

National team brings shalom to communities around globe

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The Rev. John Culp (left) discusses Shalom Zone work with Bishop John Schol during a March meeting of the National Shalom Committee in Philadelphia. Culp, of South Carolina, is a new member of the committee. Schol, who leads the church's Washington Area, is chairman of the group. A Shalom Zone is a geographic area where churches collaborate with community organizations, businesses, institutions and residents to transform the conditions that affect people's lives—to change negative forces within the community to positive actions for shalom, or peace. A UMNS photo by Suzy Keenan. Photo #05-xxx. Accompanies



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The Rev. John Culp (left) discusses Shalom Zone work with Bishop John Schol.

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By Suzy Keenan*

PHILADELPHIA (UMNS)—The United Methodist Church's Shalom Zone ministries would have impressed Methodism's 18th century founder, according to church leaders.

"I think John Wesley would have liked Shalom," said the Rev. John Culp, referring to the Communities of Shalom initiative, as the National Shalom Committee reviewed the ministry March 30-31.

Culp, a South Carolina pastor and new committee member, was impressed with Shalom's biblical emphasis and its results in congregations and communities across the United States and in Zimbabwe and Ghana.

Today, more than 300 Shalom ministries work to transform negative forces within their communities into positive actions for shalom, or peace. Their focuses include spiritual renewal, economic development, health, healing and strengthening race, class and cultural relationships.

"Urban and rural communities alike have embraced Shalom goals and principles," said Bishop John R. Schol, who leads the denomination's Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference. "Shalom brings the church into the community and the community into the church. Shalom is scriptural, and it's the way in which we live out the Wesleyan principle that the world is our parish. For this reason, Shalom is truly timeless."

The Communities of Shalom initiative was organized through the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries. The national committee, led by Schol, gathered in Philadelphia to assess its progress and set goals and direction for the next four years.



A UMNS file photo by Larry Hygh

A mural, 'A Beacon of Hope,' graces a wall at the Rakestraw Community Education Center in South Central Los Angeles, the site of a Shalom Zone.

A 92-foot mural titled 'A Beacon of Hope' graces an outside wall at the Rakestraw Community Education Center in South Central Los Angeles in this 2002 file photo. The center is one of several Shalom Zones in the city. A Shalom Zone is a geographic area where churches collaborate with community organizations, businesses, institutions and

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The initiative took root at the 1992 General Conference, following the acquittal of four white Los Angeles police officers in the beating of black motorist Rodney King. Schol recalled that, as fires from street violence burned in South Central Los Angeles, General Conference business halted and delegates prayed and fasted for the Lord's vision of hope. The Communities of Shalom was born out of that prayer and fasting.

"Access to affordable, decent housing, to a living wage, to good schools and education, to health care, to creative outlets—these are what makes your community livable; all these things are Shalom," said the Rev. Robin Hynicka, a team member and former director of the Frankford Group Ministry, one of more than 300 communities of Shalom in 44 annual conferences around the world.

To observe a model community of Shalom, 14 members of the national team visited the Frankford Group Ministry, located in the working-class neighborhood of Frankford and surrounding areas in lower Northeast Philadelphia.

The ministry, now directed by the Rev. Catherine Bowers, unites four United Methodist congregations in ministry. Some of their programs include youth leadership development, partnering with the Frankford Community Development Corp. to build affordable housing, and working with a Muslim association to create community celebrations of diverse cultures and faiths. The ministry also has brought back nearly \$1 million into the hands of low-income residents by helping them take advantage of the Earned Income Tax Credit on their income-tax returns.

"In keeping with the United Methodist Igniting Ministry campaign, Communities of Shalom open doors for people to come in, but also open the doors of our churches for us to walk out into our immediate community, so we are in partnership in creating a more whole community," Hynicka said. "This makes for a more whole congregation as well."

The Rev. Dorothy Watson Tatem (red hat) addresses the National Shalom Committee during its March 30-31 meeting in Philadelphia. She is director of urban and global ministries for the United Methodist Church's Eastern Pennsylvania Annual (regional) Conference. A UMNS photo by Suzy Keenan. Photo #05-309. Accompanies UMNS story #231, 4/18/05



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The Rev. Dorothy Watson Tatem (red hat) addresses the National Shalom Committee during its Philadelphia meeting.

The team reviewed established goals for Communities of Shalom based on the Old Testament concept of the shalom community from Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7, and the New Testament understanding of the kingdom of God. Those goals are to renew the spirit of God in the church and the community; develop the prosperity and economy of communities; strengthen race, class and cultural relationships; and improve community health care and coordination of social services.

Principles for establishing Shalom in communities are based on proven strategies: witnessing to the transforming power of God through community action; focusing on church and community strengths rather than problems; working with churches, businesses, community organizations, residents and governmental agencies; and addressing the systems that create poverty.

The committee identified objectives to:

- Strengthen Shalom sites by evaluating and updating resources, including goals and strategies, training programs and manuals, conference coordinator manuals, grants and summits, as well as re-energizing sites.
- Strengthen the partnership among the general church/National Shalom Committee, annual conferences and local sites.
- Identify and resource the staff for general oversight and administration of the Shalom Initiative, local training, conference coordinators and the Community Investment Foundation.
- Develop a financial plan for greater self-sufficiency.

"The Shalom movement has made great progress during the last 12 years, as well as tested different ideas for resourcing and staffing," Schol said. "It is clear that we must build on our past and identify how the Shalom movement will equip and maintain Shalom sites for the future."

More details are available from Deanna Martinez, Board of Global Ministries, at (212) 870-3711 or dmartine@gbgm-umc.org.

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