



# The Fellowship Post

Mira Vista  
United Church of Christ

February 2018

## My Reflection

by Tom Emanuel

***“What did I have to justify? I did not want to paint in order to justify anything; I wanted to paint because I wanted to paint... My father worked for Torah. I worked for-- what? How could I explain it? For beauty? No. For what then? For a truth I did not know how to put into words.”*** –Chaim Potok

I recently read Chaim Potok’s novel *My Name Is Asher Lev*, about a young Hassidic Jew from Brooklyn who finds himself caught between his strict Orthodox upbringing and his incredible artistic gifts, which refuse to be bounded by his tradition. Potok uses art to brilliantly capture the sometimes generative, sometimes painful tension between tradition and newness, between who we have been and who we want to become. It’s a cliché in the creative arts that you have to know the rules in order to break them. Because what is art, after all, if not that exact tension made manifest, learning a craft from those who have gone before – and then stepping out into the uniqueness of your own vision?

The Christian liturgical season of Lent is an opportunity to live into that tension in our own tradition and in our own lives. When most people think of the word *Lent*, they affix the expression “giving up [x] for” to the front of it, where [x] equals “chocolate” or “coffee” or “meat on Fridays” or any number of other indulgences. In the popular imagination, the season (which begins this year, funnily enough, on Valentine’s Day!) is synonymous



with fasting and renunciation. And it must be said, this interpretation has a long history within Western Christianity: Lent has historically been viewed as a time of penitence and self-denial in imitation of Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness, a time to “take up our cross” and follow him in subordinating our fleshly desires to the life of the Spirit.

I’m all in favor of spiritual practice, but this world-denying approach to Lent strikes me as what Fr. Richard Rohr calls “false asceticism,”

in which human beings, especially our bodies, are seen as inherently sinful and in need of purgation. I prefer, with many contemporary Christians (especially our monastic brothers and sisters), to reclaim and reinterpret Lent as an opportunity to embody the wisdom of the Tao Te Ching:

*We shape clay into a pot, but it is the emptiness inside that holds whatever we want. We hammer wood for a house, but it is the inner space that makes it livable. We work with being but non-being is what we use. (v.11)*

Sometimes we need to fast from sweets, or alcohol, or social media; other times we need to fast from the traditions and negative self-perceptions that hold us back from becoming our fullest, truest selves. But the fast is never an end in itself: *fasting* must always be balanced by *feasting*, emptying always balanced by filling. We pour out the contents of

the pot, not so we can leave it empty and useless, but so we can fill that negative space with something greater.

In worship this Lent at Mira Vista, we will be using the creative arts as a gateway into contemplation. In Eastern Orthodoxy, praying with icons has long been a way to do precisely this: rather than allowing ourselves to be bombarded with image after image, Tweet after Tweet, anxious compulsive thought after anxious compulsive thought, we focus our whole attention upon a *single* image, and allow that to lead us more deeply into prayer. You can think of it like a visual mantra, a “window into heaven,” as our Orthodox siblings put it. We’ll be using not only visual art, but poetry, prose, dance, and, of course, music as a way of opening some windows into heaven and reclaiming Lent as a creative, life-affirming practice.

My prayer for us this season is thus a prayer for emptiness: the emptiness not of self-abnegation but rather that pregnant emptiness, that “singing silence,” from which all creative self-expression springs. If we choose to observe Lent by fasting, may we do so not to punish ourselves, but rather to carve out space in which we can become our best selves and give voice to the truth we feel in the depths of our being, but which we cannot always put into words.



## **Good News Report: Creating *the GOOD table***

by Rev. Dr. Melinda V. McLain

It was a little over a year ago that we last gathered in a retreat to affirm the original business plan for *the GOOD table*. Unfortunately, the process of enacting that vision has not worked the way we/I might have hoped and I think the project has now shifted so significantly that we need to make some decisions about the implementation (and perhaps the feasibility) of the plan.

One of the weaknesses of the original plan was **our lack of expertise in commercial food service**, but we may have identified a

local chef/restaurant developer (a new neighbor of Bonnie and Dan Hariton’s!) who may be able to help us in this area, including understanding whether a food truck would be a good way to experiment with food service and whether or not we need a commercial kitchen too. The potential **change from a built-in kitchen to a food truck** presents some wonderful ministry opportunities such as: serving food during emergencies at shelters, distributing left-over food to folks on the street, and/or operating the truck at various community events. But not all food trucks can be operated without regular access to a commercial kitchen and refrigeration, so this might be an add-on for the future instead of a way to reduce building cost.

Meanwhile, **Colleen has been in touch with the commercial realtor** recommended to us by **Margaret Kavanaugh-Lynch**, and she has been looking at various potential properties to do the coffee shop, co-working, and event space. We seriously looked at a potential property in late December that is still on the market, but is still too expensive and may not be possible for our use without identifying dedicated parking. It is also true that a sprinkler system might be required for our use permit too. **Brian Campbell-Miller** and **Bonnie Hariton** also became involved in evaluating that property and the church council has been in the loop at every turn in the process.

Personally, I am concerned that **we may not have the human energy** to do any of this vision. Our active leader core has been beset by illness, personal tragedy, and is getting smaller. Even if all our members beyond the leadership core (council members plus regular Sunday attendees) were able to be fully engaged in the project, we may not have the right matrix of gifts and skills needed. In order to move forward on this big vision, I feel we will need to create a much larger group of volunteers and/or leadership by seeking a much broader group in the wider community. This larger skilled volunteer base could come from other UCC churches and/or appropriate non-profits, but those partnerships and relationships are not obvious and will take time to develop.

