

ShalomNexus

Spring 2008

The Newsletter of Communities of Shalom at Drew University

Volume 1, Issue 1



Shalom Is On The Loose Again at Drew

On January 1, 2008, the Theological School of Drew University became the new home-base for Communities of Shalom, a grassroots, faith-based, community development network of congregations and community members working together for healing, health, and wholeness in their communities. Previously coordinated by the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), these community transformation sites now are resourced at Drew in collaboration with GBGM and the National Shalom Committee, with Michael J. Christensen, Ph.D. as National Director.

Drew was chosen as the new national partner of Communities of Shalom following a competitive six-month application process. Once chosen, Drew faced the daunting task of determining how many of the 300+ Shalom sites in the U.S. and Africa were active. After three months, we determined that there are 79 active sites in 25 United Methodist Annual Conferences, including the Central Conference of Africa where there are 5 active sites. The National Shalom Team surveyed the active U.S. sites and identified their ministry areas and opportunities for the future growth and development of Communities of Shalom.

Since 1992, over 600 Shalom teams have been trained in asset-based community development. Over 300 "Shalom Zones" were started in 57

Annual Conferences during the first 10 years. Some evolved into successful community-based organizations offering direct services under another banner, while others retained the Shalom name to do community organizing, advocacy, and justice work. Most provided needed services for a season and, with changes in leadership, became inactive. All did their part to seek the shalom of their communities.



"Transforming the world one community at a time" is the bold vision of Communities of Shalom.

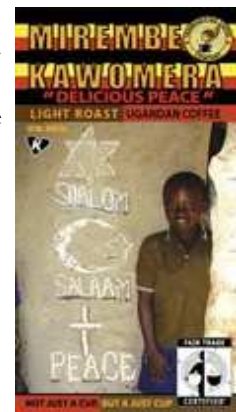
Communities of Shalom continues to be guided by the social principles of the UMC as it seeks new shalom sites, pursues interfaith opportunities, and lifts up the ecological motif as a distinctive feature of the Shalom model of community development. Already this year, we have 7 new urban sites in the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference, 3 new rural sites in the North Carolina Annual Conference, and 3 new Native American sites in the Dakotas Annual Conference. We have received training requests from the West Virginia Annual Conference and the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference, and the UMC in Santa Cruz, CA envisions a "green shalom zone." Also, the Shalom initiative is a founding member of a new Interfaith Coalition for Hope and Peace in Newark, NJ.

Shalom is on the loose again, and we welcome you to join the movement. If your congregation is called to Shalom ministry, please contact the Shalom Resource Center at shalom@drew.edu.

Shalom Coffee at General Conference

Shalom coffee, produced by Thanksgiving Coffee Company to benefit a collective in Uganda, will be available at the Shalom Reception at the Ashton Depot on Friday, April 25, and at the Town and Country Fair on Saturday, April 26. On Monday, April 28 and Tuesday, April 29, the Shalom initiative seeks participants for focus group sessions to be conducted by Duncan Associates. Participants will receive free shalom coffee in recognition of their contribution. Focus group participants include those who self-identify in four categories: 1) former or current members of Shalom ministry teams, 2) delegates with some familiarity with the Shalom initiative, 3) UMC connectional staff, and 4) Drew alumni. Look for the "Shalom Focus Group" sign during your coffee break at General Conference.

A preliminary evaluation and 'futuring' report, prepared by Duncan Associates, will be shared and discussed with the focus groups at General Conference and selected Annual Conferences. A final five-year evaluation (2003-2007) of the Shalom initiative and recommendations for its future development, will be produced and presented to the National Shalom Committee in July.

