

## **National Shalom Committee and New Staff Move Forward the Vision of a United Methodist Movement**

In September the National Shalom Committee of the United Methodist Church gathered to plan the future growth of Communities of Shalom and specifically discussed community redevelopment concerns that have been raised in the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Communities of Shalom, a community development initiative of the United Methodist Church, was a response to the conditions that impelled, and the aftermath of the Los Angeles rioting in 1992. The Shalom Movement today addresses four areas: community development, eradicating racism, congregational development, and health and healing.

Community development that includes congregations, local nonprofit organizations and community leaders can be transformative. Resources and strengths exist in every community. With intentional nurture resources will increase and strengths will grow stronger.

The Communities of Shalom Program shares a vision of revitalized neighborhoods and engaged congregations together with urban, rural and suburban partners that seek renewal. Partners gain awareness and familiarity with their neighborhood and build relationships with among neighbors. Other communities face crises, whether a natural disaster or the daily struggle with social injustice, that move a community to seek wholeness in the midst of brokenness. Communities of Shalom face these realities with a faith-based approach to community development.

Communities of Shalom are built on four principles:

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

With these principles in mind, groups are trained to recognize neighborhoods' strengths. Communities then develop a plan that will encourage growth and development. Communities of Shalom commit to work together as a partnership of congregations, nonprofit organizations, community members, and other groups who are vested in building strong and diverse relationships. Communities of Shalom also recognize that there are underlying policies and systems that block people from creating equitable relationships. Through community organizing strategies, neighbors can work together to seek change.

Communities of Shalom is an initiative of the United Methodist Church coordinated through the General Board of Global Ministries, and in consultation with the National Shalom Committee. Bishop John R. Schol of the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference and the committee chairperson said, "Shalom Communities around the world

are making a difference as they organize disciples for the transformation of the world." He added, "Today we, as United Methodists, have a unique opportunity to engage congregations in an adventure of bringing hope, healing and development in the community and the church."

The National Committee hopes that the recent tragedies of hurricanes Katrina and Rita will be a turning point. This is an opportunity for community groups to empower themselves to address systemic issues. The committee's goal is to provide a supportive environment for this to flourish. Specifically, training for new Communities of Shalom is planned for 2006, and grants available for new and revitalized communities.

The Communities of Shalom program has as new staff person who will be coordinating training and development. Barbara Wheeler began as the program associate with the Communities of Shalom program in August. Wheeler was most recently assigned to serve in the Mission Personnel Unit of GBGM as the Missionary in Residence for Young Adult Programs.

Wheeler was a US-2 missionary from 2001-2003 in Jackson, Miss. at Bethlehem Center, Inc., a National Mission Institution of the United Methodist Church. While in Jackson, Bethlehem Center Inc. and other community organizations were beginning their Communities of Shalom training.

"The model of partnership and inter-faith coalition building that Communities of Shalom embodies is a powerful vehicle for social change," Wheeler said. "A Community of Shalom exists at a level of collaboration that encourages churches, community organizations and others to gather strength from each other's gifts and skills to work for the community good."

Barbara Wheeler received a B.A. in communications/journalism from Shippensburg University, Shippensburg, Pa. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in nonprofit management at the Milano School of Urban Policy and Nonprofit Management, New School University, New York, NY