

## Fulfillment rooted in hope and confidence

FOCUS ON  
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Today I saw an ad in a respected ecumenical periodical offering a "learning experience for laity and clergy who are seeking a spiritual fulfillment." Here is my warning: Beware of anything that suggests the possibility of "fulfillment." It's not that I accuse the advertiser of deliberate false advertising. It's simply that I have come to believe that in this world, "fulfillment" is always momentary and fleeting.

As a student of history, I have from time to time read a good deal in 19th-century sources. I can't remember ever running across the word "fulfillment" — at least, as it's commonly used in our therapeutic society. Other generations, perhaps, had a more sober view of the possibilities in life. In our era, it doesn't seem possible that any good thing may be beyond our grasp. How long have 20th-century people been talking about "fulfillment"? Is it 20 years? Or 30?

What does "fulfillment" mean anyway? In the cartoon "Doonesbury," if memory serves me, a character named Janice Coucus sought "fulfillment" by leaving her family and striking out on her own. The feminist movement had "raised her consciousness," as we used to say in the '60s, and she resolved to break her shackles and build a life centered on her own needs. Her family represented bondage and serfdom. She had been a non-person whose labors supported the lives of others. In a novel written in the '90s, "Ladder of Years," the author Anne Tyler has created a character who makes a similar, though less ideological, bid for her own freedom. There is enough truth in the stereotype of the taken-for-granted wife and mother to generate sympathy. But is breaking even enough to lead to "fulfillment"? Or is "fulfillment" an overstatement even for the most successful attempts at self-liberation?

One of the reasons that people enjoyed John Grisham's novel "The Firm" so much is that it ended in a long-distance chase from airport to airport, across land and sea (a chase unfortunately radically abridged in the movie of the same name). People who feel locked into the routine of their jobs, boards and committees, daily commutes from home to day-care to work, then back to day-care to home often identify with the run-away. What ecstasy it would be to be in full flight, engaging every sense in the race to outwit those pursuing us! Who we are and where we are, so often seems like a trap as compared to who we might be, and where we might go. But I wonder if at the end of a successful flight, there is "fulfillment"? I doubt it. I doubt it because after we have run away, we meet the same old selves in the new place.

The '90s have witnessed an increased interest in things spiritual. In fact, our society offers a virtual smorgasbord of spiritualities to choose from — or, more likely, to mix and match. One of the most common features of these spiritualities is the explicit (or implied) offer of "fulfillment." Sometimes, traditional religions (such as Christianity or Judaism) may also suggest that they will provide "fulfillment." However, when these religions are at their best, they are compelled by honesty to be more modest. Religions — whether "traditional" or "new age" or whatever — may offer comfort, wisdom, challenge and adventure. But they cannot in good faith promise "fulfillment."

As long as we live in this world, we are too full of ourselves to be "fulfilled" by anything or anyone. We may experience a sense of fulfillment in occasional momentary doses, but we can never possess those moments and make them permanent. For "fulfillment" in the truest sense, we must wait. Wait not passively, or bitterly, but in hope and confidence: "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord" (Ps. 27:14).

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BY RENA FULKA  
SPECIAL WRITER

A small sign with the words, "TEAM Center," points toward the lower courtyard entrance of the First Baptist Church in the heart of Birmingham's downtown district.

Since September, volunteers in the office at the foot of the stairs have been standing ready to provide individuals with emergency assistance and referrals for food, shelter, utility bills, medical expenses and other invaluable services. The Emergency Assistance Ministry (TEAM) of Birmingham/Bloomfield is a cooperative effort of 22 Oakland County churches and synagogues pooling their resources to meet legitimate needs while maintaining the dignity of the individuals involved. The interfaith organization works in partnership with Pontiac-based Lighthouse of Oakland County. Walk-ins and referred clients are screened from the central location to substantiate their claims.

"It really gives us a chance to effectively help someone with more of their needs," said the Rev. Philip Hemke, pastor of Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Bloomfield Township. "And it minimizes any abuse where people are going door to door to get money for wants or whims."

"Churches handing out bits of money were a problem. They were doing more harm than good," said Carol Averill of Birmingham, TEAM Center director. "You can't make a way of life going from church to church. I see the harm done to some people by that."

Since the center opened only months ago, participating congregations have already reported a downturn in door-to-door requests.

"The word is out that we don't give cash," said Averill, a former grant coordinator in the Office of Justice and Peace at the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit. Most clients typically visit the center seeking emergency housing, auto repair, food or money for rent or utilities. Legitimate needs are met with vouchers or staples from the center's on-site food pantry.

"Our goal is to be helpful to those in need, even short term need," said Hemke, pointing out that even people in affluent areas can sometimes find themselves struggling financially. "It can happen to anybody."

### Spiritual sharing:

The Rev. Bruce Quatman (left), the Rev. Arnold Kosco and Rabbi Michael Moskowitz comprise the planning committee for the interfaith Service of Celebration.

BY RENA FULKA  
SPECIAL WRITER

As they celebrate their 25th year as a worshipping community in West Bloomfield, members of Prince of Peace Catholic Church will open their doors for the fifth annual Interfaith Service of Celebration on Sunday, May 18.

The event is sponsored by the West Bloomfield Clergy Association, which links clergy and representatives from 30 faith communities with school, township and business leaders.

Begun in 1992 as the association's contribution to Michigan Week, the interfaith service is held at a different house of worship each year. Last year's event at newly constructed Temple Shir Shalom was celebrated by 13 clerics and attracted a record crowd of 260 individuals from a diversity of religious backgrounds.

"When I came here, people told me that West Bloomfield was like a United Nations, and I found that to be true even in our congregation," said the Rev. Arnold Kosco, pastor of Prince of

Peace and planning committee member. "People deliberately live in this community because they find it enriching and want to experience the fact that there's beauty in everyone. We're all reflections of God."

