



M inistering Together

“News, comments and events of concern to the religious community”

The Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County

February 2009

Coming Events

❖ Welcoming the Stranger

Wednesday, February 4, 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
St. Patrick's Catholic Church
756 Mission St., San Francisco

This FAITHS Program event will highlight the latest immigration issues and how faith communities can support immigrant communities. Ana Perez and Antonio Cube will provide the keynote address. Attendance is free and breakfast will be served. For more information, or to register, contact Kristi Laughlin at Kristi@workingeastbay.org or 510-893-7106 ext. 314.

❖ Workshop on Religion and Human Rights

Thursday, February 5, 7:30 p.m.
Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology
2301 Vine St., Berkeley

Panelists will include Judge John T. Noonan, Imam Faheem Shuaibe, Rabbi Menachem Creditor, Rev. Hilary Martin and Dr. Rita Maran. For more information, contact mfarina@dspt.edu. The Interfaith Council is a co-sponsor of this event.

❖ Gaza: Myths vs. Facts

Sunday, February 8, 2:30 p.m.
Orinda Community Church
10 Irwin Way, Orinda

Speakers will be Prof. Hisham Ahmed of St. Mary's College and Dr. Paul Larudee of the Free Gaza Movement. The is sponsored by the Middle East Study Group. For more information, contact 925-228-5746.

❖ Interfaith Council Benefit Concert

Sunday, February 22, 3:00 p.m.
St. Ignatius of Antioch Catholic Church
3351 Contra Loma Blvd., Antioch

Come to enjoy music offered by individuals and choirs, as well as Sufi Dances of Universal Peace, in celebration of our diversity and unity in faith. There will be a free-will offering. For more information, or if your choir would like to participate, contact Brian Stein-Webber at eye4cee@aol.com or 925-285-7256.

❖ Relevant Ecumenism: Input from Earliest Christianity

Monday, February 23, 6:00 p.m.
University of San Francisco, Xavier Hall
Parker and Golden Gate Aves., San Francisco

Dr. Elsa Tamez of the Latin American Biblical University in Costa Rica will be the presenter for this year's Paul Wattson Lecture. The public is cordially invited. There is no charge, but donations toward the support of the program will be accepted. More information is available at 415-422-5200.

❖ Health Care Activist Training

Friday (7:00 to 9:30 p.m.)
to Saturday (10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.), March 6-7
Hillside Community Church
1422 Navellier St., El Cerrito

The West County Health Care for All and the Green Party of El Cerrito invite you to this two-day training for those who want to become informed activists for healthcare change. A \$5 donation is requested. Snacks, Saturday lunch and hand-outs are provided. To register, or for more information, contact 510-526-0972.

❖ Update on the Middle East

Sunday, March 1, 2:00 p.m.
Clayton Valley Presbyterian Church
1578 Kirker Pass, Clayton

Carol Dolezal Ng will make a presentation on the politics of the Middle East. Dessert and discussion will follow. For more information, contact normadelcia@comcast.com.

❖ World Day of Prayer

Friday, March 6, 10:00 a.m.
Hillcrest Congregational Church
404 Gregory Ln., Pleasant Hill

Church Women United invites all men and women of faith to observe World Day of Prayer. The prayer service was written by women of Papua New Guinea and will allow us to learn about their many cultures and social challenges, including worsening violence against women and children and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. For childcare or other information, please call Evelyn Ternstrom at (925) 279-4301.

Director's Letter

Dear friends,

The day of the inauguration of President Barack Obama is still fresh in my mind a week later. So many people have spoken of their impressions, their feelings, their analysis, and I dare to add my own words. Simply put, it was marvelous.



American president, but also the first clearly mixed-race president, and, from a personal standpoint, the first president younger than me!

President Obama is eloquent, thoughtful, transparent, open-hearted, consultative and careful. He loves this country and its people.

The crowd at our Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration the day before provided a forecast: good cheer and feelings of unity and joint purpose. Rev. Leslie Takahashi-Morris' tag-line in her keynote speech was taken from one of Dr. King's publications — "Where do we go from here?" Those present were saying, "Toward greater justice, compassion, and cooperation in addressing the many serious issues facing the world."

He takes its challenges seriously. My friend, Jean Harris, gave me a copy of his first autobiographical book, *Dreams of My Father*, and I was struck at Obama's genuine abilities to reflect and communicate on vital human issues and experience. For those who say they don't know what kind of person he is or how he intends to rule, I recommend reading what he has already put out there!

My family visited Washington, D.C. a few years ago, and remember the great expanse of the national mall. In particular, our legs recall the distances we covered on foot, from museums to archives to monuments. So even though you could get all that visiting crowd into one picture (at least from the Capitol Building to the Washington Monument), it was difficult for us to imagine the great mass of people who were actually gathered there. The estimates were somewhere about 1.5 million people, but I wonder if that includes the hundreds of thousands that were not able to make it through security checkpoints in time.

