

Drew Theological School to Be New Home Of United Methodist "Shalom" Initiative

New York, NY/Madison, NJ, Oct., 23, 2007—The Drew University Theological School Madison, New Jersey, will be the new home base for Communities of Shalom, a United Methodist program that engages congregations and communities in working together for community development, peace, and wholeness.

The General Board of Global Ministries has administered the Shalom Initiative for 15 years in collaboration with the National Shalom Committee. Global Ministries is the denomination's international mission agency. Drew University is a United Methodist-related institution. Its Theological School is one of the denomination's 13 seminaries. Drew will support and develop Shalom as a national network, and Global Ministries will continue as a partner, providing significant funding for the next two years..

The new partnership was announced jointly by Bishop John Schol of Washington, DC, chair of the National Shalom Committee, and Dr. Maxine Beach, vice president and dean of Drew Theological School. The new arrangement goes into effect in January 2008.

Communities of Shalom was launched by the policy-making General Conference of The United Methodist Church as a response to social unrest and riots in Los Angeles in 1992. It has expanded to more than 200 sites, mostly in the United States; two sites are in Africa. "Shalom" is the Hebrew word indicating peace, harmony, and well-being.

Both Bishop Schol and Dean Beach termed the new relationship "exciting" and mutually beneficial for the Shalom sites and for the seminary.

"A partnership with Drew University and the Theological School will give the Shalom movement legs well into the future as it transforms congregations and communities," said

General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church

475 Riverside Drive,
New York, NY 10115

Contact: Elliott Wright
Tel: 212/870-3921

email: ewright@gbgm-umc.org



*Michael J. Christensen, Ph.D.
Image by: Drew University*

the bishop, adding, "Shalom has achieved results that far surpassed anyone's expectations over the past 15 years. This new partnership will further enhance the initiative and multiply the results over the next 15 years."

Dean Beach said, "We are excited that our faculty and students will now have access to the lessons that are stored in these committed communities. Our curriculum is rich with courses that teach of social injustice and increased sensitivity to the marginalized, but we have often lacked ways to give students and faculty opportunities to work with ministries that act out of these convictions."

As the new "national partner" in Shalom, the Drew Theological School will assume major responsibility for the human and financial resources required to sustain the initiative, which will become part of its curriculum and training resources in preparation for parish and community ministry. The seminary already has strong commitments in the areas of social justice, multicultural collaboration, and faith-in-action, which factored in its selection by the National Committee.

Dr. Michael J. Christensen, a Drew faculty member and director of the Doctor of Ministry program, will become the new Shalom director. He has extensive experience in community development, disaster response and emergency relief, urban ministry, community health, and human rights advocacy. He holds the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree from Drew and teaches in the area of spirituality and practical theology. Dean Beach called Christensen "the right person" to assume the leadership of Shalom.

Drew was selected through a process of competitive applications guided by the National Shalom Committee.

Communities of Shalom has four goals:

- Renewing the spirit of God in congregations and communities,
- Developing the shared prosperity and economies of communities,
- Strengthening relationships among diverse neighbors, and
- Improving community health care and delivery of community services.

Shalom emerged from floor action at the 1992 General Conference, in session only days after violence erupted in Los Angeles when a jury acquitted police officers who were caught on videotape beating motorist Rodney King while he was in custody and handcuffed.

United Methodists in other parts of the United States resonated to the concept of congregations or clusters of churches, often in ecumenical or interfaith configurations, organizing to achieve peaceful, hopeful, and economically secure communities. The national office of Shalom has provided seed grants, training, and technical consultation, all funded by World Service, the basic central fund of The United Methodist Church.

"There was never any thought that the General Conference would fund Shalom in perpetuity," said Jerald McKie, head of the Global Ministries unit in which the program has been lodged since the mid-1990s. "The idea has always been that of Shalom finding its way into the life and texture of our denomination and ecumenical partners." Ms. McKie is associate general secretary of the mission board in charge of community and institutional ministries.

The full texts of the statements by Bishop Schol and Dean Beach follow:

Bishop John Schol:

This is an exciting day for the Shalom Initiative. A partnership with Drew University and the Theological School will give the Shalom movement legs well into the future to transform congregations and communities. The General Board of Global Ministries has guided the Shalom initiative to achieve miraculous results. Its commitment to rebirth Shalom into a self-sustaining initiative is an act of Gospel courage and a model for how ministry can become self-sustaining.

The Community of Shalom sites across the United States and around the world will be enriched through this new partnership with Drew University. They will benefit from quality training and new funding streams. Shalom has achieved results that far surpassed anyone's expectations over the past 15 years. This new partnership will further enhance the initiative and multiply the results over the next 15 years.

Dean Maxine Beach:

Drew Theological School is excited about this partnership with the National Shalom Committee and the General Board of Global Ministries. The Shalom initiative has an incredible history of working with the churches and agencies that are positioned to bring transformation to communities. We are excited that our faculty and students will now have access to the lessons that are stored in these committed communities. Our curriculum is rich with courses that teach of social injustice and increased sensitivity to the marginalized, but we have often lacked the ways to give students and faculty opportunities to work with ministries that act out of these convictions.

Our commitment to community organization, to advocacy, and to an understanding of violence and abuse is seen not only in our curriculum but in dozens of Drew Doctor of Ministry projects. Shalom gives us a way to bring new energy to the training and networking that has always been a part of this strategy. We are delighted that we had the right person already

here to become the new national director in Dr. Michael Christensen, who has been director of our Doctor of Ministry program. We all look forward to continuing to work with those who have stayed committed to seeking "shalom" in the Board of Global Ministries and the National Committee under the strong leadership of Bishop John Schol.