

The Budding of the Shalom Justice Group



Several tips of my green Christmas Cactus are developing plump little bumps that promise to grow and unfurl into bright reddish flowers in about a month. Also recently, just before the cold spell, I had pity on my little azalea bush which had been bloomless for two years and I transplanted it to another location. Within a couple of weeks of replanting, it burst into a mass of pink blooms in spite of the weather, indicating at last I had found the right location.

The same thing often happens with great ideas within the church. They struggle and transform, as just the right formula for them to thrive is searched for and found. The Crestwood Shalom Social Justice Committee has been faithfully trudging along, looking for the right direction and inspiration. Although the will was there, we continued to look for the right soil and temperature. I am predicting that Shalom Social Justice is about to blossom at Crestwood.

About a year ago, I shined the spotlight on Crestwood's history of Shalom. In a nutshell, Crestwood became passionate about Peace issues in 1987 when The Disciples of Christ officially became a Shalom Denomination. Crestwood followed as a formally recognized Shalom congregation a few years later. It was an active movement at Crestwood for several decades. If you'd like to review the history, it is [Spotlight #50](#).

As the main motivators of the original peace movement eventually moved or died, the Shalom group faded away for a while. But about a year ago, it started to resurrect. The new interest is centered around social justice issues – a slightly different emphasis from the earlier group, but with Shalom being still defined as “the deepest level of peace.”

The group has been searching to find its niche. It sponsored speakers on homelessness and race relationships. We organized a sandwich-making event for an outreach organization. All were useful, but still the group hadn't found that spark of inspiration and congregational leadership that is needed for real progress. We wanted to find ways to make structural changes in struggling systems, not just put on band-aids. We kept trying, thinking, and exploring. Our efforts were overwhelmed by the problem of making large structural changes by ourselves.

Crestwood is already doing an incredible amount reaching out to those affected by life's challenges. In the recent church Weekly, seven of the articles focused on ways members can give and help with holiday needs in the community. There is no shortage of Crestwood interest in helping others.

But there seems to be no end to hunger, homelessness, broken families. The Shalom group does not want to change our current outreach activities, but wants to look towards activities that will someday help us see a country with no hunger or homelessness or unnecessary pain. It's a high bar.

But I sense change is in the air. Jill Howe, a relatively new member at Crestwood, introduced us to BUILD (Building a United Interfaith Lexington through Direct-Action). A spark was lit. BUILD is a coalition of 26 Lexington congregations of different faiths. Each year in a community assembly they identify several serious issues in our city (ex. housing, transportation accessibility), break into research areas and, during the next months, explore what can be done to make meaningful changes in Lexington. In the late spring each year, about 1500 church-related people gather with council persons and decision-makers to present conclusions of what they believe can be accomplished in specified areas by working together. Crestwood is looking into how we can become an active participant. Just a bud of possibilities is appearing, but excitement is growing.

The Shalom group recognizes they need to help in both the micro and macro areas. They want to support and encourage all the disparate activities and giving opportunities sponsored by Crestwood's circles, youth, outreach, etc. We see the need for regular food baskets, clothing, and money. But those are needs that never wane. The Shalom Group wants to encourage those activities, but also facilitate outreach activities that go out into the community where we can build our understanding and help devise long-term solutions to hunger, homelessness, and brokenness.

One of the joys that come with welcoming new members is learning of their many skills and abilities. Jill, who introduced us to BUILD, is also developing an online document where church members can track the many social justice activities occurring in the city. It is designed to help interested people connect with others to share rides to events and share common experiences. It will enable us to connect to other members with similar interests. Stay tuned as this new document gets introduced and rolled out into action, probably after the Christmas season.

I chose this week to shine the spotlight on this new active involvement in our church even though it isn't yet well-defined. Perhaps I should only call it a “flashlight on Shalom Justice.” Time will tell if the current movement will bud into another flower of Christian outreach for our church. One of the purposes of the Spotlight is to help you become aware of some new energy and ideas flowing through our congregation. Maybe there are others who would add to the enriched soil.

After the holiday activities subside, stay aware of mentions of Shalom Social Justice activities. Ask yourself if this is something that appeals to you. Or do you have an idea to share? Or maybe other ideas will bloom. Just watch, think, and pray. Let Kory know if you would like to get involved or have a new idea.

I sense the blossoming of new significant Crestwood outreach.

Let's explore Crestwood together. If you have an idea or suggestion for a Spotlight, contact Gaye Holman at gдохolman@bellsouth.net.

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