It is possible that I am being taken up by the excitement of the moment, and that hard political realities will soon set in. But I am more than happy to be taken in by a plea to allow mutual love to overcome fear, to be united rather than separated, to rely on the power of honesty and good will.

I know the US voting population is not in agreement with how to conduct our nation's affairs, and the two-plus-party system is in no danger of becoming outmoded. But I was struck with the widespread enthusiasm for inaugurating not only the first African-

The most tearful moment of the morning was when the quartet was playing John Williams' arrangement of *Simple Gifts*. The music was wondrous enough without Yo-Yo Ma's beatific presiding and Ytzhak Perlman's inspired tones. But really got me were the words that went along with the music—"When true simplicity is gained, to bow and to bend we will not be ashamed." THIS is what I have been waiting for, that our nation might be led by someone willing to listen, and engage, and consider that true wisdom might be possessed by the whole lot of us together, working together, ministering together.



Transitions

Welcome to **the Rev. John Ridenour**, who has come to serve as pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Concord.

Farewell to **Bishop Allen Vigneron**, who is leaving the Oakland Roman Catholic Diocese to become Archbishop of Detroit. He writes to his flock: "Our Lady's fiat, her 'yes' to the message from God which the Archangel Gabriel brought her is the template for every disciple's response to learning God's will. In accepting this assignment, I have tried to imitate Our Lady. Please pray for me: that the same trust which brought me to this Diocese and sustained me in my ministry here, will be my support in the sadness of our goodbyes and in taking up the new responsibilities God is giving me."

Congratulations to **the Rev. Gail Doering**, who was called from Temporary Supply Pastor to [regular] pastor at Clayton Valley Presbyterian Church.

Best wishes to **Justin McCarthy**, who has left Most Holy Theotokos Hermitage and is now the principal consultant for Crane Consulting, 925-300-7692.



We are going to have a party in June! On June 16th of this year, it will have been forty years since I began to work with young people. Time certainly flies, whether one is having fun or not. But, to employ a colloquial phrase from the past: I have had a *BLAST!!* When I began to work with youth in June, 1969, I was between five and ten years older than those with whom I sought to teach, to guide and to counsel. Now, of course, I am thirty-five to forty years older than the kids I encounter in this extraordinary setting.

Truly a blessing, this most remarkable journey has been. Nevertheless, I clearly remember a question I asked God those forty years ago, “Lord, what have you gotten me into?” The question is still asked in frequent conversations with God, even these many years later. From a most faithful God, the answer is always swift, decisive and unambiguous.

I shared in this space several months ago the story of an encounter with a young man in juvenile hall whose father was one among 150 of my day campers in San Francisco forty years ago. When that piece was written, the kid’s father and I had yet to become re-acquainted. In mid-December we were able to sit down over a meal, reminisce a bit and discuss his son’s future following release from custody. As we discussed the past I was at a distinct disadvantage because I still did not, and do not, remember him or much about him at the time. Yet, surprisingly, he remembered me. The kind and polite gentleman now approaching middle age, spoke of pleasant fun-filled times in programs I administered when he was in elementary school. He has asked that I continue to work with his seventeen-year-old son. The Psalmist writes: “Come and see what God has done.” (Ps. 66:5a) NRSV

Six months ago, I received a telephone call from a person who identified himself as a student of mine some twenty-five years ago at Contra Costa College. Remembering nothing about the caller, he was asked how he found me. “Over the internet,” was the response. My thought, though not expressed to him was an emphatic, “WHY?” The caller, whom I still only vaguely remembered, spoke about people and events of a quarter century ago. He had seen a news-

paper article last spring. He wanted to find out if the person profiled in the article was the same person who took time for him when he was eighteen years old. Those times were, he told me, special for him. Although he was a bit disturbed that I did not remember him, we will get together sometime in the near future... “Come and see what God has done.”

Very recently while placing items for purchase on the checkout conveyor in a local store, the clerk asked, “Aren’t you Reverend Tinsley? I met you in juvenile hall when I was fourteen...” The much larger face was slightly familiar. He spoke briefly about recollections of initial conversations we had when he was in custody, eight years ago. We shall get together soon to discuss, among other things, tattoo removal. Someone is growing up... “Come and see what God has done.”

This ministry, in its fifteenth year, represents the longest tenure and the most defining illustration of the work to which God has called me. It seems clear, even as described in the few vignettes above, that God has indeed richly blessed the activities of the past forty years. What a tremendous honor and privilege it has been to serve God’s people in a variety of settings and in unique and special ways. Thank God for the opportunity and for “what God has gotten me into!”

