30TH ANNIVERSARY
By Katherine Seigenthaler

The seven men and women who gathered recently in Wilmette had an easy, honest way with each other as they talked of the wars they had fought, the battles won and lost together.

Each is a longtime resident of Chicago’s North Shore. Each also is a pioneer.

The Reverend Paul Allen, Jean Cleland, David James, Marvin Miller, Mary Sample, Dr. Bill Thomas and his wife, Betty, were among the first residents of their affluent communities to advocate for open, affordable housing in the northern suburbs.

They are living repositories of the history of the Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs, which celebrates its 30th anniversary this October.

“I think surviving 30 years is itself an accomplishment,” said Cleland as she sat with her compatriots last month in Mary Sample’s living room, “especially when you’re doing something that rubs against the grain of society.”

Interfaith has done more than survive. The Winnetka-based center continues to be a force for fairness on the North Shore, and represents more than 65 congregations and civic groups in 11 communities. On behalf of its membership, its staff investigates complaints of housing discrimination; monitors sales, rental and mortgage lending practices in the northern suburbs; educates the public and the real estate industry about fair housing rights and responsibilities; and works with local governments to promote diversity and fair housing. It was not always so. Prior to

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Director’s Letter
A REMARKABLE LEGACY

“I am writing to extend a cordial invitation to you to participate in an important and unprecedented ecumenical undertaking which will take place here on the North Shore next month.” With these words, Rev. Paul Allen, then pastor of the Winnetka Congregational Church and chair of an ad hoc interfaith planning committee, invited all congregations in the northern suburbs of Chicago to a conference entitled, “The Inclusive Community: Challenge to Church and Synagogue.”

This conference, which took place on October 15, 1972 at Am Shalom Congregation in Glencoe, endorsed the creation of a new organization to bring about fair and affordable housing on the North Shore. What is now called the Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs became that expression of religious concern.

In this special 30th anniversary issue of just Housing, you will read eloquent expressions of commitment from north suburban residents who participated in Interfaith and kept its dream of a racially and economically diverse community alive. I am proud to have been Interfaith’s executive director for the past nine of these years and have found inspiration in the example of each one of these people, many others, and some who have passed away in recent years, such as Rayna Miller, Tom Phillips, Rabbi William Frankel, and Mary James.

To me, this work is true humanitarianism or, for the faithful, religious witness. I was shocked to read an ad in the Yellow Pages for volunteering which said, “In America, you are not required to offer food to the hungry. Or shelter to the homeless. In fact, one of the nicest things about living here in America is that you don’t really have to do anything for anybody.” If we didn’t have to do anything, why did people in the 1960’s feel the need to make civil rights part of the law of the land? Isn’t a sense of citizenship in fact rooted in a sense of justice for all, in satisfying hunger, shelter, and a dignified quality of life for our neighbors as well as ourselves?

This year, Interfaith celebrates several current accomplishments, only possible through the concerted action of the good people and organizations of the North Shore:

- a standing-room-only forum on the north suburban housing crisis last April, which is influencing discussions in Evanston, Glencoe, Highland Park and other north suburban communities on inclusionary zoning (affordable housing set-aside) policies
- forty-five Homesharing matches during the last fiscal year
- the convening of Wilmette residents to advocate for affordable and handicap-accessible housing at the Mallinckrodt campus who then formed a group known as Mixed Use for Mallinckrodt
- the successful resolution of many fair housing cases, including preserving the housing of a long-time African-American Evanston homeowner who had the misfortune of refinancing with a predatory lender, and of a disabled white tenant in Skokie.

Getting Involved

Thanks to our joint work with the Evanston Neighborhood Conference, CEDA/Neighbors at Work, and other groups, we helped launch “North Suburban Housing Partners” which organized the April forum and is now amassing hundreds of names on petitions, “We Want Affordable Housing in Every North Suburban Community.” Sign the petition and encourage your neighbors, congregations, and families to do so as well. You can find the petition on our web site, www.interfaithhousingcenter.org. Stay tuned — we will need your help as we present these to elected officials this year. We also encourage you to send letters to State Representatives Jeff Schoenberg and Julie Hamos whose fall Urban Revitalization Committee hearings on housing gaps in Illinois will culminate in an affordable housing action plan for the new governor.

