

The Fellowship Post

Mira Vista United Church of Christ

November/December 2017

Melinda's Musings

Each of us is born with a box of matches inside us but we can't strike them all by ourselves. — Laura Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate*

When Tom Emanuel and I first talked about an Advent theme for this year, we settled in on the **metaphor of fire**. In the Bible, the presence of God is described as a burning bush, a pillar of fire, and eventually as the flames of the Holy Spirit. The star that leads the Magi to the Christ child is, of course, a huge burning ball of gas. Plus, the ability to control fire is the moment in human evolution that has also become the two-edged sword of great destruction and creation. Controlling fire is indeed our “advent” to our fullest selves. Plus, the traditional Advent theme of tracing the coming of the light in the darkness would remain part of this wider metaphorical investigation.

And then, a huge swath of Northern California burned in an epic firestorm. I seriously wondered whether our “fire” theme was still a good idea. Maybe we should go back to the traditional themes of hope, peace, love, and joy. Or maybe it would be better to play with “water” instead?

After some conversation, Tom and I agreed that we still wanted to look at the spiritual dimensions of fire as a way to both heal and challenge us this Advent season. Fire is on our minds, after all, so we hope that this Advent



theme will be more relevant and easy to apply to our recent experience.

Because **Christmas Eve** falls on a Sunday this year, and we will only have an evening service that day at 7:30p, our Advent theme will unfold over three Sundays and arrive on Christmas Eve as the Christ child arrives as the “light of God in a world of darkness”. Along the way we will explore the power of fire in creation, in the burning bush, and in the form of the Holy Spirit.

Do you find fire attractive or scary? What would be different in your life if you were more “on fire” in your spiritual life? How can we help one another to become more “on fire” with love and compassion?

Love,
Melinda

UCC Response to North Bay Fires
by Rev. Dr. Melinda V. McLain, Disaster
Ministry Coordinator, NCNC-UCC

Virtually no one in Northern California will soon forget the terrible devastation of the early October firestorms that swept through Sonoma, Napa, Mendocino, Yuba, Lake and Solano counties. For those of us here in Contra Costa county, we will remember being awakened by smoke on Oct. 8 in the middle of the night, while those in the fire zone remember fleeing for their lives.

As the fires raged through country previously devastated by epic drought, air quality went

into the red zone for days on end and for 100-150 miles in different directions, depending on the wind conditions. As of this writing, the blazes killed at least 42 people, destroyed an estimated 8,400 structures, burned through nearly 400 square miles of land and prompted 100,000 people to evacuate. Governor Jerry Brown has requested 7.4 billion dollars for wildfire recovery.

Within our Northern California Nevada Conference UCC (NCNC) church family, Pastor Eddie Sunia and another member of Wellspring Church in Santa Rosa lost their homes. Pastor Eddie was living in a rental home pending the building of a parsonage on land owned by a member of the church. The congregation is now working with United Church Building and Loan to build a parsonage for their pastor. Seven members of First Congregational, Santa Rosa lost their homes and two members of First Congregational, Sonoma lost homes as well. While all our church properties were spared major damage, almost everyone in the fire zone has some level of damage from toxic ash, lost food due to power outages, and smoke damage to linens and bedding.

Our NCNC-UCC churches and organizations quickly sprang into action to help our friends farther North. Pacific Islander and Asian American Ministries (PAAM) immediately organized two fundraising concerts and many, many churches sent gift cards to be distributed by congregations in the fire zone to those most in need during the extended evacuation. Rev. Laura Rose, pastor for First Congregational,

Alameda took to social media to offer her motor home to evacuees and Rev. Curran Reichert connected the RV to evacuating neighbors.

In the United Church of Christ, our role in the disaster recovery community is to focus on unmet needs and technological (human-caused) disaster. This often means that our work begins somewhat late in the process of disaster recovery. But in this case, the Rev. Curran Reichert and First Congregational, Sonoma identified an early unmet need to connect Spanish-speaking and undocumented persons to fire recovery resources in the town of Sonoma neighborhood known as Agua Caliente, or “the Springs”.

