Melinda’s Musings

You are encircled by the arms of the mystery of God. – Hildegard of Bingen, 12 c Benedictine Abbess, musician, writer, and mystic

I’ve recently returned from a wonderful week of study leave at Christ in the Desert, a remote Benedictine monastery about an hour’s drive beyond the small town of Abiqui in northern New Mexico. While there this time, I also asked to become a novice oblate of the community and was received by the brothers into that process of discernment and preparation. Oblates are secular members of the monastic community who agree to live by the Rule of St. Benedict out in the world and to support a particular monastic community in mutually-agreeable ways. Over the next year, we will figure out exactly what that means for me with regard to Christ in the Desert, but in the meantime, I am studying the Rule and working to create a stronger contemplative practice of praying the psalms each week.

Part of my desire to become part of Christ in the Desert is that my first retreat there in 2011 was enormously healing and probably saved my vocation for ministry. Benedictine spirituality seeks to balance ora et labora (prayer and work). At the time that I first visited the monastery, my work, even though it was church work, had completely subsumed my prayer life and my inner spiritual life had become dry and brittle. I was all “labora” with not much “ora”.

While in residence in the monastery, prayer begins at 4:00 a.m. with Vigils and continues throughout the day through the liturgy of the Divine Office. At Christ in the Desert, the Divine Office is mostly-sung and they adhere to the primitive Benedictine practice of chanting all 150 psalms each week, which works out to be about 20-25 psalms each day. Chanting the psalms with the monks is a transformative spiritual practice for me and has helped me understand myself as a primarily contemplative Christian. This practice has proven to provide a sturdy balance of prayer to all the work that I do each week.

I also believe that my study of Benedictine spirituality will greatly benefit Mira Vista’s transformation into a “café church”. The Rule of St. Benedict is an amazing, ancient document that has ordered the life of monastic communities and oblates for over 1500 years. Amongst other things, the rule asks monks, nuns, oblates, and communities to promise their stability.

Benedictine communities, like our proposed cafe, the GOOD table, must be self-sufficient and stable, and so for centuries these monasteries, convents, and abbeys have operated guest houses, brewed beer, made all sorts of crafts to sell, and have engaged in commerce as part of their organizational plan for stability. In my way of thinking, while our model may seem to be “cutting-edge”, in some ways we are simply adopting monastic stability into our ecclesiology.
The rule also puts high-value on the practice of hospitality, especially for the stranger or outcast, with the requirement to receive all guests as if they are Christ himself. That is exactly the sort of “customer service” I hope we can provide via the GOOD table.

In the short ceremony where I was received as a novice oblate, I was asked to choose a saint name to be my name within the community. I choose to be Sister Hildegard in honor of Hildegard of Bingen who was a mystic, musician, writer, herbalist, and founder of a community of nuns at Rupertsberg, Germany. I have known her music for many years and have loved reading about this patron saint for artists, writers, and musicians. Hildegard lived in a time of great political upheaval too, so I expect she will also be my patron for engaging political power with creativity and wisdom.

A persistent image in Hildegard’s visions was that of “Ecclesia”, the hidden true church. In our time, we need to help that “hidden” church emerge again in new ways that serve our times. May our experience of Easter this year bring such an emergence!

Love and many blessings,
Melinda

One Great Hour of Sharing Offering this Easter

Concerned about the catastrophic famine in South Sudan, tornados in Illinois, and or the plight of Syrian refugees? The One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) special mission offering of the United Church of Christ involves you in disaster, refugee/immigration, and development ministries throughout the world. When a disaster strikes or people are displaced or made refugees by violence or extreme poverty, you are part of the immediate response and of the long-term recovery.

Through OGHS you engage in holistic development programs including health care, education, agriculture, food sustainability, micro-financing and women’s empowerment.

Because the UCC relates in mutual partnership to churches and organizations through Global Ministries and worldwide response & recovery networks, your contributions to One Great Hour of Sharing put you in the right place at the right time for the relief, accompaniment and recovery of the most vulnerable. You meet immediate needs and you address the underlying causes that create those needs in the first place.

Mira Vista UCC will receive this offering on Easter Sunday, April 16th and all are encouraged to give generously.

