinking from dawn to sunset, Muslims are commanded to have extra night prayers, engage in constant remembrance of Allah, recite from the Quran and help the poor and the needy. Those who could not fast due to traveling or sickness should compensate for the missing days later. But to those whose health conditions do not enable them to fast and can afford it financially, should feed a poor person every day of Ramadan. Furthermore, Muslims who are fasting and are able to do so, should also engage in feeding the poor and the needy. It is also recommended that Muslim families get together whether in mosques or in their homes to break the fast and pray together. The holiness of this month brings Muslims closer to Allah through their worships including extra night prayers, recitation of the Quran and remembrance of Allah as well as helping the poor and the needy.

Ramadan is the month when the Quran was revealed in a night described by Allah as the Night of Power. Muhammad the Prophet of Islam said that the whole month is a blessing, therefore, be totally immersed in fasting, prayers, remembering Allah and helping the poor and the needy. Muslims in America thank Allah for all His bounties, including strengthening their faith and health and thus enabling them

to fast. Muslims are grateful to the members of the faith communities who extended their good wishes on this occasion.

Peace in the Middle East

The Middle East in general and the Holy Land as well as Iraq in particular are passing through very difficult times. The debates last week on Iraq demonstrated that the United States Occupying Forces would remain in that country until 2008. Violence as far as the Iraqi people are concerned is not ceasing. This saddening situation will continue until the withdrawal of the Occupying Forces are replaced by the United Nations peacekeeping forces. The United Nations Security Council must determine to be directly involved in Iraq in order to eliminate the sectarian and ethnic militias and build true democratic institutions. As for the Holy Land, the United States Administration is calling for an international peace conference. We hope that this gathering will not be merely for photo opportunity. Thirteen years have passed since the ceremonies in the White House on the conclusion of the Oslo Accords between the Palestinians and the Israelis without true tangible results for the Palestinians. Therefore, the conference should tackle the serious issues concerning the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, i.e. the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian refugees. The

conference should invite all the states concerned in the Middle East and the Palestinian Authority. There should be mutual cessation of hostilities by all the parties including attacks and counter attacks.

The crux of the matter is the occupation in 1967 of the Palestinian territories, including the Israeli settlements, which constitutes a violation of international law. Once there is a true determination for a mutually agreed cease-fire between all the parties and to end the occupation, the question of the Palestinian refugees should be settled by the parties to the conference through negotiations. We in the faith communities should not hesitate to contribute to the debate. However, it is advisable that when we deplore violence we should do so whether it is committed by states, groups or individuals. I am aware of the fact that all the followers of the monotheist faiths have emotional attachments to the Holy Land. All peace loving peoples around the world are also praying for peace in the Middle East. In order to achieve this lofty goal we have to encourage people to do so by emphasizing that true peace will be achieved when justice is established and that requires ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and amicably solving the question of Palestinian refugees.

BOOK REVIEWS

**The Faith Club: a Muslim, Christian, Jew—
Three Women Search for Understanding**

(Free Press: 2007 paperback, 2006 hardcover)

Many of us in the interfaith community and elsewhere have a deep longing for peace and reconciliation. We are aware how difficult our differences can make our relationships with one another. **The Faith Club...** offers a superb entrée to interfaith engagement and understanding.

The three women -- Jewish, Muslim, and Christian -- all mothers in their 30s-40s living in New York, come together soon after the 9/11 terrorism to create a children's book, drawing on shared stories of their three traditions. (Interestingly, they haven't yet published that book.) Ranya, Suzanne and Priscilla challenge one another as they examine their own faiths and gain insight into the lived faith of their sisters. They engage with honesty, respect and curiosity. Each experiences deepening of personal faith, change in relationship with her own faith community, and expansion of compassion for others.

The Faith Club is a valuable book for those wondering how to start such conversations. Information on starting a faith club is included. The book demonstrates that interfaith dialogue is not only about sharing ideas; it's at least as much about building relationships. The narrative is a light-filled testimony to the trio's perseverance and humor midst aha moments and revelations, disagreements and alienation. Thus, it may also be a valuable book for folks already laboring in the interfaith vineyard who could use some easy-read, satisfying, revitalizing affirmation!

New Book by Local Playwright

Award-winning playwright and distinguished psychologist, Rabbi Milton Matz, PH.D., explores a new direction for American theatre in his recently published *Nine Plays in Search of an Ending*. The theme of the volume is clear: every life is a play, and we are all playwrights searching for good endings to our personal difficulties.

Matz has heard thousands of dilemmas. He explores the most challenging ones by writing nine fictional plays, three full plays with controversial endings and six short plays with no endings at all. Each of the plays focuses on a provocative issue:

- v Infidelity
- v Facing death
- v Seduction
- v Seniors and sex
- v Human and supernaturalists
- v Reconciliation with enemies
- v If your spouse is gay
- v Color blind marriage
- v Speaking with God

Reading a play puts us in each of the leading characters' shoes and forces us to see through their eyes endings we never imagined. And if we share our endings with others, our supply of practical solutions to personal dilemmas increases. The book includes guidelines for sharing-discussion groups.

Some of the plays are available for reading and discussion, on a rotation basis and at no cost, at the book's website and blog, www.miltonmatz.com. Currently, the available plays are "Generals and Rabbis" and "Seduction."

