

M inistering Together

“News, comments and events of concern to the religious community”

The Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County

Spring Edition

Message from Interim Executive Director, Rev. Will McGarvey

Dear Friends,

During my tenure among you, I've been helping our Executive Committee restructure our bylaws, and shortly after the time you receive this newsletter we will have voted on a new structure that expands our new "Elected Council" while electing a smaller group as the "Governing Board." If this new structure is approved, with updates to the legal and process language of our bylaws, we will have brought them into the 2010's and we will be about half way through the process for which you hired me as your Interim E.D.



John Young, Carrie Knowles and Fred Fielding of the ICP Board, and Will McGarvey and Margaretmary Staller of ICCCC at the "Embracing our Veterans" event

Since September 2012, I've met with every Board member and we have led multiple regional focus groups. We will continue to work toward discerning a future path for the Council. Based on our interviews, our board will prepare a strategic plan and profile for the next E.D. necessary to move the I4C forward. We hope to have this work done by July so we may do a search for a permanent E.D. by the end of October. This will allow the new E.D. to be a part of the Annual Meeting on Sunday, November 10th at 6:00 pm (at a site to be determined).

As I've said since before my hiring, I've insisted that your search for an E.D. be an open and transparent process – and so I've insisted that this be an open search. Not knowing what the Council will need in its leadership in the future, the I4C should be able and willing to select a new E.D. with the gifts and talents necessary for the future. If I feel like I'm a good match, I will have the opportunity to apply.

In the mean time, we continue to share our Interfaith dialogues and programming. We were successful in our recent "Embracing our Veterans" event, training faith leaders how to welcome home the many vets returning (pictures included). While we have hired a new bi-lingual Office Manager, and moved into a smaller, less expensive office space, we have noticed a decrease in individual giving for our many ministries. However, if we wish to return to our previous staffing model we will need more funds donated regularly toward the general fund.

As the Ministering Together newsletters have gone to being a quarterly publication, do go to our website for information on upcoming events www.interfaithccc.org. If you would like me to add your events or announcements to our more frequent eBlasts, please email me directly at eye4cee@gmail.com.

"We belong to each other."

Will

Rev. Will McGarvey
Interim Executive Director

"We Belong to Each Other"

Religious and Cultural Observances

April 2013

- 20 Ramanavani - **Hindu**
- 21 First Day of Ridvan - **Baha'i**
- 23 St. George Day - **Christian**
- 25 Hanuman Jayanti - **Hindu**
Mahavir Jayanti - **Jain**
- 25-28 Theravadin New Year - **Buddhist**
- 27 Lazarus Saturday - **Orthodox Christian**
- 28 Lag B'Omer - **Jewish**
Palm Sunday - **Orthodox Christian**
- 29 Ninth Day of Ridvan - **Baha'i**

May 2013

- 1 Beltane and Samhain - **Wicca/Pagan**
Northern and southern hemispheres
- 2 Twelfth Day of Ridvan - **Baha'i**
National Day of Prayer USA - **Interfaith**
- 3 Holy Friday - **Orthodox Christian**
- 5 Easter/Pascha - **Orthodox Christian**
- 9 Ascension Day - **Western Christian**
- 15-16 Shavuot - **Jewish**
- 19 Pentecost (Whit Sunday) - **Western Christian**
- 23 Declaration of the Bab - **Baha'i**
- 25 Visakha Puja - Buddha Day - **Buddhist**
- 26 Trinity Sunday - **Western Christian**
- 29 Ascension of Baha'u'llah - **Baha'i**
- 30 Corpus Christi - **Catholic Christian**

June 2013

- 5 Lailat al Miraj - **Islam**
- 7 Sacred Heart of Jesus - **Catholic Christian**
- 13 Ascension of Jesus - **Orthodox Christian**
- 16 Guru Arjan Dev martyrdom - **Sikh**
- 19 New Church Day - **Swedenborgian Christian**
- 21 Solstice
Litha - **Wicca/Pagan** northern hemisphere
Yule - **Wicca/Pagan** southern hemisphere
- 23 Lailat al Bara'ah - **Islam**
Pentecost - **Orthodox Christian**
- 24 Lailat al Bara'ah - **Islam**
- 29 Saints Peter and Paul - **Christian**
- 30 All Saints - **Orthodox Christian**