On the occasion of our anniversary, we will be releasing an updated study of housing patterns in the northern suburbs, similar to the study presented at the 1972 conference, thanks to Professor Janet Smith and her student Alicia Lewis at the University of Illinois at Chicago’s Urban Planning department. Call us at (847) 501-5760 — we’d love to come out and talk to you and help you organize with your neighbors for housing justice.

—Gail Schechter

PS: I would also like to extend Interfaith’s best wishes to Rabbis Harold Kudan (Am Shalom) and Robert Marx (Congregation Hakafa) in their retirement. We hope you will stay in touch. To those spiritual leaders who are new to the area or to your congregations, we are here as your fair housing vehicle; there is still so much work to be done.

Former board president Karen Chavers (left), director of the Evanston Neighborhood Conference, with executive director Gail Schechter, at St. Paul A.M.E. Church, Glencoe, at the 1997 Annual Meeting of Interfaith.
REFLECTIONS OF FAITH: The struggle for housing justice
By Karen R. Chavers, former President of IHCNS Board

The childhood question which plagued me deeply was, Did God love coloreds more or whites more? Why were people nice on the surface, but lived separately in neighborhoods of unequal quality and in very different houses? Even in congregations where blacks and whites attended same service to worship the same God, there were separate pews.

The Interfaith founders – like my beloved family of field slave origins in America – had a different vision and acted on it in 1965. My family and I attended the North Shore Summer Project's Winnetka rally and heard the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. challenge us all to work for J-U-S-T-I-CE. Reframing the housing patterns of old by working for fair and open housing was indeed an inspiring and very personal call to action.

It was a tall order and bold move to break unprecedented ground in metro Chicago, which remains one of the top three segregated urban regions in the nation. But these people of faith and the thousands more organized by Interfaith gave way to a movement that grew in size, commitment and determination.

Years and numerous volunteer hours later towards the struggle for voter rights, human rights and housing/school equality, I returned to the North Shore. In 1986, with a young child in the Evanston schools, I was invited to an Interfaith event at Trinity United Methodist Church in Wilmette to hear James Farmer reflect on his autobiography of the civil rights movement, Lay Bare The Heart. I was inspired not only by Mr. Farmer but by the clergy, lay leaders, Christians, Jews, Baha’is and Buddhists who organized this pot luck supper. I heard the Interfaith board and staff, including then director Rayna Miller and her husband Marvin, describe fair housing wins, strategies for new housing construction at the Linden el, and the possibility of filing a fair housing law suit to fight housing discrimination for a person of color who was denied access to housing because of race. I had not heard such a spirited discussion about testing for discrimination since the early 1970’s.

I was elated by an opportunity for boardmanship at Interfaith Housing Center and proudly accepted. I am proud to stand among its supporters and am grateful for its work, which makes a direct impact on the future landscape of our communities.

Nonetheless, I am more outraged and less confused that we have not yet changed institutionalized patterns of unequal housing, jobs and access. I am determined to continue to be part of the fight against the status quo bigotry and racism that still defines quality of life and access to goods and services by where people live.

People of faith struggling together for equality and housing justice through personal action are at the core of Interfaith. The Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs stands strong after thirty years to welcome our hearts and provide us a vehicle for housing justice.

If civility and equality are to be, it is indeed up to the actions of you and me.

From the President
BEING A BOARD MEMBER MEANS PRIDE IN OUR WORK
By Michael C. Condon

As Interfaith Housing turns thirty years old, I take this moment to reflect back on my three years with this terrific and much-needed organization, and find that the work it has done is of immense significance. To put it simply, I am honored to be a part of this organization. Being a board member means working with a diverse and wonderful group of people from all walks of life and from a variety of north suburban communities. Our common goal is to support Interfaith’s mission of affordable, fair housing in the northern suburbs.