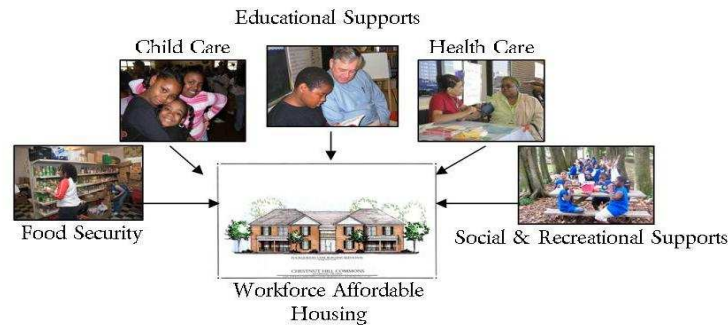


Mirembe Kawomera, which means "delicious peace" in the Ugandan language Luganda, is a sweet, nutty coffee grown in Uganda by an interfaith cooperative of coffee farmers. See www.thanksgivingcoffee.com.

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UMUMR Makes Affordable Housing a Priority *Qasarah Bey*



As this model shows, UMUMR places the issue of affordable housing at the center of its Shalom ministry. Housing is considered affordable if the rent or mortgage consumes no more than 30% of one's monthly income.

The current crisis in the housing market has propelled the issue of affordable housing to the forefront of the local, state, and national agendas. Many communities have struggled for years to provide affordable housing to all members of society. People experiencing poverty and/or mental illness, those with criminal histories, and working class and middle class families face increasing difficulty qualifying for home loans or maintaining higher rent payments. United Methodist congregations witness the struggles of parishioners and community members alike.

Because housing stability is a cornerstone of a healthy community, United Methodist Urban Ministries of Richmond (UMUMR) is prioritizing affordable housing development as a primary goal in the work of community transformation. UMUMR is developing Chestnut Hill Commons and Community Life Center in the Highland Park neighborhood in Richmond,

VA. Through collaborative partnership with the Virginia United Methodist Housing Development Corporation, the Richmond District, local community churches, non-profit, governmental, and civic organizations, and community residents, Chestnut Hill Commons demonstrates the principles of the Shalom initiative in its design and operation. Furthermore, UMUMR is employing a Community Builder (developer) in this housing complex to develop and support a new Shalom site.

Using existing local resources and partnering with the local community, UMUMR seeks to promote systemic change by providing United Methodist congregations an opportunity to put their assets and faith into action to create what Regional Coordinator Rev. David Cooper calls a "City of Shalom" in Richmond.

Qasarah Bey is a MDiv/MSW intern for UMUMR.

A Ministry of Reconciliation *Rev. Marilyn Heckstall*

The enslavement of African Americans is a sin that caused a disruption in the relationship between African Americans and European Americans, and systemic racism continues to feed mistrust. Yet, African Americans are called to forgive those who were and are still perpetrators of racism. I believe God is calling us at Asbury UMC to embrace the ministry of reconciliation as opportunities are given for inner healing and community building.

During a community meeting, a remarkably open and honest conversation concerning race and reconciliation emerged. After this conversation, Pat Shipley, pastor of Centenary UMC, which is predominantly European American, touched me on the shoulder and said, "We can do something about this." Pat had explored racially charged movies as a medium to encourage dialogue between the races and begin the process of healing and reconciliation. We decided to formulate the partnership of Asbury UMC, Centenary UMC, and Boaz and Ruth, a non-profit organization committed to a holistic approach to rehabilitation. Our leap of faith began with four movies centered on Lenten meals. The movies, which included *Mississippi Burning* and *Cosmic Slop*, revealed the pain and suffering of the oppressed, perpetual stereotypes, fear, selfishness, power, and white privilege. Also, many seem reluctant to acknowledge and accept their personal and corporate guilt, stand at the foot of the cross, and rise as new creations in Christ. The Good News is that African Americans return to the foot of the cross, seeking healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

I returned to the foot of the cross during a planning retreat where participants from Asbury, Centenary, and Boaz and Ruth watched the movie *Rosewood*, in which a group of whites murdered most of the blacks in a town called Rosewood. As I was receiving my healing, I heard the painful cry of Pat Shipley: "I am so ashamed." I got up and held her. As I rocked her in my arms, I thanked her for coming and told her I forgive her. Both Pat and I were lifted to a new place. Then there was total silence as the Spirit whispered, "Sing *Amazing Grace*." This "shalom moment" illustrates how the ministry of reconciliation empowers both African Americans and European Americans to regain our divine place as prophetic voices of hope seeking systemic change together. This is the focus of our Shalom ministry in Richmond.