So, truly when we come together to celebrate in June, foremost, we shall all “Make a joyful noise to God.” We will, “sing the glory of God’s name; give to God glorious praise.” We will, “say to God, ‘How awesome are your deeds!’” And together all those, precious ones of God, assembled with me, wherever the venue, will rejoice and shout, “Come and see what God has done: God is awesome in God’s deeds among mortals.” (Ps. 66:1a, 2, 3a, 5)

Blessed be God, because God has not rejected my prayer or removed God’s steadfast love from me. (Ps. 66:20)

Rev. Dr. Charles Tinsley
Juvenile Detention Chaplain

■Dr. Amer Araim, Dar-ul-Islam Mosque, Concord

The Beginning of the Islamic New Year

On Sunday, December 28, 2008 Muslims observed the beginning of the Islamic new year, which is called *Hijra* (migration). The Prophet Muhammad preached and invited the people of Mecca to the new religion, which was a continuation of the message of all other prophets and messengers before. He called on the people of Mecca to follow the commands of Allah (God) as conveyed to him by the Archangel Gabriel. However, they inflicted harm and persecuted him and his followers. Allah ordered the Prophet to go to Medina. The Prophet, though knowing that he would be protected by Allah, left Mecca without declaring his new destiny. Only few people knew about this mission. It was narrated that the Prophet, who was called the trusted and the truthful person, used to have with him all the valuables of the people of Mecca. Despite the harm caused to him by them, he gave all these valuables to his son-in-law Ali and asked him to return those valuables to their owners.

When arriving in Medina, the people welcomed the prophet and everyone invited him to his house. There were two tribes which had been fighting each other for long time. Both tribes became Muslims and stopped their fighting. Many other Muslims of Mecca, upon hearing that the Prophet arrived in Medina, began joining him. However they arrived in Medina without wealth. The people of Medina provided them with shelter and shared with them their wealth.

The first month of the Islamic calendar is called *Muharam*, which means that fighting and killing is prohibited on this month. On the tenth day of this month, the Jews in Medina used to fast to celebrate the occasion of Prophet Moses crossing the sea and Allah's miracle to save him from the Pharaoh. As expression of thanks to Allah, the Prophet Muhammad decided to fast (this was part of the tradition of monotheism) and Muslims everywhere (including this writer) fast to follow the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad and to affirm the unity of the religion.

■Tre Essa Palmeri, Liturgy Coordinator St. Bonaventure Catholic Church

Prepare the Way of the Lord

So, how are you preparing the way of the Lord? Both Isaiah and John the Baptist tell us that we should straighten the roads, fill in the valleys and level the mountains. I don't know about you, but I don't have a bulldozer or blasting caps in my tool shed. Besides, I really like variety in the landscape. I am sure that I would get bored looking over flat land everyday. And does anyone else think that

Interstate 5 to Los Angeles is one of those roads you could travel on auto-pilot? What are they really wanting us to do? And what gifts do I have that compare to TNT or bulldozers?

How about this? The road that needs to be made straight is the path to our heart and those mountains and valleys are really metaphors for the gaps and blocks that get in the way of our relationship with God and one another. They might be fear or negative past experiences. Maybe it is prejudice or mistrust or poor judgment that is hindering or hurting our relationships. Whatever the cause, preparing the way of the Lord means coming to grips with these gaps and blocks, and finding a way to re-center our lives on God.

How do we accomplish this? By using the gifts of repentance, forgiveness and peace. When we recognize our own failings, receive God's forgiveness and realize the peace that comes from living in right relationship with him, then we are able to look at our relationships with others in a new light. We can forgive past hurts, ask others for forgiveness for times we have hurt them and then re-establish connections of family and friendship.

Keeping God as the center of our lives allows us to see the world through his eyes. We see the value of everyone and the blessings of life. We can not help but be kinder, more generous in helping others through giving of ourselves. We are more committed to justice and peace. By the actions of our daily life using the gifts we have been given, we are creating a world that is based on gospel principles.

What if we took just one gift that God has given us - the gift of peace - and cultivate it in our hearts each day? What if the power of that peace in us helped diffuse anxiety everywhere we go? What if it eased the burdens of everyone we encountered?

The way of the Lord is prepared not with stones that pave a new road, bulldozers that move earth or TNT that can level mountains, but with hearts whose faith has created a welcome for him, hearts that have turned from all else to God.

■Rabbi Alissa Forest Temple Isaiah, Lafayette

There is rarely a week that goes by that I don't get a phone call from a parent concerned about the challenges their daughter or son is facing at school, with friends, or in their own parent/child interactions. We can all recall the joys and pains of our teenage years. I don't even need to list them. Somehow each of us made it through! But now we find ourselves in equaling challenging roles as the parents, teachers, and rabbis of teenagers. We ask ourselves one again. "Will I really survive the teenage years?"

The answer is "YES!" The real question is "How?" In this

short *Ruach* article, I cannot possibly provide all the answers. But I can begin the conversation. Recently I read Rosalind Wiseman's book, "Queen Bees and Wannabes," the basis for the movie "Mean Girls." In the book, Wiseman explains that the key rights of passages (a. k. a. difficult situations) a teenage girl goes through (e. g., getting an invitation to an exclusive party...or getting left off the guest list, her first break-up with a friend, or the first time she dresses up for a party in the latest style) are not only critical milestones for her, they are also rights of passages for the parent. We have been there, we know how it feels and are ready to jump in to help our teenagers so they don't have to experience the same hardships.