Being a board member means pride — pride in the work we do to fight social injustices, whether in the housing market or in our community; pride in our Homesharing Program which has helped hundreds of people find affordable, fair housing by matching them with community members facing financial struggles, each offering the other a simple but valuable solution to the problem of affordable housing and paying one’s bills.

This story strikes home with me, since my mother was able to purchase a house in a good community because it was affordable. We did not have a lot of money. My parents were divorced but had the same American Dream as everyone else, and we achieved it because our community had affordable housing. Now it is my turn to help support this cause so that current and future generations may benefit from affordable, fair housing the way that I did. This is what being an Interfaith board member means to me.

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Interfaith’s inception at an October conference in 1972, voices like Jean Cleland’s often cried out in the wilderness.

“The real story began in 1962 or ‘63, when these eight wonderful women, including Rayna and Jean, decided they wanted to push the idea of open housing,” recalled Marvin Miller, whose late wife, Rayna, ultimately became the first executive director of Interfaith. “They would take the Pioneer Press on Thursdays and they would go through the real estate listings, and they would call the people and say, ‘Would you be willing to sell your house on a non-discriminatory basis?’ It took them two years to find one person.

“They became discouraged and decided to advance the agenda a little bit. Buckner Coe [then Wilmette pastor of First Congregational Church, UCC] introduced them to the idea of holding vigils. They held vigils before the realtors’ board. They held vigils in front of the three churches at Lake and 10th Streets in Wilmette. They were spat on by one of the ministers. They kept on advancing. They began to get noticed.”

Then came the North Shore Summer Project of 1965. “We tried to mimic the Mississippi Summer Project [a landmark black voter registration drive] here on the North Shore,” Cleland said. “We were kind of copy-cating that idea to ‘register’ community attitudes about these sorts of things. And also it was a way of encouraging minorities to look at the North Shore as a semi-enlightened place.”

“You sent around college kids to home sellers, asking the same question, ‘Would you be willing to sell your home on a non-discriminatory basis?’ And you documented the experiences, which were sometimes very negative,” Miller said. “We gathered together some community leaders and we sent them out to real estate offices asking the realtors if they would be willing to sell on a non-discriminatory basis. One person was actually thrown out of an office in Evanston. So these community leaders were discovering what attitudes were in the real estate industry.”

The highlight of that summer was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech to 10,000 people gathered on the Winnetka village green.

It was during those early, heady years of activism and optimism that a few black and interracial families began moving to the North Shore. In 1964, Harold and Lillian Calhoun became the first black family to move to Kenilworth. The Millers invited the Calhoun children to play with theirs.

David James, his wife and six children integrated Winnetka in 1966. “Mary’s [Sample] cousin was the first to shake my hand,” James recalled.

Bill and Betty Thomas got in touch with Jean Cleland in the summer of 1968, and attended one of the potluck suppers for prospective minority homebuyers that Cleland and other members of the Wilmette Human Relations Commission hosted weekly. The Thomases moved to the village in November 1968.

In 1972, Rev. Paul Allen, pastor of Winnetka Congregational Church, was inspired by friend and Chicago Reporter founder John McDermott to convene a conference on North Shore housing issues.

“John said to me, ‘We have in principle won the battle for open housing among the races because of the [Fair Housing Act of 1968],’” Allen remembered. “He said, ‘Now, in principle, there is open access to

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housing on the North Shore and everywhere else in the Chicago area. But we haven't tackled the problem of division by income. That's the next big problem. And this is something the religious community should be concerned about.”

The conference was held October 15, 1972 and dubbed, “The Inclusive Community: Challenge to Church and Synagogue.” Allen invited congregants from houses of worship in Wilmette, Kenilworth, Winnetka, Northfield, Glencoe and Highland Park. More than 200 people attended.