July 2013

- 9 Ramadan begins - **Islam**
Martyrdom of the Bab - **Baha'i**
- 11 Saint Benedict Day - **Christian**
- 13-15 Obon - **Shinto** - **Buddhist**
- 15 Saint Vladimir Day - **Christian**
- 16 Tish'a B'Av - **Judaism**
- 22 Asalhka Puja Day - **Buddhist**
- 24 Pioneer Day - **Latter-day Saints Christian**

Chaplain's Corner



Rev. Dr. Charles Tinsley
Juvenile Detention Chaplain

In a memorandum dated February 27, 2013, addressed to "Interested Individuals/Organizations," the Contra Costa County Juvenile Justice-Delinquency Prevention Commission (JJ-DPC) shared: "(The) Commission is planning its 24th Annual Juvenile Justice Awards presentation on Saturday, May 11, 2013. We are honoring individuals and programs/organizations in Contra Costa County, who during 2012, have substantially contributed toward making our County a better place to live for juveniles. Awards may also be given to individuals and programs directly related to the prevention and intervention of juvenile delinquency."

For at least the past fifteen years, it has been my honor and pleasure to have nominated many young people for one of the Commission's awards, the "Juvenile Offender Success Story." Over the years I have nominated as few as one individual per year and more than once as many as seven or eight individuals for the award. The Commission has graciously given the award to all those whom I have nominated. Several times, in this space, I have shared (prior to the ceremony), the short nomination essays. Since this has been done well before the Commission has made its selections, names of the nominees have generally not been revealed. The following essays have been submitted to the JJ-DPC for its consideration of those I have placed in nomination for the award this year:

1. Within mere days of successfully completing a program recently at the Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Facility in Byron, _____ got on an airplane and spent a week on the Central State, Kentucky State and Wilberforce universities campuses in Ohio and Kentucky. Additionally, he has visited the Butte College campus in Oroville where he has completed assessment tests and new student orientation as he prepares to enroll in classes for the fall semester 2013. He shares: "I am learning to give instead of taking, which I know so well. But life is a learning experience to enjoy and to teach others..."
2. Upon successfully completing a program at the Youth Offenders Treatment Program in Martinez, _____ immediately got a job and enrolled at Contra Costa College. However, he contemplates exploring the fire service academy and EMT training programs at Butte College. He may enroll as soon as fall semester 2013. His goal is to become a firefighter. Other interests have included military service. He states: "After my stay in juvenile hall, I got a job, been struggling in college (financially) but (it is) still my ambition to stay in college and become a fireman..."
3. Last year _____ completed a program at YOTP. He is now working and going to school. He recently wrote a most eloquent essay titled "Changes." An excerpt follows:

Having spent my 18th & 19th birthdays in juvenile hall, made me think real hard about if that was what I wanted to

be doing for the rest of my life; coming in and out of jail. Long days having nothing to do except sleep for hours and hours was not what I wanted to see in my future... When I walked outside the freedom door I said to myself "this is a new beginning, let's see if you can keep your word _____" ... Right now I'm working full time in a warehouse 7 a.m. through 3:30 p.m. on not so busy days, when there's a lot of work I get off at 5-6 pm. I'm currently working to save money for school materials and those very expensive books I need for class. I always liked going to school, so I also made that one of my main priorities once I got out. Not having enough time to go to school I managed to talk to my manager to let me out a little early on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to attend the 2 classes I enrolled in at Contra Costa College.

Right now I'm always busy with work and school I know it's hard but one thing I learned it's that nothing in life is easy, you have to work hard to become what you want to be in life...10 years from now I see myself attending medical school and also being married to my beautiful wife and having a few children. I plan to keep myself busy by following my dreams and never giving up.