Members of Asbury UMC, Centenary UMC, and Boaz and Ruth have joined forces to seek racial reconciliation.

Rev. Marilyn Heckstall is Pastor of Asbury UMC and Site Coordinator of Church Hill Community of Shalom in Richmond, VA.

The Origins of Shalom

The following is an interview with Bishop Joseph Sprague, conducted by Michael J. Christensen on April 1, 2008.

MJC: What was the original impetus for the creation of shalom zones in 1992?

BJS: Our General Conference in Denver coincided with the aftermath of the Rodney King incident in Los Angeles and what seemed to be a downward spiral of the cities of America. Those of us who had been involved with civil rights in the 1960s and urban ministries subsequently were concerned about this new reality.

MJC: What set of circumstances prompted your proposal on the floor to create a shalom zone in Los Angeles?

BJS: Well, first of all, there was a certain irony about how I got to General Conference in 1992. As a pastor from West Ohio, I had been elected as a delegate at two prior General Conferences. However, this time Good News and IRD targeted me to not get elected, apparently because of some of my social justice stands. Consequently, I was the last clergy delegate elected and seated. As luck or Providence would have it, I was seated on the aisle in front of the chair of the Presiding Bishop, perfectly positioned to make a motion from the floor.

James (Jim) Lawson, a UMC pastor in Los Angeles, hosted and led the Los Angeles contingency as they gave a report to the General Conference about what was happening in their city. Jim, I believe, is the second most influential person in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Having been trained in the Gandhian method of active resistance and non-violence, he trained most of the children and freedom riders in the movement. I knew Jim over the years and we had done community organizing work together. When Jim and the Los Angeles contingency told the story of what was happening in Los Angeles, the General Conference Rules were suspended and we all listened. The Order of the Day was set aside for over an hour.

I remember having a restless night after hearing the report, wondering what we could do in terms of a proactive, systematic response to the social unrest in the wake of our cities spiraling downward. I feared that the UMC would offer a mere rhetorical response and continue with business as usual.

I drafted a proposal for creating a shalom zone in long-hand on paper and passed it by as many people as I could. It required some early morning caucusing with the Los Angeles contingency and others who care about cities and urban ministries. Before the first session of the day, the proposal had a lot of support.

As I said before, I was positioned directly in front of the chair as the last clergy to be seated. I was ready with my card to be raised at an appropriate time. The Presiding Bishop saw it right away and recognized me. I read what I had written out during the night and brokered with others in the early morning.

Many spoke in favor of the resolution and a few against it. The language of shalom was acceptable and supported. Specific actions were suggested. When the vote was taken, support for the motion and the concept behind it was overwhelming. Many of the Good News delegates understood shalom as a faithful, tangible, biblical response to violence and

injustice. It was one of the few times that the General Conference was able to make a bold decision with bipartisan support.

MJC: What was the basic idea or concept of a "shalom zone" and why was this term chosen?

BJS: I had done interfaith organizing in the 1960s to find common cause and saw some success with asset-based community development in Cincinnati. I also had studied the concept of "enterprise zones" proposed by the federal government in the early 1990s. I asked myself and others what the church could do as a faithful, distinctive, systematic response. We came up with the "shalom zone" concept by combining the rich biblical term "shalom" with the "enterprise zone" approach to community empowerment and development. Out of this mix and match came the concept of designating one square mile as a "shalom zone" for a multidisciplinary, multicultural, multi-faith response, engaging and utilizing all the sectors and assets of the community.

MJC: How did the initiative develop in the first few years?