Working quickly with Zach Wolgemuth and Mary Schaller Blaufuss in the national setting of the UCC and our own Rev. Diane Weible, we were able to create a solidarity grant to help FCC, Sonoma hire a short-term “service navigator/community organizer” named Mario Castillo. Mario, who has now been seen on many local media outlets raising issues about undocumented and Spanish-speaking people’s unique needs in this disaster, is also helping to reach out to folks who may or may not qualify for federal disaster aid, but could access private sources of support. And as a way to “open doors” and support Mario’s outreach efforts, NCNC congregations have also assembled over 80 food bags to distribute to those in need so that we can help folks connect with recovery resources. Congregations have also sent respirator masks to facilitate safe clean-up of the toxic ash.

Associations, churches, and individuals have donated generously and a number of folks stand ready to volunteer as needed. But the longterm need is great and as the UCC, we pledge to be in it for the long haul. So even though the headlines have diminished, our energy to help must not decrease, so give as you are able to the NCNC wildfire recovery by sending donations to the conference office. If you have further questions about how to help, do contact Rev. Melinda V. McLain, melinda@miravistaucc.org or 415-378-3193.



Good News Report: Creating *the GOOD table*

by Rev. Dr. Melinda V. McLain

It was about 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.

In particular, the **change from a built-in kitchen to a food truck** is very exciting, but presents the need for more research and work to flesh this vision out. I propose to develop a completely **separate business plan** for the food truck, incorporating some of the ideas about being able to use the truck for emergencies (such as at shelters during the recent fires) as a means for distributing left-over food to folks on the street and also, the possibility of having the food truck be part of various community events.

Meanwhile, **Colleen has been in touch with the commercial realtor** recommended to us by **Margaret Kavanaugh-Lynch**, so she is starting to look at various potential properties to do the coffee shop, co-working, and event space.

One tidbit that she learned from the realtor is that if we use the building for events, we will likely have to gain a “public assembly” permit and that would include adding a sprinkler system. This will require more research and could add significant cost depending on the sort of building we might acquire.

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. In order to move forward, I feel we will need to create a much larger group of volunteers and/or leadership to go forward. Right now, it still feels like our vision is too big to invite other churches and interested community folks into the planning and implementation. But I feel we must, if we are

actually going to achieve this vision, so we need to adjust things in order to make room for others to become part of creating *the GOOD table*.

Also, I have learned over the years that the best way to address the feeling of being overwhelmed (which is how I feel about this project now) is to **break the project down into smaller more manageable parts**. For example, if we just focused on the building, but no food truck, it would be easier. Alternatively, we could focus on the food truck and leave the building project for the future.

There are serious advantages and disadvantages to **choosing truck over building and vice-a-versa**. And, I believe this is a big decision that needs to be made by a broader group than just the Council.

So mark your calendars now for an **all-church retreat on Saturday, January 13th** at Colleen and Melinda’s in El Sobrante. We’ll gather at 9:30am and end by 3p with lunch provided.

At the retreat, we will revisit the revised business plan for the building (no food service) and the **new plan we are developing for the food truck**. We would then decide whether or not to go forward with either plan. And if we choose to move forward, which plan to prioritize.

I would also like some input as to **who we might invite** to be part of creating *the GOOD table*. Should we focus on local congregations in the vicinity? UCC sister congregations such as Sycamore, Arlington, Grace North, etc.? Or should we look for community orgs and individuals for assistance. The secondary question about partners for the venture might be different depending on whether we choose truck or building.

As always, I am so deeply grateful for your courage and desire to be church **just the way we** are AND in a new way too!



Sunday, December 24, 7:30p

(Please note: No 12n service on Christmas Eve Sunday)

The Lower Slopes of Horeb

With gratitude to Rainer Maria Rilke

by Tom Emanuel

Be not afraid-- thus the Angels always say,
and we cower in the very fear
we are commanded to overcome.
Those who do not speak
with the Angels, or who do not
perceive that they are spoken to, imagine
that our terror arises
from their discontinuity, their
alterity. We fear
what we don't know,
and the Angels (so
they think) are
wholly Other, ungraspable
by such limited faculties
as the eyes, the mind
of a human being. Save the Date - Saturday, Jan.
13 All Church Retreat 9:30a - 3p Lunch provided

But the fear of the Angels
is not that of the extraordinary, rather
that of the everyday. To converse
with one is to be convicted
by the commonplace, to hear
in summer's soft valley, or in
the river's persistence
beneath its sheath of ice, or
in the clocktower's late-night chime,
the Messenger's voice: *you must
change your life*. Truly I tell you,
and I am a less brave man
than he: Moses
removed his sandals
not because the bush was burning
but because it was a bush.
The astonishment, the holy wonder arose
only with his sudden apprehension
that at any time, any Thing
among Things
might open its mouth
and speak on God's behalf.

