

National Shalom Committee Meets and Affirms the Foundation of Communities of Shalom Training

by Barbara Wheeler

The National Shalom Committee of The United Methodist Church continues to emphasize the importance of living into the principles of Shalom that have been the foundation of the Communities of Shalom movement, which began 13 years ago. The committee gathered in Baltimore, Md. March 31-April 1.

Under the direction of the chairperson, Bishop John R. Schol of the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference, the committee reflected on the impact Communities of Shalom are having on the Gulf Coast in the wake of the 2005 hurricanes, and in other communities across the world.

As the committee met, efforts of relief, recovery and rebuilding continue on the Gulf Coast. The DeLisle Shalom Community, Pass Christian, Miss. and H.A. Brown/Faith in Community Ministries Community of Shalom, Wiggins, Miss. have contributed to these efforts and exemplify principles of collaboration and faith in action as volunteers visit the region and work with local neighbors to rebuild. In New Orleans the First Street Community of Shalom works with the community to re-envision its mission in a neighborhood transformed by the hurricanes. National Committee member Rev. Chris Cumbest has been appointed by the Mississippi Annual Conference to serve as the Coordinator of Church Recovery on the Gulf Coast.

While in Baltimore, the National Committee visited a local Community of Shalom in the neighborhood of Mt. Winans United Methodist Church. The Mt. Winans Community of Shalom offers programs and resources to a community that is challenged by poverty and gentrification. Many neighbors live with addictions to drugs, alcoholism, or HIV/AIDS. Mt. Winans works in partnership with Hesed Ministries (a drug and alcohol addiction recovery assistance program), Baltimore City Schools, the Department for Juvenile Services, and other local congregations.

See related story "The City of the Living"

Mt. Winans is a small church in south Baltimore, and located next to the city's oldest African American cemetery often called "The City of the Dead". There is hope and life in the Mt. Winans congregation and Community of Shalom. Over 160 people regularly attend worship services. The church is open six days a week. There are regular health workshops and health screenings held at the church.

Rev. Dr. Patricia Johnson is the pastor at Mt Winans. She shared with the National Shalom Committee that this was one of the first communities to complete Shalom training in the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference 12 years ago. "Training is the most powerful tool in the world," Rev. Johnson said.

Communities of Shalom Training is based on four principles:

1. Faith in Action
2. Asset Based Community Development
3. Collaboration
4. Systemic Change

Communities across the United States continue to receive training from local Shalom coordinators and consultants. Communities of Shalom commit to work in partnership as congregations, nonprofit organizations, community leaders, and other groups while following the Shalom principles. The National Shalom Committee is equally committed to expanding the number of sites that will be trained, and also offering more technical assistance in the form of consultation and funding.

The Communities of Shalom program area of Global Ministries will partner with the North Central Jurisdiction's Urban Network and Town and Country Network to host an education and networking event in January 2007. The theme of the event will be "Living into Shalom" and focus on the theology of Shalom and also practical ways to practice that theology.