

The Fellowship Post

Mira Vista
United Church of Christ

December 2016

Melinda's Musings: Following the Prophetic Path of Advent by Pastor Melinda

The liturgical season of advent is an invitation to wait, ponder, imagine, wonder, and then wait some more. Traditionally, this waiting is often characterized as a project of penitent reflection that helps us to slow down to receive God's mercy and then joyfully anticipate the birth of the Christ again.

While taking time for self-reflection is always good, I believe we are sometimes too quick to dismiss the invitation to dwell in the mystery of this season, which is understandable given that the wider culture went straight to Christmas long before Halloween! So even though we "know" the end to this season of waiting will be that Jesus will be born again in Bethlehem, we might take some time to wait for a new understanding of what that birth means to us now.

This year, our sacred environment for Advent invites us to take the radical step, as outlined by the lectionary texts from Isaiah, to keep company with the prophet's words of comfort to those contending with exile. This path invites us to set aside our set expectations and then take time to imagine what needs to be born in us, now and in this place.

Isaiah's vision of what is needed to bring about God's realm is poetic, mysterious, and compelling. The imagery the prophet uses declares the beauty of God's Creation to be our touchstone and waiting companion. Isaiah



speaks to people who have lost sight of what matters and need inspiration to find their way back to God and the prophet looks to nature for clues about the constancy of God.

In our Advent art installation created by **Bonnie Hariton and Colleen Rodger**, the traditional themes of **peace, hope, joy, and love** will unfold inside the context of creation moving from the formation of earth to the emergence of plants, animals, and humans. A star will guide us and remind us that our path will be illumined by the light of God shining in our hearts, even when we cannot see it.

On the first Sunday, the prophet speaks **peace**: "*they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks*" (Isaiah 2:1-5). The second Sunday germinates unexpected **hope**: "*a shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse . . . (and) shall stand as a signal to the peoples*" (Isaiah 11:1-10). For the third Sunday, Isaiah preaches **joy**: "*And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads*" (Isaiah 35:1-10), And on the fourth Sunday, the prophet speaks of incarnate **love**: "*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel*" (Isaiah 7:10-16).

Finally, on Christmas Eve, after we have waited in holy mystery, I pray that each of us will experience the birth of Emanuel in an unexpected and new way.

News from *the GOOD table*

by Rev. Dr. Melinda V. McLain

Our core leadership group gathered on Saturday, November 12th to continue our dreaming and scheming about becoming a café church called *the GOOD table*, a name we can now legally use after filing a successful dba “doing business as” application with Contra Costa County. We have also had our first “pop-up” live music event at **El Cerrito Natural Grocery (NGC)** with jazz duo, **Amy Ukena and Hans Raag**. The event was a great success with good tips for musicians and a nice, festive crowd. **NGC** was happy to run out of pizza and almost run out of wine glasses - both good problems! Amy and Hans will do it again on **Sunday, Dec. 4th at 6p**.

For the morning session of the retreat, our minister-in-training **Tom Emanuel** presented some of the work that he is doing with colleagues at Pacific School of Religion about new forms and models of ministry. Central to their study is a report done by Harvard Divinity School students entitled, “**How We Gather**”. If you want to read the whole report, check out: howwegather.org.

Tom led us through some of the characteristics of non-religious organizations and activities that “stand-in” for what might have been done by spiritual communities in the past. It was heartening to see that our current community meets many of these needs and our proposed café project would seem to be tailor-made for postmodern folks looking for meaningful community. There really is a lot of synchronicity going on for this project!

For the afternoon session, I admit that I was a bit nervous to present our still-in-progress business plan. This café church idea is wonderful, but daunting when it comes to the details. Still, I now believe that we have a model that is sustainable and meets our triple bottom-line aspirations. And those gathered on the 12th agree! So, we’re off on the next leg of the journey to look for suitable real estate and to continue to refine our business plan.