BJS: Specific actions were proposed and taken in South Central, Los Angeles, where there was much social unrest. A shalom team was organized under the leadership of Bishop Felton May. We met with local congregations and community members and began to formulate a strategy that called for moving from concept to concrete realities. Specialized training emerged in asset-based community development, focused on economic and housing issues. We did some grassroots organizing. Still, it floundered for awhile. It was disappointing to watch it evolve into "kindness ministries" rather than justice work. I believe they should be carried out concurrently.

MJC: How much money was raised to fund shalom zones?

BJS: The Shalom initiative did not initially require any money, and we did not ask for any. It was tossed fairly quickly to the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) for administration and staffing, and then funds were needed. There was some resistance to the need for church funds but not to the idea of shalom. I feared the initiative might become institutionalized and wondered what the church would do with an out-of-the box idea. To some extent it got domesticated. To some extent it remained a movement.

MJC: Did you think the idea would catch on outside of LA and become a movement?

BJS: I knew other urban areas needed something like shalom zones. Many found the idea of taking on one square mile in city after city and systematically working for the total well-being of a community of shalom compelling. I knew there were those in every church and community who would come together if invited to the table. I thought it would look differently in other contexts. Common to all situations where shalom is active is people of good making a big difference. Amazing things can be done if it does not matter who gets the credit.

Mandate for first Shalom Zone, adopted by the General Conference, United Methodist Church, May 6, 1992:

"That in solidarity and consultation with the indigenous persons and local churches in a selected neighborhood, The United Methodist Church commits itself to the creation in Los Angeles of a Shalom Zone...with the hope that the Shalom Zone concept becomes a prototype for proactive ministry in other places."

(Continued on following page)

The Origins of Shalom (cont.)

(an interview with Bishop Joseph Sprague, conducted by Michael J. Christensen on April 1, 2008)

MJC: *Who were some of the shapers of Shalom?*

BJS: Bishop Felton May was the organizing bishop. Rev. Brandon Cho, a District Superintendent in Los Angeles, was particularly effective as a bridge builder to the Korean community and [helped] get the initiative moving. Rev. John Schol (now bishop) came on board early and was instrumental in the development of shalom zones nationally. He helped it be not just a church program but a prophetic initiative with a bold vision requiring coalitional effort to succeed. John and Felton were able to help local community coalitions tap into resources in the public and private sectors, address systemic issues, and rise above in-house squabbles. They restored the radicalism of Shalom and rescued it from the doldrums.

MJC: *What are your thoughts on the future development of shalom at Drew University Theological School?*

BJS: It seems like a good and right thing. GBGM has much programmatic work on its plate. Perhaps a seminary can manage the initiative well and have more freedom for movement and creativity in fundraising. Shalom ministry ought not to stand on institutional support but be rooted in the community and driven by the local church.

MJC: *What wisdom might you share for the new National Director of Communities of Shalom?*

BJS: William Stringfellow said if he was elected bishop in New York City, he would not do anything until he had knocked on a hundred tenement doors and listened to what the people had to say. Do a lot of listening before taking too much action. There is much wisdom in the grassroots.

What's in a Name? *Nicole H. Lemon*

Since its inception, the Shalom movement has been known as "Shalom Zones" and "Communities of Shalom." Given the negative implications of the word "zone," many have expressed their concerns about retaining the name "Shalom Zones." Historically, zoning laws have had negative consequences for less affluent communities, placing limitations on opportunities for growth and development. Nonetheless, the idea of "zones" in the context of Shalom ministry is worthy of preservation.

First, "Shalom Zones" is a name that honors the radicalism behind the Shalom movement. Bishop Sprague's interview reveals that the name "Shalom Zones" was an intentional indication that this movement would promote justice and peace in a radical manner. Second, I believe in the power of re-appropriation. In the 1960s, African Americans re-appropriated the word "black," changing its meaning from detestable to beautiful. The same can be done with the word "zones." Retaining the name "Shalom Zones" gives us the opportunity to honor our legacy and engage in an act of resistance against those who have relegated particular communities to poverty and despair. In the context of our ministry, "zones" are communities exercising their right to self-empowerment by manifesting the very growth and development zoning laws often have suppressed.