...
July 2017
Vermillion, SD

News from the Pews

The long-term plan of **Patsy** and **Stan Severson** to move to Seattle is now in motion. They have purchased a condo and are preparing their home for sale early in the new year. Patsy is currently serving as our treasurer and has been in leadership at Mira Vista for a number of years. Stan is always a joy to be with at MVUCC social events, such as our jazz nights at El Cerrito Natural Grocery. While we wish them all the best in this next chapter of life, we will miss them deeply.

Bonnie Hariton's sister Taura has finally returned to her home at Fountain Grove Lodge in Santa Rosa after spending five weeks with Bonnie and Dan after having been displaced by the North Bay fires. Fountain Grove Lodge is one of the very first LGBTQ senior-living facilities and is one of the few places in its neighborhood that survived the Tubbs firestorm.



4th Sylvia Sugg
9th Nancy Lemon
21st Matt Kavanaugh-Lynch
24th Kevin Manz
30th Andrew Noble
30th Benjamin Noble



with love from Mira Vista!

SAVE THE DATE - Saturday, January 13, 2018
All Church Retreat, 9:30a – 3p
Lunch provided

Mira Vista UCC
Semi-Annual meeting & Potluck,
Sunday, January 21, 2018, after worship
2018 budget is the agenda for this meeting



Mira Vista United Church of Christ

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2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3 12n Worship with Holy Communion followed by Social Action Team @ La Mesa  <i>First Sunday of Advent</i>	4	5 Mira Vista prepares lunch, GRIP Souper Center, 10a 	6 Mindfulness Circle @ El Cerrito Royale, 7p	7 Community Office Hours with Pastor Melinda each Thursday @Catahoula Coffee, 2-5p Interfaith Meditation @Sycamore UCC, 6p	8	9
10 12n Worship followed by La Mesa Tom Emanuel preaching  <i>Second Sunday of Advent</i>	11	12  <i>Hanukkah begins</i>	13	14 Community office Hours, 2-5p Interfaith Meditation @Sycamore UCC, 6p Council meeting, 7p	15	16
17 12n Worship followed by La Mesa  <i>Third Sunday of Advent</i>	18	19	20 Mindfulness Circle @ El Cerrito Royale, 7p	21 Community office Hours, 2-5p Interfaith Meditation @Sycamore UCC, 6p	22	23
24 Christmas Eve Candle Light Service, 7:30p  <i>4th Sunday of Advent</i>	25 	26 	27	28 Community office Hours, 2-5p Interfaith Meditation @Sycamore UCC, 6p	29	30
31 12n Worship followed by La Mesa 						

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!

- Nov. 19 “Totally Depraved or Cheap Grace?”
 Tom Emanuel preaching

- Nov. 26 “Ecclesia Semper Reformanda”

- Dec. 3 “Led by Fire” Psalm 105: 39-43
 Social Action Team meets during La Mesa

- Dec. 10 “Contained in the Flame” Exodus 3:1-16
 Tom Emanuel preaching

- Dec. 17 “Spiritual Fire” Luke 3: 15-16

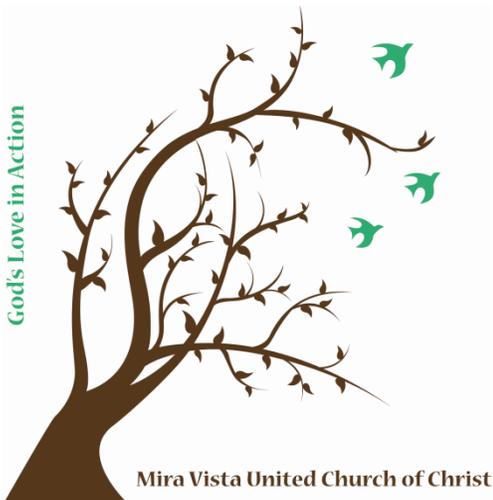
- Dec. 24 Candlelight Christmas Eve 7:30p**
 Please note: we will not have a 12n service on Christmas Eve Sunday

- Dec. 31 “Supernova Faith” Matthew 2: 1-12

Mira Vista United Church of Christ
780 Ashbury Avenue
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Address Change Requested

Dated Material
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published monthly by Mira Vista
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