I am very grateful for all those who have been working on the various pieces of this plan and welcome your ongoing comments, suggestions, and referrals.

The Christmas Fund

One of the unique aspects of the Christmas Fund is that the funds provide direct financial assistance to individual UCC clergy and lay church employees – the funds do not support programs or institutions, but people. With your continued generosity, more individuals will receive the support of the Church in their time of need.

- Monthly Pension Supplementation for 464 lower-income retired UCC clergy and lay employees
- Quarterly Health Premium Supplementation for 235 lower-income retired UCC clergy and lay employees
- Christmas “Thank You” Gift Checks given to 528 retired UCC clergy and lay church employees
- Emergency Grants for 58 active/retired UCC clergy and lay employees

These special gifts at Christmas time remind these “Veterans of the Cross” that they have not been forgotten and that the Church is grateful for their service.

December Celebrations



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

With love from Mira Vista

What Child Is This?

by Tom Emanuel

What Child is this being born on the occupied streets of Bethlehem in 4 BC on the occupied streets of Bethlehem in 2015 *anno domini* (things don't change much in 2,000 years) on the occupied streets of Ferguson in the occupied bedroom of a double-wide in Pine Ridge Village in the occupied faces of the Woody Guthrie hobos who train-hopped from Seattle to San Francisco in search of warmer climes but found only rain and refrigerator container after refrigerator container of Made in China dreams and conductors who wouldn't let them keep riding down to sunny Los Angeles so here they are giving birth to God in the back of a Berkeley-dingy coffee shop?

What Child is this being born to this unwed teenage mother wet and pink and face scrunched and fists clenched screaming howling into the silent night holy night who knows that he will leave this world screaming howling too nailed to the cross of expectations he could never meet but he didn't come to meet anybody's expectations he came to spit in the face of these badlands that would steal the song from the mouth of a babe before he's even had a chance to sing?

What Child is this being born who they say will be the Anointed One—the One who will take the pain away—the One who will bring fulfillment everlasting—the One who will finally do Thy will on Earth as it is in Heaven and lead us to the promised land where the fairy-stories we tell our children come true where happy endings are not silver-breathed lies but the way-down-deep architecture of Reality where Incarnation is not a myth where Resurrection is not a plot device where you don't even have to get to the end of the story to be surprised by Joy?

What Child is this being born who never made any such claims who only

permitted his infant mewling body to become a projection sheet for our deepest longings because we would not permit ourselves to believe that Thy will might actually be done on Earth already—would not permit ourselves to believe that no Messiah is required—would not permit ourselves to believe that we are not broken or that if we are then God is broken too—would not permit ourselves to believe that God is with us whether we see Her or not whether we like it or not?

What Child is this being born whose little very body demands of us that we either repent and believe that the Kingdom is at *hand* or that we pretend that this is the case at least—that we pretend long enough for it to become Who We Are—that we pretend long enough to realize it's Who We Were all along—that we pretend long enough for God to steal past our defenses and give birth to Herself in us 365 days a year—that we pretend long enough for Christmas to never end?

Berkeley, CA
December 2015



Hear Ye! Hear Ye!

Still recruiting for our Christmas Choir! All ages, all sexes, all abilities are encouraged and welcome to come sing with us.

Rehearsals are 1:45 - 3:00 pm every Sunday (after church and noshes). We will be singing on Dec. 18th at our regular service and at the Christmas Eve service as well. Come join us!

