

## COMMUNITIES OF SHALOM

A Community of Shalom is a geographically defined area within a community that engages the people who live in the community, United Methodist Churches, churches of other denominations, community organizations, businesses, and other institutions in and around that area to work together for the good of that community. It is to renew and rebuild communities from the inside out while creating a better quality of life—wellness, wholeness and prosperity (shalom)—for all who live there.

This annual conference is in a transitional period, and so is the Communities of Shalom Ministries. As we have moved from providing programming to resourcing and equipping local churches to do the ministry to which God calls them, the roles of the various committees and boards are changing. That evolution includes the Conference Board of Global Ministries to which the Communities of Shalom is related.

Our mission in South Carolina is to help identify the needs of a particular congregation or community and resource and equip them to seek and create the shalom of their community. We do this by providing training and education, funding opportunities, and technical assistance and support to existing shalom communities and to those who desire to become a community of shalom. The work focuses on spiritual growth, economic development, understanding and strengthening multicultural relationships, and focusing on health and wholeness. The outcome hoped for is that as we provide relief to our brothers and sisters who are living in poverty stricken communities amidst a country that has so much wealth, we will help to bring about systemic change that removes the barriers that keeps that cycle going. This ministry has been going strong for many years in this annual conference and there is much to celebrate.

On March 16 and 17, 2007, people from around the state and around the nation gathered in Hemingway for the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Communities of Shalom Celebration. The COSS site in Stuckey was the host for this event. What a hidden jewel. God is doing some great things in this area. Our host was the chair of the South Carolina Communities of Shalom Steering Committee, Edd Cunningham. The Reverend Geneva Stafford was the host pastor. The theme for the celebration this year was: Telling Our Story and Making a Difference. Our guest speakers were Bishop John Schol of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. Bishop Schol was instrumental in starting the first Communities of Shalom after the riots in Los Angeles following the Rodney King beating; and the Reverend Jack C. Washington who was the Conference Coordinator of Shalom Ministries since it began in South Carolina. Special guests from the National Shalom Committee were also present. Good singing and preaching was the highlight of the evening.

On Saturday, there was a talent showcase which featured youth reciting poetry, singing, dancing, and rapping a positive message. Some seniors also participated singing the old songs of yesterday. Also, in keeping with the theme of Telling Our Story and Making a Difference, six of the 30 Communities of Shalom sites shared their stories of making a difference in their communities. Awards were given at a barbeque held on the site grounds in Stuckey.

Training for new sites and refresher courses for current site members have started for this year. There will be five sessions beginning in March and concluding in early June. Training is usually offered every two years for new sites, however, there will be opportunities for training available throughout the year.

Our sincere thanks goes out to the Conference Connectional Ministries for its support; the Conference Board of Global Ministries for its support; and the hard work of each of the Shalom Communities around the state. We are thankful, above all, to God for all that he has done in blessing this ministry to become what it is today. We are prayerful that it will continue to grow and flourish. We are hopeful that it will continue to meet the needs of the people in the community as we work to be a catalyst for change.

Respectfully submitted,

*Edd Cunningham, Chair, Communities of Shalom Steering Committee  
Millie Nelson Carter, Congregational Specialist, Conference Coordinator of Shalom Ministries*