Having to **cancel the retreat slated for January 13th** due to illness and projected low turnout was a perfect example of why we need to find a new path if we are to move forward on this project. I look forward to rescheduling the retreat soon to ponder our choices and then determine our next steps.



## News from the Pews

**Amy Ukena** is pleased to announce she is a grandmother! **Chloe Constance Hutchens** was born at 1am on Thursday, January 25th, 9lbs. 14 oz, 23". Mother and baby are fine, and Amy is over the moon!

**Heinz Lankford** learned this week that former member **Michael Ozenberger** was killed by a car while walking late at night on a road near his home in Oakley. Although he had been living away from the area for quite some time, he was always generous in supporting Mira Vista and is remembered by many longtime members.

We also learned this week that **Wilma West** died peacefully after a long slow decline. The date and time for her memorial service will be announced soon. May her family be comforted as they mourn her passing.



1st Barbara Cook  
1st Adelle Lemon

**Best wishes to you both  
with love from Mira Vista**

## Incarnation is Necessary

by Rev. Dr. Melinda V. McLain

From the delicate balance  
of yeast to flour  
To the complex chemicals combined  
in astral phenomena,  
Great power is created  
by a precise and miraculous  
Mixing of just the right things  
in just the right proportions.

Our lives mirror the same fragile chemistry  
Of soul and Spirit, psyche and physique  
As we seek to be fully alive  
in all  
that we are  
in all  
that we do  
with whom  
all we love.

This is the mystery of human possibility  
And Godly creation  
That in a moment,  
All will be in perfect power aligned  
And in the next hour  
When all seems lost  
That even God couldn't get it right  
Until Jesus became one of us.

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# **Respite. Reflection. Reverence.**

***Come to meditative mid-week centering prayer and song  
in February and March:***

## **HOLDEN EVENING PRAYER AROUND THE WORLD**

**Wednesday Feb. 7 at 7 PM**

Join thousands of people on every continent in praying and singing this service, which was written by composer Marty Haugen in the winter of 1986 at Holden Village, a retreat center high in the Cascades of Washington state. Following the traditional form of Evening Prayer from ancient times, the music is peaceful and beautiful.



## **ASH WEDNESDAY TAIZE SERVICE**

**Wednesday Feb. 14 at 7 PM**



Sing simple, meditative Taize chants and receive the traditional imposition of ashes to observe the beginning of Lent, a reflective season leading to the celebration of Easter. Founded in France in 1940, Taize worship uses simple phrases from the Psalms or other Scripture texts, repeated or sung in canon.

## **HOLDEN EVENING PRAYER (MIDWEEK LENT)**

**Wednesdays Feb. 21 and 28; March 7, 14 and 21 at 7 PM**

This special, musical evening prayer returns for each Wednesday in Lent to offer you respite in a busy week – a time of reflection and reverence. All are welcome.



***Come join in prayerful music and reflection***

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*February*

**2018**

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
 <p><b>American Heart Month</b></p>				<b>1</b> Community Office Hours with Pastor Melinda each Thursday @Catahoula Coffee, 2-5p Interfaith Meditation @Sycamore UCC, 6p	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4</b> 12 Noon Worship & Holy Communion followed by La Mesa with Social Action Team  Live jazz w/ Amy Ukena and Hans Raag @El Cerrito Natural Grocery, 6-8:30p. <i>FREE - invite your friends!</i>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b> Mira Vista prepares lunch, GRIP Souper Center, 10 am  	<b>7</b> Mindfulness Circle, El Cerrito Royale, 7p	<b>8</b> Community office hours, 2-5p Interfaith Meditation @Sycamore UCC, 6p Council meeting, 7p	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>11</b> 12 Noon Worship followed by La Mesa  <i>Tom Emanuel preaching</i>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>  & Taizé Service w/ Christ Lutheran, 7p	<b>15</b> Community office hours, 2-5p Interfaith Meditation @Sycamore UCC, 6p	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>18</b> 12 Noon Worship followed by La Mesa	<b>19</b> 	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b> Mindfulness Circle, El Cerrito Royale, 7p	<b>22</b> Community office hours, 2-5p Interfaith Meditation @Sycamore UCC, 6p	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>25</b> 12 Noon Worship followed by La Mesa  <i>Tom Emanuel preaching</i>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>			

# Our worship life together . . .

Join us on **Sundays at 12 noon** for our celebration with music and preaching, then stay for lunch because our worship continues as we share food and friendship together at our common table, **La Mesa**. Feel free to bring food to share as you are able. We celebrate the sacrament of **Holy Communion every First Sunday**. All are welcome at our table!

- |         |   |               |
|---------|---|---------------|
| Feb. 4  | The Shape of Ministry<br><i>Social Action Team meets during La Mesa</i> | Mark 1: 29-39 |
| Feb. 11 | Transfigured<br><i>Tom Emanuel preaching</i>                            | Mark 9: 2-9   |
| Feb. 14 | <b>Ash Wednesday Taizé Service w/Christ Lutheran, 7p</b>                |               |
| Feb. 18 | Into the Wilderness   | Mark 1: 9-15  |
| Feb. 25 | Left Behind<br><i>Tom Emanuel preaching</i>                             | Mark 8: 31-38 |

*Happy Valentine's Day*

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Address Change Requested

**Dated Material**  
February 2018

God's Love in Action



Mira Vista United Church of Christ

*The Fellowship Post*

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