

## Interfaith effort creates community job-training program

### Group to focus efforts on health-care field

By Lawn Griffiths

SPECIAL FOR THE REPUBLIC

Southeast Valley congregations are teaming up to help recruit unemployed or underemployed people for the new Arizona Career Pathways project, funded by a U.S. Department of Labor grant. Valley Interfaith Project, an alliance of about 50 congregations from a wide spectrum of faiths, received a \$476,000 federal grant to train and motivate 40 to 50 people for jobs, starting in the health-care industry.

One goal is to make the effort a “demonstration model” that can be expanded into training for jobs in other work sectors, said Joe Rubio of Tempe, the lead community organizer.

“We have kind of set up a three-legged stool with the community colleges, the churches and different businesses to see

#### About job-training program

**Mandatory session:** People interested in applying for the Career Pathways training program must attend one of two workshops at 6:30 p.m. Monday at La Primera Luterana Church, 142 N. Date St., Mesa, or 6:30 p.m. Jan. 25 at Red Mountain United Methodist, 2936 N. Power Road, Mesa.

**Qualifications:** At least 18 years old, a U.S. citizen, resident of Maricopa County for at least a year, high school diploma or GED, must be able to enroll in English 101 and meet income requirements. Applications for the program only are available at the orientations.

**Information:** valleyinterfaithproject.org, 602-258-0607.

what positions they know are going to be available in Maricopa County in the next one and a half to two years,” said the Rev. Karen Spencer-Barnes, a retired United Methodist pastor who serves on the Jus-

tice Ministry Team at Red Mountain United Methodist Church in Mesa.

Training will center on four primary health-care occupations.

“They have to be in partnership with us to say that they will be on time for classes,” she said.

Community colleges have agreed to hold a designated number of slots open in classes for the Arizona Career Pathways students, she said.

“The people enrolled have to want to be trained in these four or five specific health-care areas, and they have to be motivated to say, ‘OK, this is the training I need,’” Spencer-Barnes said.

Once people are chosen for the program, she said, congregations are asked to support them, such as by providing child care. She calls its part of faith communities’ longstanding commitments to “ministries of mercy – helping to make sandwiches, helping to share food or clothing, to share furniture and those sorts of things.”

She said they find there is an equal responsibility for justice, dealing with the

systemic forces that bring about suffering and misfortune.

“The Bible is loaded with places where injustice is going on, and Jesus was the first to go around helping those who were not receiving justice,” Spencer-Barnes said.

Rubio said he has found that congregations and neighborhoods have inherent dynamics to be supportive of people joining a workforce-development program.

“You will probably be between 25 and 15, you have been out of school for a while and now you are going back doing college-level work,” he said.

“That can be difficult... To know there is a community behind you makes all the difference.”

Arizona Career Pathways draws from previous work-development models that were successful in San Antonio, El Paso and Austin, Texas, and in Tucson. Massachusetts Institute of Technology “has looked at this model and has called it probably one of the most successful training models in the country because it is based in the community,” Rubio said.