But it is through the experience of navigating those challenging situations, Wiseman explains, that our teens learn who they are and how to survive in this sometimes difficult world. We need to limit our involvement. "Your daughter [or son] needs to know that you're watching her back, but she also needs to know that you have confidence in her to take care of herself," Wiseman explains. "Your role as a parent is to communicate your values and ethics on the subject, help your daughter [or son] clarify her own, and teach her how to communicate her boundaries to others and act on her principles." No easy task.

A central concept in Jewish mysticism is the principle of *tsimtsum*. Jewish mystics explain that God's presence originally filled the entire universe. In order to allow room for the world to exist, and then later for human free choice and responsibility, God had to withdraw or contract from the universe. *Tsimtsum* means "contraction" of divine energy." Wendy Mogel, author of *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*, explains that at first God remained close to God's new creatures - liberating them from Egypt, providing manna in the desert, revealing the commandments at Sinai - but over time, God started to retreat in order to leave humans to their own devices. Working closely with teenagers and their parents, I agree with Mogel, that the principle of *tsimtsum* can be a guide for working with teenagers. Just as God contracted from the world to allow humans to become responsible for themselves, the adults in the teenagers lives need to slowly retract from their lives in order to help them grow.

As I have worked with our teenagers, I have found with the new availability of cell phones, they now have greater access to parental help, and therefore often call for immediate assistance, before ever attempting to solve their problems on their own. As parents and teachers, we balance a fine line. We want to help, but we also need to provide them room to grow and learn on their own. Will we really survive the teenage years? Yes. It may be challenging at times, but we can work in partnership.

■The Rev. Richard Mapplebeckpalmer The Abbey of Merton St. Ambrose, Martinez

Monastic Religion in the Third Millennium

In the Presence of Darkness Shining: Beyond us; Within us; and Around us, Amen.

Globalization is a feature of the new world economy facilitated by the internet; a feature foretold 50 years ago when Fr. Teilhard de Chardin's evolutionary concept of the *Noosphere* was first published.

Nowadays we call it the *World Wide Web*. At the same time the imperialisms that motivated the globalization processes of previous millennia are revealing their inadequacies. They tended, in practice, to globalize by delocalizing – exploiting and uprooting local populations. Today, in some forms of protest, there is the polar opposite: localizing by violent attempts to de-globalize. It is a dynamic we need to get in balance.

Where our *communities of grace* are not governed by hierarchical denominations, they tend to be local: focused on a household or groups of households. This pattern characterized the ethos of the early Celtic abbeys in Europe. However, in our own age and culture, the rituals of our daily work no longer harmonize with any traditional religious calendar; nor are our gender differences any longer regarded as absolute. Increasingly there is a growing flexibility in households where our friends and neighbors: married, monastic, solitary and interfaith, mingle – especially during an economic downturn when accommodation is in short supply.

Given all this, it makes sense to me, as a retired minister with his own house, to open his home as he used to open the English parsonage houses he previously lived in. The ordained minister's accommodation has always served as a private home with a public purpose. As we seek to renew our own souls, the souls of those for whom we care and all beyond, we need to focus on this rhythm between privacy and publicity, love and justice.

Whether publicly vowed or not, we need once more to cultivate privately the virtues of

Poverty: for we are stewards of the Earth and cannot possess her;

Chastity: for we guard our personal boundaries and those of others;

Obedience: for we listen to and follow our own Conscience; and

Stability: for, by grace, we value the Here and Now of where and how we are.

Accordingly, as stewards of our own little plot of land, [my wife] Lindzi, our son and our friends, have planted dwarf fruit trees in the front yard of our home. In the backyard are

more fruit trees and small vegetable beds. There are sitting areas, both inside and out, where visitors may quietly enjoy the *terroir* of the garden. There are also, when asked for, hours in the week for pastoral counseling; and times when sermons can be heard and insights shared.

Beyond this bare structure there are no ideologies, no programs and no subtle coercions – only free-ranging conversations and shared silences with, from time to time, a little music and dancing. What we are cultivating is our compassion with our anchor, the Earth, and the creatures, large and small, among whom we dwell. As that mystic and critical philosopher, Immanuel Kant, hinted in his *Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (1793); it is enough.

[To contact Rev. Mapplebeckpalmer, and to visit his abbey, write richardw@mapplebeckpalmer.com.]

■Murshida Carol Weyland Conner Sufism Reoriented, Walnut Creek

Americans Responding to the Heart

As we approach the beginning of a new year, it is natural to be drawn to taking stock in many areas. Recently, I came across some interesting facts summarizing current trends in spirituality among Americans. One surprising finding reported that 77% of Americans agree with the statement that all religions have elements of truth. One sociologist called this “probably the single biggest change in the way people think about religion - that there are many paths and many ways.”