Included in the collection are Matz's award-winning plays: *Spinoza*, *Maria and Excommunication*, the love story behind the excommunication of the originator of the doctrine of separation of church and state, and *Affairs of the State*, a hilarious satire on sex, therapy and politics in Washington. *Rabbi Matz is an active member of the Rossmoor Interfaith Council*

Books can be ordered from iUniverse Inc. (1-800-288-4677), Amazon.com and booksellers.

Social Justice Alliance-SoJA

October SoJA Meeting: Wednesday, the 10th, 7 p.m., Interfaith Council Office
SOAW March at Fort Benning, GA—Sunday, November 18.

Winter Nights

Preparing for October 15 Opening.

The Winter Nights Shelter's crew of workers are busy these days. Monday, October 15, is Shelter Opening Day. **Pat Snyder** and **Sandy Anderson** have updated the website documents. Check them out at cccwinternights.org.

Privacy screens for our families will be built as one of the projects of Mitzvah Day at Temple Isaiah; **Valerie Sloven** helped with the design.

The Steering Committee is conducting employment interviews for Site Supervisors.

Fundraising Efforts

Brian is preparing the shelter Annual Appeal Letter which is set to be mailed in October. **Sandy Anderson** is helping to design the latest WN Aprons. Large donations were recently received from Lafayette Orinda Presbyterian Church and Orinda Community Church.

Lorri Gazzano, WN Grantwriter, reports that the Y & H Soda Foundation answered our grant appeal with \$6,000.00. Grant appeals pending are Lowell Barry Foundation and Wayne and Gladys Valley Foundation.

We are most grateful for these and the following generous contributors to our 2006-2007 season



Gwen & Mahmood

GROUPS

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CONGREGATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Canyon Creek Korean Church
Christ the King Parish
Church of Santa Maria
Community Presbyterian Church
Concord United Methodist Church
Danville Congregational Church
East Bay Catholic Charities
First Evangelical Lutheran Church
First Presbyterian Church, Concord
Hamonah Presbyterian Church
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Orinda Community Church

Our Savior's Lutheran Church
Shell Ridge Community Church
St. Bonaventure Catholic Church
St. Ignatius Catholic Church
St. John Vianney Church
St. Monica Catholic Church
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
St. Perpetua Catholic Church
St. Stephen Catholic Church
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley
First Church of Christ Scientist in Orinda
Concord United Methodist Church Women
First Christian Church Women, Concord
Church World Services

Health Care Report

AB 8 (Nunez), a health reform bill that builds on the current employer based insurance system, passed the Legislature and was vetoed by the Governor. He announced that he intends to call a special session to negotiate with Democratic leaders in an effort to produce a final product that includes part of his own reform plan. The Governor's plan never became a bill and so was not considered by the Legislature.

The final hours before the passage of AB 8 saw many amendments that were largely not available to advocates for consumer. Some of the amendments met objections of some organizations regarding affordability, and led to increased support from them. Other groups felt that changes were inadequate or negative, and came out in formal opposition, including the League of Women Voters of California, Church Impact, and California Physicians Alliance. The California Nurses Association, and California School Employees Association were already opposed.

No one knows what the special session will bring, and many advocates are very concerned about what the reform may include. Even more concerning, it is not expected to be a transparent process, just like the end of the legislative session. **Pat Snyder**

Individuals

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 Blind Dog Band
 Sue Banducci
 Nadine Barroca
 John Bevis
 Martha Bilbrey
 Paula Bishop
 Barbara Blake
 Machrina Blasdell
 Elsie Boarman
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 Diablo Business Forms
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Is YOUR congregation represented on our team of workers? If not, call Lenita at 672-1053 and volunteer. We can always use more helpers.

Please pray for:

Victims of recent hurricanes and typhoons
Victims of earthquake in Indonesia
An end to the violence on Bay Area streets
First Congregational Church, Antioch
Clayton Baha'i Community
First Church of Christ, Scientist, Danville
Northminster Presbyterian Church, El Cerrito

Living on the Edge *by Jonathan Seight*

My life once was spent in the main stream.
In sync, with the other unquestioning salmon.
Like a beast racing around and around the track wearing blinders.
Responding to the whip of the jockey and the roar of the crowd.
Fighting my way forward within the mass.
Trying to keep up and not get trampled
in my headlong hypnotic rush to the finish.
Indistinguishable in thought, action and appearance from my
fellow weary marathoners.
But what's that at the edge of the herd?
Someone has stopped. Unheard of!
And He's helping an injured stranger. Impossible!
Doesn't He know He will be left behind?
Why doesn't He continue the race? Why must He pause?
My focus is not on the race. I'm aware of myself stumbling.
I'm being trampled and I find myself left behind!
There I am, all alone in the dust with my terror
and the vanishing stampede.
But wait; there is Someone beside me.
It's that same figure on the edge. He's now helping me.
Quite, calm and reassuring is His manner.
He sets my broken bones and calms my spirit.
He gives me drink and stays with me until I am healed.
One day I awaken to find He has left my side but His vision
stays with me. And there I sit, on the edge,
waiting for the next herd and those who will be left behind.