Bonnie Hariton's beautifully-carved turkey platter shared Thanksgiving meal on November 20



Pastor Melinda delivers 30 MORE hand-crocheted caps for the homeless made by **Betty Coates** to **Rev. Lyle Beckman** of the **San Francisco Night Ministry**

Amy Ukena and Hans Raag playing at **El Cerrito Natural Grocery** sponsored by *the GOOD table*
Come hear them again on **Sunday, Dec 4, 6-8:30p**



Ray Capiral and Amy Ukena wait to perform at **NCNC Raising the Roof** benefit for **First Church Berkeley**. Second chance to hear them plus **Pastor Melinda, Curran Reichert** and more on **Sunday, December 28 @ Lake Park Methodist, Oakland, 6p**



Mira Vista
United Church of Christ
 780 Ashbury Ave., El Cerrito, CA 94530
 phone: (510) 526-0110 fax: (510) 526-0110
 email: office@miravistaucc.org
 website: www.miravistaucc.org

2016

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 Interfaith Meditation @Sycamore UCC, 6p	2	3
4 12 Noon Worship & Holy Communion followed by La Mesa with Social Action Team The Good Table with Amy & Hans @El Cerrito Natural Grocery. 6-8:30p  Second Sunday of Advent	5	6 Mira Vista prepares lunch, GRIP Souper Center, 10a 	7 Mindfulness Circle, El Cerrito Royale, 7p	8 Interfaith Meditation @Sycamore UCC, 6p	9	10
11 12 Noon Worship followed by La Mesa with Holy Communion  Third Sunday of Advent	12	13	14	15 Interfaith Meditation @Sycamore UCC, 6p	16	17
18 12 Noon Worship followed by La Mesa with Holy Communion NCNC Raise the Roof Concert, Lake Park Methodist, 6p  4th Sunday of Advent	19	20	21 Mindfulness Circle, El Cerrito Royale, 7p	22 Interfaith Meditation @Sycamore UCC, 6p	23	24 Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, Special Christmas Fund offering, 8p 
25 Joint service with Christ Lutheran, 11a 	26 	27	28	29 Interfaith Meditation @Sycamore UCC, 6p	30	31 

Our worship life together . . .

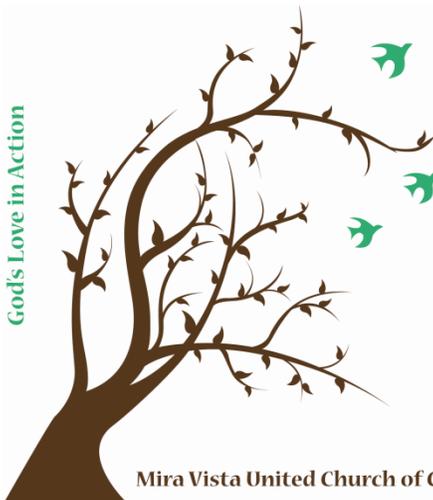
Join us on **Sundays at 12 noon** for our celebration with music and preaching, then stay for lunch because our worship continues as we share food and friendship together at our common table, **La Mesa**. Feel free to bring food to share as you are able. We celebrate the sacrament of **Holy Communion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

- December 4 "Hope Amidst Rotting Roots" Isaiah 11:1-10
Second Sunday of Advent
- December 11 "Joy Upon Their Heads" Isaiah 35:1-10
Third Sunday of Advent - Tom Emanuel preaching
- December 18 "Love With Us" Isaiah 7:10-16
Fourth Sunday of Advent with Mira Vista Choir and special guest cellist, Emil Miland
- December 24 Candlelight Christmas Eve Service at 8p
followed by cider and cookies
- December 25 Joint service with Christ Lutheran Church at 11a
Festive celebration of the season led by Mira Vista with special performance of Brahms lieder by Ray Capiral, Pastor Melinda, and cellist Jukka-Pekka Vainio
- January 1 Joint service with Christ Lutheran Church at 11a
Christ Lutheran will lead us in a service of music and joy to begin the year.

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

Address Change Requested

Dated Material
December 2016



Mira Vista United Church of Christ

The Fellowship Post

Editor: Diane Young
published monthly by Mira Vista
United Church of Christ
An Open and Affirming Congregation
780 Ashbury Avenue
El Cerrito, CA 94530
(510) 526-0110
office@miravistaucc.org
www.miravistaucc.org

Rev. Dr. Melinda V. McLain, pastor
melinda@miravistaucc.org