The broad acceptance of this principle in recent years has helped to make the defining boundaries of traditional religion more permeable, accelerating the breakup of rigid formalism and the emergence of diversity within the old-line denominations. A recent Gallup survey found that Americans “are practicing a do-it-yourself, whatever works kind of religion, picking and choosing among beliefs and practices of various faith traditions.” These may include yoga, chanting or some form of meditation, either within the context of the church, if offered, or independently as an aid to personal growth.

Many organized churches have responded to these challenges with an increasing emphasis on the expressive dimensions of worship and a personal relationship to divinity. In traditional churches, this has meant a shift from the Word of the Spirit, from doctrinal preaching of scripture to emotional celebration of the experience of divine love. In this view, the purpose of the worship service is to support and nurture the individual sensing of divinity within and free qualities of the heart. This movement has not been without conflict, and many churches have been caught up

in what has been called “the worship wars” between traditional liturgy and “praise” or “seeker” services.

Another Gallup survey found that four out of ten Americans has a spiritual experience that changed the direction of their lives. George Gallup, Jr. said, “This is one of the most dramatic findings we have ever uncovered since we started this poll in 1962.” He said that Americans today have “an intense thirst and hunger for the spiritual and an unprecedented desire for religious and spiritual growth” in all segments and all age groups of the population.

Another important trend is a surge in *spirituality-oriented groups or communities*. The old paradigm of the solitary seeker on his or her personal quest is rapidly giving way to new modes of *shared* exploration and *shared* life based on transformative experience. One example is the small, self-selected study group whose members are seeking to broaden their understanding of a personal experience of divinity. Nearly 40% of adults are involved in some form of “house church” or “fellowship” group, and two-thirds of these groups are associated with a church or a synagogue. These may be prayer circles, groups exploring meditation, or even self-help groups following a “12 step program” such as Alcoholics Anonymous, in which the transformative experience involves freedom from destructive patterns of life.

At the other end of the scale is the “mega-church”, a largely suburban phenomenon. Usually non-denominational and inspired by a charismatic leader, these organizations may have an average weekly attendance of 2,000 people or more.

While membership in mainline churches is declining, the megachurches are growing. The number has tripled since 1990, and there are now nearly 900 of them, mostly in the Sunbelt states and California.

A central quality of these groups is the primacy of direct experience over received teaching, “the Spirit over the Word,” and emphasis on active participation in community. In this regard, Americans appear to be preparing themselves well for the coming New Age, which, spiritual leaders throughout the world tell us, will be inspired by a more immediate perception of God and the inner experience of divine love, along either increased cooperation, social cohesion and harmony among men. As distinct boundaries formerly separating religions lose some of their importance, religions will increasingly blend together through their immediate and shared perception of the unity of God’s love, joining them like beautiful beads on one string. These trends in American spirituality give ample reason for joy, gratefulness and celebration.

Executive Committee of the Interfaith Council

[The following was submitted to, but not accepted for publication by, the editorial board of the Contra Costa Times, on January 15th.]

Among the many who have weighed in on the matter of Israel's recent reactive offensive into Gaza and the rocket attacks by Hamas into Israel, the members of the Executive Committee of the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County also feel compelled to comment. These are our continuing convictions:

- We call on all persons of faith and morals to follow the highest ideals of their individual traditions.
- We call for an immediate ceasefire, negotiated in the best interests of all parties.
- We affirm that there are more than two sides in this historical and present conflict, and also affirm the large common ground, in which people wish only to live in peace and have opportunity to create lives of blessings.
- We cry out that, on this earth, there is no "acceptable loss of life."
- We reiterate that peace has its greatest chance when there is concerted action for human dignity and respect for rights.
- We especially affirm the innate human right to live without fear or hate.
- We strongly state our belief that there is no lasting victory in war or violence.
- We affirm the superiority of universalism over tribalism.
- We dedicate our prayers to the strengthening of the real peacemakers in our midst.
- We call for open reporting, even and especially in theaters of war.
- We believe that God's deepest desire for this world is true and lasting harmony, not fiery Armageddon.

Rabbi Raphael Asher, President,
 Congregation B'nai Tikvah, Walnut Creek
 Rev. Will McGarvey, Vice-President,
 Community Presbyterian Church, Pittsburg
 Ms. Gail Rodens, Secretary,
 Mt. Diablo Unitarian Universalist Church, W. C.
 Dr. Amer Araim, Dar-ul-Islam Mosque, Concord
 Rev. Alexis Easton,
 Brentwood Community United Methodist Church
 Dr. Jaleh Kilpatrick, Walnut Creek Baha'i Community
 Dr. Harmesh Kumar, Sikh Temple, Pittsburg
 Ms. Mary Lou Laubscher, First Presbyterian Church, Concord
 Rev. Norm Luecke, First Congregational Church, Martinez
 Ms. Susan Randall, Pleasant Hill Second Ward,
 Church of Jesus Christ, Latter-day Saints
 Ms. Lenita Shumaker, Church Women United
 (Contra Costa County)
 Rev. Margaretmary Staller, St. Paul Episcopal Church,
 Walnut Creek
 Rev. Brian Stein-Webber, Executive Director
 Rev. Thomas Bonacci, St. Ignatius Catholic Church, Antioch
 Dr. Francis Wang, Buddha Gate Monastery, Lafayette