The North Shore Interfaith Housing Council was born three months later. Rayna Miller, who attended the first meeting, became Interfaith’s executive director in 1975. She held the position for 11 years. In 1977, the council spawned the North Suburban Housing Center to provide referral and counseling services. Miller was its director, and she brought her friend Mary Sample on board as her assistant.

“Those beginning days were wonderful,” said Sample, who worked for the Housing Center for almost a decade. “We just sort of fumbled around. We didn’t know what we were doing. We just did it.” Sample said the Center staff’s initial goal was to find homes on the North Shore for “Gautreaux” families, so called because of a 1969 federal court case named for plaintiff Dorothy Gautreaux. It found that the Chicago Housing Authority had systematically discriminated against low-income blacks by segregating them.

Since its inception, Interfaith also worked to establish moderately priced housing for the elderly, Sample said. “But we became aware that we needed to consider real estate agents that were discriminating against families with children,” Sample recalled. “We tried to get local housing for people who worked for area businesses. I remember Rayna didn’t find a single business on the North Shore interested in finding housing for their workers. I was really disappointed about that.”

One of Interfaith’s major accomplishments during Miller’s tenure as executive director was establishing Gates Manor on Central Street in Wilmette, a 51-unit apartment complex for senior citizens that was the North Shore’s first subsidized housing. In 1983, the Council and the Center founded the Interfaith Housing (now Housing Opportunity) Development Corp. to create affordable housing.

Upon Miller’s retirement in 1986, the North Shore Interfaith Housing Council merged with the North Suburban Housing Center to form the organization it remains today – the Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs.

Rayna Miller died in 2001, but her dynamic presence was almost palpable at last month’s gathering. Asked to speak on behalf of his late wife about Interfaith’s past and its future, Marvin Miller joked, “I would never presume to speak for Rayna.”

However, Miller and his colleagues were more than willing to discuss their own histories of passionate Continued on page 5
activism; the positive changes Interfaith has helped bring about; and the important work still left to do.

“All of the race riots in Chicago in my lifetime centered around housing,” maintained David James, a lawyer and former Tuskegee Airman. He said he moved his family to Winnetka from Chicago’s South Side in 1966 because friends told him, “If you really believe in integration move your six kids on up here to the North Shore.” At that time, he said, there were 250 blacks living in Winnetka, “all of them as domestics. I used to describe Winnetka as black by day and white by night.”

Bill Thomas, a pathologist, who moved with his family to Wilmette in 1968 and thought he would not have a problem, “but I heard from a friend of mine later that there was a group of people over on 17th Street who were going to burn us out. My friend told them they’d better not.

“For a long time, about 8 or 9 years after we moved, whenever I would cut my grass on a Saturday I would have to rake first because there would always be glass and stones in the grass. I never knew who did it. Even now, if I’m out front, there are still teenagers who will drive by in their cars and call me nigger.”

“I first got interested in the prejudices of people through the street I lived on in West Wilmette,” Sample said. “A family at the end of the street put their house on the market and sold it to a Jewish couple, and you would think all hell had broken loose. It tore the neighborhood apart, and the people who were selling felt they really had to tell the Jewish couple the reaction they were getting, so they withdrew their offer. That’s when I really got exercised.”

“Tremendous credit has to be given to Buckner Coe [who now lives in California],” Cleland said. “He gave me and some of the others the backbone to do what was uncomfortable for us to do and scary. He taught us that it was okay to offend people. If they’re on the wrong track, why, set them straight.”

The group marveled at the progress made is racial acceptance, if not true diversity, over the past 30 years.


“It’s terrific,” Cleland said. “I met a couple several years ago at some big event. They were both black and lived about four blocks from me. There was no buzz in the neighborhood.”

“So much has happened,” Sample said, “and it’s amazing to me that it really doesn’t matter who you are when you move into a neighborhood anymore as long as you have the money.”