So what's in a name? In "Shalom Zones" there is reclamation and resistance, which signify the radicalism of the Shalom movement. This moment of transition is an opportune time to choose a name that speaks to who we have been and who we hope to become. Please join us in an online discussion on the Shalom name, brand, and logo at <http://communitiesofshalom.ning.com/forum>.

THE SHALOM ZONE By Michael J. Christensen



As the new National Director, I have visited several Shalom sites this year in Dallas, Los Angeles, Baltimore, Richmond, VA, Appalachia West Virginia, and Columbia, SC. When I meet Shalom Site Coordinators, I ask them to share with me a particular 'shalom moment' in which they experienced a spirit of peace, healing, harmony, or wholeness. When I visited Richmond, I met Rev. Marilyn Heckstall. Her Shalom team joined forces with other ministries in the community to address systemic racism and the need for racial reconciliation (see p. 2).

Shalom Ministry is the slow, determined, relational work of community organizing and development. Local congregations work with different sectors of a community toward transformation of the individual, the community, and the environment. Rev. Heckstall's ministry in Richmond exemplifies what makes Shalom distinctive: its focus on systemic and sustainable change.

ShalomZone Training equips local ministry teams with a six-point approach to community transformation, which can be remembered by an acronym formed by the letters of **SHALOM**:

S = systemic and sustainable change

H = healing, health, harmony, and wholeness

A = asset-based community development


L = love in action for peace and justice

O = organizing for direct action

M = multi-cultural, multi-faith collaboration

The **Shalom Resource Center** at Drew provides on-going training, technical assistance, and relational support to registered Shalom sites. For more information, visit us at Drew University, explore our website, or contact us at shalom@drew.edu. Please lend your support to this important ministry.

"Seek the shalom of the city where I have sent you...for in its shalom you will find your shalom." (Translation of Jer. 29:7)

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NATIONAL SHALOM COMMITTEE

Bishop John R. Schol, National Committee Chair	Dr. Maxine Clarke Beach, VP/Dean, Drew University
Rev. Tanya Bennett, Drew University	Rev. Ken P. Ehrman, Minnetonka UMC
Mr. Byrd Bonner, UMC Foundation, Inc.	Ms. Mary H. Gates, General Board of Global Ministries
Dr. Chris Boesel, Drew University	Rev. Robin Hynicka, Arch Street UMC
Rev. John Culp, General Board of Global Ministries	Rev. Pinckney V. Love, Jr., Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference
Rev. Christopher Cumbest, St. Paul UMC	Ms. Videte Bullock Mixon, General Board of Pension & Health Benefits
Dr. Morris Davis, Drew University	Mrs. Jerald L. Scott-McKie, General Board of Global Ministries

NATIONAL SHALOM TEAM

Michael J. Christensen, National Director	Nicole H. Lemon, Communications Coordinator & Editor, <i>ShalomNexus</i>
Will Dent, Senior Program Associate	Kevin Olds, National Staff Intern and Shalom webmaster
J-P Duncan, Senior Program Associate	Brian Schlemmer, National Staff Intern for Newark initiative
Robert J. Duncan, Jr., Consultant	Christian Ciobanu, National Staff Intern for Zimbabwe research

Shalom Events and Dates

April 25, 2008, 5:15pm

UMC General Conference

Shalom Reception

Fort Worth, TX

May 7-9, 2008

Accelerated Training,

Conference Coordinators

Xavier Retreat Center in NJ

July 6-11, 2008

Intensive Seminar,

Prophetic Leadership Development

Ocean Grove, NJ

July 11-12, 2008

National Shalom Committee Mtg.

Ocean Grove, NJ