Rabbi Raphael Asher Congregation B'nai Tikvah, Walnut Creek

In order to be a credible moral voice to others, a nation or nations cannot compromise its own moral standards. Some 34 years since Arafat was welcomed and Zionism was equated with racism, The U.N.'s credibility has not been fully restored. In this shaky start to a new millennium the United States and Israel must also be vigilant in keeping their own houses clean if they want to be a beacon of righteousness to the rest of the world.

Rabbis for Human Rights in Israel has for 20 years drawn attention to legal and military abuses against the Palestinian people. They have regularly been accused of being unpatriotic when they call attention to the bulldozing of olive groves and the demolition of homes in East Jerusalem and throughout the West Bank. On the contrary, a growing number of Israel's progressive rabbinate knows that Israel can only continue to be a Light to the Nations if it hasn't blurred its own high moral standards.

As a member of Rabbis for Human Rights-North America, I have supported RHR in Israel; and having just returned from a conference in Washington, I am encouraged to join others in shining a light on human rights abuses; in this country. Our country's fear of terror has allowed the government to compromise our values of due process and equal justice under the law. Secular and religious alike should be eager to restore America's image which has been tainted worldwide by torture, unjust imprisonment and gross abuses of habeas corpus.

The global campaign against terrorism must continue, unhindered by its own excesses, with even broader coalitions against violence and fanaticism. However, this campaign among the nations will only be weakened by the uses of torture and by neglect of the rules of the law. Pointing out our fear-driven lapses in these areas is not a betrayal either of Israel or own country; it is potentially a healing restoration of the principles of our Constitution and the refueling of a new light in Zion.

We are extremely grateful for these persons, congregations and organizations whose names appear below.

Pamela Joan Abbey
John & Agnes Alden
Betty & Robert Aldrich
Sardar Ali
Robert & Charlotte Anderson
Diane Erney
Dr. & Mrs. Francis Barham
Laura Barnes
Diana Bauer
Bob & Sandy Bender
Martha Bilbrey
Rev. Thomas Bonacci
Beverly Bortin
Charie Bowman Reid
Mary Kay Breazeale
Nancy Bublitz Smith
Dolores Burris
Frances Calavan
William Carlen
Pamela Joan Carr
Zohar & Constance Chiba
Tim Christoffersen
Darlene Cioffi-Pargilla
Joseph & Donna Clevenger
Dean & Chris Coons
Ann Coslett
Louise Crowe
Charles Cumming
Vella Cunningham
Marsha Lyn Davis
Richard & Jill Day
Alma DeBisschop
Jacqueline DeGroot
Kay Derrico
Dennis & Dolores Desmond
Linda Doran
Elisa Dowd
Steve & Karen Dufour
Myrdell Dybdal
David K. Eary
Mark Ehni
Ronald & Linda Elsdon
Martha Engelbert
Gabriel Escobar
Allison Farnitano
Larry & Betty Fisher
Shirley Fluhrer
Frances Foster
Hal & Betty Foster
Mollie Fujioka
Glenn & Kathleen Fuller
Mr. & Mrs. Sam Gallinger

Lorri & Ron Gazzano
Sue & Vernon Gibbons
Marilyn Goeller
Joe & Linda Goglio
Frank & Madeline Gomes
Minerva Q. Gonzales
John Gowey
Martha & Thomas Green
Josh & Noga Gressel
Robert Gwyan
Robert & Ann Haines
George Hake
Barbara Hannafan
Robert Hanson
Dan & Mary Agnes Hardie
Paul & Linda Hardwick
Beverly Harrington
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C. Douglas Hayward
Paul & Alice Heuer
Rev. Ross & Evelyn Hidy
Robert & Mary Hogan
Kathryn Holmgren
Arlene & Birney Hopkins
Robert & Dorothy Howell
Charles & Marjorie Hull
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Guity Kiani
Jaleh Kilpatrick
Dennis King
Alan Kingsley
Jessica Kinnering
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Pat Martin
Carol Mathews
Brian & Vicki McCoy
Phyllis Meyer
Johanna Meyer Mitchell
Sigmund & Louise Milford
Henry Miller
William & Susan Miller