Therein lies the rub, the assembled agreed.

“My only regret is that there are not more of my people here and I think the barrier is income,” Bill Thomas said. “I don’t know how much longer we’ll be here if they keep knocking down $600,000 houses and putting up $1.2 million dollar ones.”

All lament the fact that the lack of affordable housing remains a significant barrier to legitimate fair housing on the North Shore. Home ownership in the northern suburbs is unattainable for people of all races and ethnicities, but more so for people of color who suffer from inequities in household incomes.

According to current U.S. Census data, blacks comprise just 5.1% of the North Shore’s population, a figure that shrinks to 1% when Evanston is excluded. Even within Evanston the black population is largely segregated. Latinos make up only 4.8% of the total population. Furthermore, the North Shore is woefully lacking in affordable housing for its elderly, its disabled, and the moderate- and low-income workforce that teaches in its schools, fights its fires, and serves in its restaurants.

“I’d like to see us go out of business if it means we’d have more racial and economic diversity,” Cleland said. “Between the haves and have-nots,” James said. “That’s the next big issue.”

The gathering was sweet, but short. Several members of the group were pressed for time. They were on their way to a meeting of the Wilmette Park District to urge that body to redevelop the 180,000 sq.ft. Mallinckrodt building on Ridge Road into moderate income or senior housing.

The time for talk was over. There was work to do.
TOP – Executive director Gail Schechter (second from left) with five of the “Suburban Seven” – former residents of the Suburban Motel in Morton Grove, in March 2000. This motel was demolished as part of a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district. Interfaith’s advocacy led Morton Grove to award housing counseling assistance and relocation benefits to each resident. These tenants, and the more than 200 residents of the also demolished Admiral Oasis Motel and Fireside Inn a year earlier, were low-income veterans, retirees, cab drivers, restaurant and hospital workers, and others for whom the Waukegan Road motels were affordable housing close to jobs.

MIDDLE – Residents of the sixteen northern suburbs respond to a call to action at the North Suburban Housing Issues Forum, which Interfaith and a dozen other organizations sponsored in November 1999, at the Glenview Community Church. More than 225 attended the event.

BOTTOM – Police officers from seven north suburban municipalities attend a “Valuing Diversity” forum in Winnetka in April 1999. The following day, Wilmette’s police chief, who attended the forum, arrested Benjamin Smith and an accomplice for tossing hate literature on more than 300 lawns. Only months later, Smith, a North Shore native, shot at African-Americans, orthodox Jews, and Asians on the north side of Chicago and the northern suburbs, killing noted basketball coach Ricky Byrdson in Skokie. Interfaith later spearheaded a concerted response from the religious community, leading to the creation of RELATE, Religious Leaders Acting Together for Equality.

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If you feel that you have been discriminated against, you have the right to file a complaint with the Illinois Department of Aging. Call: 1-800-252-8966 (voice and TDD) or contact the Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs at (847) 501-5760.
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Come to Our 30th Anniversary Celebration!

Sunday, October 20, 2:00–4:00 pm

Interfaith’s Annual Meeting and Celebration will take place nearly thirty years to the day of its founding, at the same location, Am Shalom, 840 Vernon, Glencoe. The event, from 2 pm to 4 pm on Sunday, October 20, is free and open to the public.

In addition to the annual meeting, U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky will share her thoughts on housing justice organizing on the North Shore, past, present, and future. Marvin Miller (whose late wife Rayna was founding director of Interfaith), David James (the first African-American to move to Winnetka, in the 1960s), and Rev. Heather VanDeventer (Assistant Rector of St. Augustine’s Episcopal Church and active member of Mixed Use for Mallinckrodt, advocating affordable housing in Wilmette) will offer reflections on Interfaith’s history and a call to action.

Finally, we will offer a variety of ethnic foods as a “taste of the North Shore.”

For more information, please call us at (847) 501-5760. We hope to see you there.