

Shalom Zones come to Drew; Cal-Nevada's Dr. Michael Christensen to direct

Written: 12/28/2007

Beginning in January, Drew University will be the new home base for the *Communities of Shalom* initiative – a grassroots, faith-based, community development program designed to empower churches and communities to bring harmony, peace, prosperity, health, and wholeness to their neighborhoods and communities. It currently consists of a network of 200+ Shalom sites in the U.S.A. and Africa. Previously coordinated by the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church, these community transformation sites, often referred to as “Shalom Zones,” now will be resourced by the Theological School of Drew University in collaboration with the National Shalom Committee and the General Board of Global Ministries.



[enlarge>>](#)

Dr. Michael J. Christensen. Drew University photo.

Drew was chosen as the new National Partner of *Communities of Shalom* following a competitive six-month application process. The new partnership was announced jointly in October by Bishop John Schol of the Baltimore-Washington D.C. Annual Conference and chair of the National Shalom Committee, and Dr. Maxine Beach, vice president and dean of Drew Theological School (see news release http://gbgm-umc.org/global_news/pr.cfm?articleid=4707).

Dean Beach said that the Drew community will benefit greatly from the partnership. “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,” she said in the news release.

According to Bishop Schol, Drew was chosen as the new National Partner of the Shalom Initiative for three reasons: 1) Drew’s passion for the project; 2) Drew’s capacity and commitment to support the initiative long term; and 3) Drew identified project leadership with expertise in community development. “The partnership will give the Shalom movement legs well into the future to transform congregations and communities. 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,” the bishop added.

Dr. [Michael J. Christensen](#), a clergy member of the California-Nevada Annual Conference and Director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Drew since 1996, was named as the National Director of the *Communities of Shalom* initiative and will assume responsibilities for the new position on January 1, 2008. Dr. Carl Savage, currently Associate Director, will become interim Director, and a search for the position of Director will be conducted in Fall 2008.

In addition to his administrative and teaching experience at Drew in the area of spirituality and practical theology, Dr. Christensen has expertise in urban ministry, disaster response, international community development, and community mental health. Most recently, he designed and implemented a psycho-social training program for Chernobyl victims in Ukraine and a pastoral and congregational care training program in response to HIV/AIDS in Malawi, Africa.

The *Shalom* initiative at Drew will offer training, consultation, relational support, and student internships in support of the growing international network of Shalom sites. What this means for the Drew community, according to Dr. Christensen, is that there will be “many new active learning sites for prophetic ministry, social justice and community development in and beyond the local church.”

Beyond developing ministry relationships with churches and community organizations, the *Shalom* initiative also lets Drew relate to the General Conference and Annual Conferences of the United Methodist Church “with our best foot forward – our social justice and prophetic witness work in the world,” according to Dr. Christensen. Shalom also connects directly with Drew President Robert Weisbuch’s call for University-wide civic engagement and interfaith involvement in culture and conflict in the world today.

The *Communities of Shalom* initiative has four core values and goals:

- Revealing the spirit of God at work in congregations and communities,
- Developing shared economic prosperity in communities,
- Strengthening multicultural relationships among diverse neighbors, and
- Improving community health care and delivery of community services.

Shalom emerged from floor action at the 1992 General Conference of the United Methodist Church, 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.

For more information on *Communities of Shalom*, including summer internships, visit www.communitiesofshalom.org or contact Dr. Christensen at shalom@drew.edu.