Virginia Millson
Rick & Sandra Mitchell
Jack & Sumi Nakashima
Paula Nelson
Jean Nickell
Margaretha Northall
Frances Orput
Mary Ostrander
Aaron & Fran Paxson
Michael Peterson
Alan Kingsley
Clinton & Sue Phalen
Stanton & Mary Pieratt
Christopher & Eileen Pummer
Mildred Rafoth
Susan Randall
Marlys Randick
Lois Ransome
Edith Reed
Philip Reynolds
Morris & Marjorie Richman
Leslie L. Richman
Natalie Russell
David & Janis Sammons
Esther Sergeant
Lori Sawdon
Beverly Scaff
Judyth Scholz
Dick & Lenita Shumaker
Douglas Sibley
Elizabeth Dobbins Simmonds
Paul & Janet Simons
W. D. & Pat Snyder
Patricia Spires
Rev. Margaretmary Staller
Timothy Stein
Brian & Mary Stein-Webber
Sandor & Faye Straus
Evelyn Ternstrom
Norma Therkelson
Ramsey & Janet Thomas
Helen Tousignant
James & Julia Towar
Elizabeth Trinterud
Mariae Tumelty
Dorothy Vance
Raymond Waespi
Ellen Walters
Jackie Wan
Todd & Trinko Wasik
Gwen Watson
Leon & Lillian Waxman
Peter & Dolores White
Sandra Williams
Carlton Young
Mei Chu Wang
Lisa Wenger
Barbara Wille
Rev. Robert E. Williams
Renee Zeimer

Religious Organizations

Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, Bay Point
Baha'is of Martinez
Bahai's of Clayton
Baha'is of Concord
Bahai's of Orinda
Baha'is of Walnut Creek
Brentwood Community UM Church
Christ the King Catholic Church, Pleasant Hill
Clayton Valley Presbyterian Church, Clayton
Concord United Methodist Church
Congregation B'nai Tikvah, Walnut Creek
Danville Congregational Church
El Cerrito United Methodist Church
Episcopal Church of the Resurrection, PH
First Presbyterian Church, Concord
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Concord
Grace Presbyterian Church, Walnut Creek
Hillcrest Congregational Church, Pleasant Hill
Ik Onkar Peace Foundation, Dublin
Interfaith Council of Rossmoor
Lafayette United Methodist Church
Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church
Orinda Community Church
Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Lafayette
Peace Lutheran Church, Danville
San Ramon Valley UM Church, Alamo
Shell Ridge Community Church, Walnut Creek
St. Agnes Catholic Church, Concord
St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Pleasant Hill
St. Ignatius Catholic Church, Antioch
St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Walnut Creek
St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Pleasant Hill
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Walnut Creek
St. Stephen Catholic Church, Walnut Creek
St. Timothy's Episcopal Church, Danville
Sufism Reoriented, Walnut Creek
Tice Valley UM Church, Rossmoor

Groups

Church Of The Good Shepherd UM Women
Church Women United
Concord United Methodist Women
First Congregational Women's Fellowship
Grace Presbyterian Women
Hillcrest Congregation Women
William Kerr Foundation
Kiwanis Club of Martinez
Kiwanis Club of W.C.

You have given substantial support to the work of the Interfaith Council (apart from Winter Nights) in 2008. Our ministries continue because of you. If there are any mistakes in these acknowledgments, please let us know

Social Justice Alliance

Of the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County

Meeting the second Wednesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. in the Interfaith Office.

All are welcome. Next meeting is February 11, 2009

MLK CELEBRATION

"We CAN Overcome" was the theme of the 2009 celebration honoring **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** The standing-room-only audience was greeted by **Rev. Brian Stein-Webber** and welcomed by Walnut Creek **Mayor Gary Skrel**. The program featured an invocation by **Rabbi Raphael Asher**, the keynote by **Rev. Leslie Takahashi-Morris**, music by the **Second Baptist Choir** and **Children's Choir**, and a reflection by **Rev. Steve Harms**. The event was concluded by the audience singing "We Can Overcome."

The City of Walnut Creek, the Mt. Diablo Peace Center, and SoJA co-sponsored the celebration. **Natalie Russell, Brian Stein-Webber, Mary Alice O'Connell, Walnut Creek City officials,** and **Christine Gerchow** can all take credit for an inspiring event.

CNWS INTERFAITH TASK FORCE

At its January 22 meeting the members of the Concord Naval Weapons Station Interfaith Task Force decided by consensus to disband. The Task Force was convened by SoJA three years ago.

Mission. Its mission was to provide advocacy for base land and housing for homeless individuals in Contra Costa County. Since March, 2006, the group has sponsored a Candidates Forum, petitions, letter-writing campaigns, testimony at the public hearings, attendance at the Citizens Advisory Committee meetings, phone calls to nonprofit organizations requesting they apply for housing units, and meetings with Concord and County officials.

Special thanks go to **Delores Loague**, Concord United Methodist Church, and **Dan Hardie**, St. Bonaventure Catholic Church, who co-chaired the Task Force and represented the group at the many hearings and meetings. **Rev. Phil Lawson**, East Bay Housing Organization, **Ed Shockley** and **Pat Conroy**, St. Bonaventure, **Larry Risman** and **Susan Jaffe**, B'nai Shalom and the Jewish Federation, **Rev. Greg Hile**, Christian Church of Concord, **Kathie Pongrace**, Cal State East Bay School of Social Work, and **Gwen Watson**, SoJA, were members.