Representatives from each participating house of worship will stand as a united force in conducting the interfaith service, which expresses the commonalities shared by all faith groups — like Pauline, hymns of joy and a sense of holiness.

"Our roots are the same and we have a common history, so our tradition of music, prayer and scriptural readings is something we share," said the Rev. Bruce Quatman, pastor of Holy Spirit Lutheran Church in West Bloomfield. "No where have I found a group of clergy so committed to unity with a true sense of oneness with God."

Prince of Peace music director David Hansen will lead a 10-member group of teenage musicians accomplished in flute, guitar, violin and tuba. Also performing will be the bell choir from Orchard Lake Community Church, Presbyterian, in Orchard Lake.

Farmington Hills resident Lila Orbach, Good Medicine Reporter/Weekend Anchor at WDIV-TV, will be this year's guest speaker. A Fulbright scholar, Orbach speaks four languages and holds master's degrees in political science and journalism. She has reported from Germany, Nicaragua and Nelson Mandela's inauguration in South Africa. Her accomplishments have been recognized by the Associated Press, The Detroit News Club and the Detroit Free Press Club.

An important element of the Interfaith Service of Celebration is the fellowship shared. Opportunities for interaction will be provided at Prince of Peace Catholic Church, 4300 Walnut Lake Road, before and after the one-hour service, which begins at 7 p.m.

"People too often go through life and see each other, but don't understand each other," said

Rabbi Michael Moskowitz, of Temple Shir Shalom. "The whole concept is that if we can pray together, think how much more we can do together. And what better opportunity than coming here to join hands and embrace one another and have true dialogue?"

This year's planning committee is comprised of Kosco, Quatman, Moskowitz and West Bloomfield resident Mirtle Lynch, Prince of Peace Christian Service Coordinator. A free will offering will be taken to benefit the "Ambassadors of Good Will," a Gary Faber youth project and program of the Southfield-based Ecumenical Institute of Jewish-Christian Studies.

"There are forces at work in this community that anywhere else in the world creates chaos, and we are creating harmony," added Quatman, when addressing the issue of diversity. "We're all here to serve in terms of bringing the message of harmony, peace and unity."

For more information on the Interfaith Service of Celebration, call the Prince of Peace Church office at (810) 631-9424.

## BELIEFS Values

# Congregations TEAM up to offer aid



STAFF PHOTO BY LAWRENCE R. MCKEE

**Team work:** The Rev. Philip Hemke (left), Carol Averill and Sister Carolyn Nelson are founding members of The Emergency Assistance Ministry, a Birmingham-based church/synagogue cooperative established to provide emergency assistance to the needy in Oakland County.

TEAM Center is an outgrowth of the Northwest Suburban Interfaith Clergy Group of Birmingham/Bloomfield. Formation meetings began last May, after Hemke presented an ecumenical emergency plan that had met with success during his former ministry in St. Louis, Missouri.

Get approval from the present board of directors and we were off and running," said Hemke, who now serves as president of TEAM. "The congregations followed through with pledges and support."

Once the concept was put into play, Dr. Stephen Jones offered the fledgling organization a rent-free office at the First Baptist Church of Birmingham, where he has served as pastor for the

past three years.

"It became pretty clear that this needed to be downtown, that this was the hub," said Jones, the secretary of the group.

Initial meetings were also attended by representatives from Pontiac-based Lighthouse of Oakland County, the organization hired to train volunteers. The center, at Willis and Bates, is open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Lighthouse handles TEAM's off-hour emergency responses.

"It's been a great marriage as far as I'm concerned," said Hemke, of the Lighthouse partnership.

Thus far, \$22,500 has been donated by individuals and affiliated congregations.

All money above the center's \$13,000 annual operating costs are given directly to the needy. Sponsoring congregations are given referral cards to hand out to respective clients, who are then directed to the center for identification checks and job history and financial screening. Other area congregations are encouraged to follow suit.

"The thing we're attempting to do the first year is sell to congregations not active in the ministerial association," said Sister Carolyn Nelson of Bloomfield Hills, a TEAM vice president and member of St. Owen Catholic Church. "It took a little bit of selling to get the churches to understand the dual purpose ... to get

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STAFF PHOTO BY DAN DEAN

## Service celebrates spiritual diversity

### Tiny giant tells how he beat the odds

BY RENA FULKA  
SPECIAL WRITER

If there's one thing Jeff Steinberg teaches his audience, it's that everyone is a "Masterpiece in Progress."

This four-foot, six-inch tall singer learned from experience. Born with no arms and two bent, scissored legs, Steinberg refused to let life's obstacles stand in his way.

"I am God's unique design," he said. "I am proof that there is no limit to what a person can become, no matter what he or she may look like."

On Sunday, May 18, Steinberg will share his personal struggles, sorrows and achievements through songs and humorous anecdotes at the 9:30 and 11 a.m. worship services, and at a 6 p.m. concert at the First United Methodist Church, 1589 W. Maple, Birmingham. A love offering will be taken at the free concert, which will be followed by a reception. Nursery care is available.

"I am excited to have this opportunity to share ministry, inspiration, humor and a song with new friends in the Birmingham, Michigan area," said Steinberg, whose dynamic voice is often compared with that of Neil Diamond. "It will be a great day of worship and celebration — the most fun you can have and still be in church."

A Pennsylvania native, Steinberg was born with Phocomelia, a condition that may have resulted from Thalidomide or a similar drug prescribed during his mother's pregnancy. He spent the first years of his life in a welfare shelter in Philadelphia and later in the Shriners' Hospital for Crippled Children. Steinberg's early years were characterized by numerous surgeries, learning to walk with braces and moving

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