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Love and many blessings,
Lord make me a channel of your disturbance. Where there is apathy, let me provoke, Where there is silence, may I be a voice. Where there is too much comfort, and too little action, Grant disruption. Where there are doors closed and hearts locked, Grant me the willingness to listen. When laws dictate and pain is overlooked… When tradition speaks louder than need… Disturb us, O Lord, Teach us to be radical. Grant that I may seek rather to do justice than to talk about it; To be with as well as for the poor; To love the unlovable as well as the lovely; To touch the passion of Jesus in the Pain of those we meet; To accept responsibility to be church. Lord, make me a channel of your disturbance. -Author Unknown

How do we find peace within ourselves and our church communities in order to find the courage and strength to answer Jesus’ call to go out and serve when it is not comfortable?

Keynote speakers are Kristin Stoneking and Kazu Haga who will help us explore these themes during a fabulous weekend of praise, worship, study, and fellowship.

See you June 15-18 at Sonoma State University!

ON THE FIRST DAY
by Tom Emanuel
if God is anything like me, She had a dog-eared notebook just filled w/ideas for the Universe: a million potential configurations of Time and Space, dozens of physical laws both thinkable and unthinkable, 427 possible methods of procreation— and when the Big Day arrived, She did not select our current cosmic configuration b/c it was superior to alternative designs (intelligent or otherwise) but simply b/c She got tired of carrying all those great ideas around in Her godhead and figured that giving Creation a shot, screwing up, and trying again was preferable to granting Herself the addictive luxury of never Creating at all for fear of failure or disappointment or rejection. (if God is anything like me that is)

The 2017 Annual Gathering of the Northern California Nevada Conference United Church of Christ will be held from June 15 to 18 at Sonoma State University, 1801 Cotati Ave, Rohnert Park, CA.

The theme this year is “Come Home to Peace; Go Forth to Disrupt.” Our theme has been inspired by the poem quoted above, entitled the “Reverse St. Francis Prayer.” As we struggle to understand what it is to be the People of God in this time and in this place, we find ourselves confronting issues of Peace and Disruption.
Corrected April date!
Free CPR/AED Trainings in West County
Everyone is welcome to learn this life-saving skill

The more people who know CPR, the more lives we can save. It only takes a couple of hours to learn this important skill.

I'm excited to partner with American Medical Response (AMR) to offer free CPR/AED (automated external defibrillator) trainings at community locations throughout West County. **All you need to do is show up.**

I hope you'll join us at one.

Here are the dates and locations. (Later locations may be added.)

- **Saturday, April 1**, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., **Shields-Reid Community Center**, 1410 Kelsey St., North Richmond

- **Saturday, April 15**, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., **Kensington Community Center**, 59 Arlington Ave, Kensington

- **Saturday, April 22**, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., **El Cerrito Arlington Clubhouse**, 1120 Arlington Blvd. El Cerrito

- **Saturday, May 6**, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., **West County Health Center**, 13601 San Pablo Ave. San Pablo

For more information contact **Anthony Mata**, Policy Intern in Supervisor Gioia's office 510-231-8686, or **Sonia Bustamante** at sonia.bustamante@bos.cccounty.us, 510-231-8689.

Sincerely,

**John**
Supervisor, District One
Contra Costa County
11780 San Pablo Avenue, Suite D
El Cerrito, CA 94530
510-231-8686 Phone
510-374-3429 Fax
John_Gioia@bos.cccounty.us
## April 2017

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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!

April 2 “Rise Up Lazarus”  
John 11: 1-45  
with Holy Communion. Social Action Team meets during La Mesa  
Tom Emanuel preaching

April 9 “A Wild Ride”  
Matthew 21: 1-11  
Palm Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week

April 13 Maundy Thursday @El Cerrito Royale, 6:30p  
Contemplative Taizé-style service with Holy Communion

April 16 “What We Cannot See”  
John 20: 11b -18  
Easter Sunday

April 23 “Peace and Forgiveness”  
John 20: 19-23

April 30 “Inviting the Stranger”  

************************************************************

Mira Vista United Church of Christ  
780 Ashbury Avenue  
El Cerrito, CA 94530

Dated Material  
April 2017