Outcomes. Through this group's hard work and faithfulness, the homeless had a voice and a "place at the table" at those Concord City Council gatherings which focused on its role as the LRA (Local Reuse Authority) of the reuse project. Cluster Villages and a Homeless Accommodation were the approved LRA plans. June 2010 is the deadline for the Navy's approval of the Cluster Villages, HUD's approval of the Homeless Accommodation, and the Environmental Impact Report. Some \$38.2 million has been allocated to construct 130 homeless housing units and services on the base, and 130 units off base. In addition, \$500,000 was given for Food Bank startup costs. The Task Force was disappointed that only 260 units were funded, since 1,700 homeless are in the

region of the base, and over 4,000 are homeless in Contra Costa County.

The CNWS Interfaith Task Force salutes the Executive Committee of the Interfaith Council for supporting SOJA's active role in the Task Force.

WINTER NIGHTS SHELTER

Eight children ages 5 and under, two children 6 years of age, eight teenagers, their parents, and one elder have been "at home" in **B'nai Tikvah Synagogue, St. John Vianney Catholic, Temple Isaiah Synagogue, St. Paul's Episcopal, St. Monica's Catholic, and St. Stephen's Catholic** congregations during the months of December and January. **Shell Ridge Community Church** partnered with B'nai Tikvah, and the **Universalist Unitarian Church** provided some of the meals at St. Paul's. We send thanks to our friends at these congregations for their warm hospitality and generosity.

Two families have moved into housing. **Joe Macaluso**, our social worker, continues to help Winter Nights guests complete applications for subsidized units, transitional apartments, and services for which they qualify.

Daytime educational activities at the Oasis in the St. Vincent De Paul Office Building are led by a County **Head Start teacher** and an **Americorps teacher** who continue to teach the youngsters under 5 years at the Pre-School Literacy Learning Stations. Each week the evening volunteers at the congregations are guided by **Judy Stillman**, member of **Lafayette United Methodist Church**, who assures continuity for the students' homework and tutoring.

Lorri Gazzano, the Shelter's grant writer, is currently writing and monitoring proposals. We are grateful for the contributions received from individuals, congregations, businesses, and foundations. As of 1/23/09, we have raised \$110,000 of our \$132,000 budget and are optimistic that Winter Nights will be able to remain open until April 27.

HOUSING TASK FORCE

SoJA has been requested by the Executive Committee of the Interfaith Council to convene a Housing Task Force. East Bay Housing Organization will be consulted for assistance. Please contact **Gwen Watson** at animo3@pacbell.net or 925.930.9965 if you are interested in joining this group.

SoJA DECISIONS

The Social Justice Alliance of the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County will co-sponsor a talk by **Helen Pre-jean** on the Death Penalty.

SoJA voted to follow **Ron Young's** request to write President Obama and ask urge him to keep the Israel-Palestine issue as a top priority as he promised he would during his campaign for office.

The Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County

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Ministering Together is published seven times a year by the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County, a non-profit organization.

All address changes and voluntary subscriptions should be sent to the above address.

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Chaplain.....Rev. Dr. Charles Tinsley
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Next Deadline: February 15, 2009
Please send copy marked to the attention of:
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PH: (925) 933-6030 FAX: (925) 952-4554 E Mail: <eye4cee@aol.com>

THANK YOU CORNER:

Many, many thanks to our faithful newsletter volunteers who generously donated their time to collate, fold, seal and label our December/January issue. We appreciate you!

Elsie Boarman, Mary Hogan, Tim Michelson, Betty deKat, Dick Shumaker, Grey and Lillian Whipple, and Dolores White.

PLEASE PRAY FOR:

First Lutheran Church, Concord
St. Timothy Episcopal, Danville
Temple Isaiah, Lafayette
Hillcrest Congregational, Pleasant Hill
Our nation's new president
Families who suffered this year because
of violence and injustice

Elder Mediation Workshops Offered

Katharina Dress, a professional mediator, is available to offer presentations and mini-workshops for congregations and other organizations about the nature and benefits of Elder Mediation. You will learn how the mediation process works, who can benefit, and what kinds of issues are addressed and resolved in mediation. Katharina also offers non-legal mediation services for individuals, families and organizations seeking to resolve tensions involving one or more older persons. She can be reached at katharina@aginginharmony.com.

Workshops Offered on California Prison Buildup

California's prisons are in crisis. They are overcrowded despite our having opened one new prison per year for the past 23 years. The federal courts have taken over the prison medical system that was killing one prisoner a week, and is considering taking over the entire system. The prison budget is squeezing funds from education, human services, higher education and other state programs. Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB) has put together a lively, informative illustrated workshop that will explain how to reverse a quarter century of "the largest prison building project in the history of the world." To schedule a workshop, or for more information, contact curb@riseup.net or 510-444-0484, ext. 4.