



WHAT'S AHEAD FOR Shalom@Drew?

By Michael Christensen

A celebration of Communities of Shalom took place on the evening of April 25 at a hall near the Fort Worth Convention Center, where the General Conference of the United Methodist Church was in session. The reception at the Ashton Depot—the refurbished train station in downtown Fort Worth—accommodated over 130 guests who enjoyed the program of music and testimonies marking the 15th anniversary of the initiative and the migration of Shalom to Drew Theological School. Hosted by Dean Maxine Beach, the festive evening featured social justice music by Mark Miller and the Drew Choir, remarks by Bishop Felton May, organizing bishop for Shalom, and Bishop John Schol, current national Shalom committee chair, and Sally Vonner, North Texas Conference Shalom coordinator. Michael Christensen, national director of the Communities of Shalom Initiative, made the following remarks about what's ahead for shalom at the reception at General Conference:

As the new National Director, I'm delighted to provide leadership to the Communities of Shalom initiative of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church, now in its 15th year. I feel called and drawn to shalom ministry for at least three reasons:

1. I love the original idea of “shalom zones” emerging from the social unrest in LA in 1992. To identify just four square blocks, or one square mile, or one particular neighborhood and work together toward shalom with all who live in the area is a compelling vision. It's about transforming the world one community at a time.

2. I'm challenged by the radical nature and prophetic spirit of shalom. Bishop Felton May's shalom ministry in Washington D.C.—organizing tent revivals for social justice, and recovery from addiction through personal transformation and community development—is right on the mark. The Shalom movement is radical, edgy, prophetic and unavoidably political in how it goes about spiritual and social transformation.

3. I'm convinced that for Communities of Shalom to succeed, it has to engage in systemic and sustainable change. Shalom is holistic in its mission of community transformation. Shalom is not content with band aids of relief, food for the hungry and a cup of cold water in Jesus' name. Shalom requires the slow, hard work of broad-base community organizing and sustainable community development. It may be initiated by a local church but not focused on the growth and development of the local church; the focus is on the health and welfare of the entire community.

Shalom requires the slow, hard work of *Systemic*, sustainable change, *Asset-based* community development, focused on *Health* and wholeness, motivated by *Love* for God, self and neighbor, requiring broad-based community *Organizing*, and working together *Multiculturally* with every

sector of the community for peace and renewal. And that spells: SHALOM.

What to expect from shalom@drew.edu in the future?

- Greater emphasis on the ecological implications of shalom, as suggested by the prophet Jeremiah's instructions to not only “build houses” but “plant gardens” (Jeremiah 29:7).

- Curriculum revisions of the classic ShalomZone Training that already has gone through a number of revisions and adaptations since 1992.

- New ecumenical and interfaith partners beyond the United Methodist Church while continuing to engage and empower local UM churches as initiators and catalysts for shalom ministry.

Photo courtesy of Michael Christensen



Communities of Shalom booth offers free coffee and friendly chats to General Conference delegates

Together, we want to fulfill the mission and vision of shalom: to seek the peace of the city where we have been sent, until all the world experiences shalom. As community developer Bob Lupton puts it, shalom is about transforming the world one community at a time:

“Can you imagine neighborhoods with secure streets, healthy relationships, effective and affirming schools, clean air, and a thriving local economy? Can you picture neighbors sharing meals together, children laughing and playing freely, and the elderly being valued, honored and cared for as the norm in our communities? Can you fathom vibrant churches in every neighborhood being beacons of light and hope because of their deep concern for the well being of all community residents, not just their members? Can you envision people being drawn to the love and power of God because of the clear witness of Christians fully committed to Jesus Christ?”

Communities of Shalom exist to co-create with God this kind of world. And to this end, we are bold to pray, as Jesus did: “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Amen.