And, another F.Y.I.: Not long after having been called to this ministry in September 1994, I was approached by a church in Oakland and asked to consider service as part-time interim pastor. I served the Elmhurst Presbyterian Church in East Oakland for thirty months. Following that, I was called upon to serve in temporary capacities, for varying periods of time, five other Presbyterian Church (USA) parishes, in Daly City (Grace), Richmond (Sojourner Truth), Oakland (Hillside), San Francisco (New Liberation), and most recently Imani Fellowship in Vallejo. All this was accomplished, of course, while continuing to serve, with passion and zeal, this remarkable and fascinating chaplaincy ministry.

Two years ago, the founding pastor of the Imani Fellowship Presbyterian Church in Vallejo, resigned and moved with her husband to another part of the country. Given the vacancy, the church sought to fill the pastorate on a temporary basis for one year, as they began the search for a permanent pastor. It was my plan to fulfill the terms of the year-long contract only. However, although the search process was in place and moving along rather expeditiously, the process had not yet been completed by the expiration date of the initial contract. It was agreed by concerned parties to extend the contract, on several occasions, ultimately through the end of February 2013.

Following surgery last summer, a hospital stay, a subsequent period of convalescence and healing at home, and much study and prayer, I discerned a call to *apply* for the permanent pastorate at the Imani Fellowship Church. For those unfamiliar with the PCUSA call process, be assured, it is a long and sometimes arduous one. Once completed though, all "i" s dotted and "t" s crossed, folks are prayerful and confident that God has called the very individual God wishes to serve the congregation. Where that activity is concerned I humbly share that confidence. And, I look forward with enthusiasm to continuing to serve *this* chaplaincy and *that* pastorate concurrently, the type of activity I have been privileged to have been engaged over the past nineteen years.

Your Words —*Windows on each other's lives of faith*

♦ Amer Araim The Arab Spring and American Muslims

The Arab Spring is a healthy movement despite the difficulties facing the transformation to full democracy in the five countries in the Middle East trying to achieve that noble goal. Let us remember that in most countries where democracy is now functioning, there have been arduous struggle to achieve that goal. Even today, there is still a need for civil society organizations, including faith organizations, to ensure that the democratic system is maintained functioning perfectly and democracy should be expansive by the involvement of all the sectors of the society both in the political process and the benefits.

In the early 1990s, I was invited by the conference of Islamic Social Scientists held in Washington D. C., and then presented a paper emphasizing that there was (and still is) no conflict between Islam and democracy as practiced in the West.

The Arab Spring is aiming at establishing democratic systems of government in the countries concerned, and I believe that the result of this democratic movement will aim toward establishing friendly and cooperative relations between the Arab world and the Muslim world on one hand and the United States and West on the other. Though President Barack Obama did not visit any of the countries where the Arab Spring is becoming the theme of the people and the leadership, many were hoping that the United States will go beyond the encouraging statements, and provide aid to these countries to ensure their transformation to true democracy. It is a fact that whenever there is a transformation in any country, initially there will be set backs in the economic and other performances in that country. However, in the long run democracy and peace will bring great dividends to all. The theory of democratic peace emphasized that democratically elected leaders will not wage wars against each other but would be inclined to cooperate.

While the attention of the world is concentrating on the outcomes of the Arab Spring, a reminder to readers and all concerned with peace and justice in the world that the Palestinians are still suffering from demolition of their homes, the uprooting of their trees, the daily harassment at the checkpoints and the continuous threat of expulsion from their home. Peace and justice must prevail in the Holy Land, and the first step in that direction is the halt of building Israeli settlements in the West Bank, which will be followed by negotiations to have permanent peace in the Holy Land.

♦ Rev. Ron Dunn San Ramon Valley United Methodist Church

One of the most telling and significant practices of Jesus' ministry can be found in his insistence on breaking bread with others—without regard for their social status or

place in the cultural pecking order of his day. To the consternation of the religious authorities, he had the disturbing tendency to sit down at table with "tax collectors and sinners," a catch-all phrase that indicated those who were deemed disreputable and unworthy. As Marcus Borg and other scholars have long pointed out, the table was, for Jesus, a powerful metaphor of what the kingdom of God was like.

In more than one parable, Jesus suggests that the kingdom of God (heaven) is like a great feast to which all are invited—even those who are deemed disreputable or unworthy, and it is not by accident that our sacrament of the Lord's Supper is grounded in the understanding that there is room for everyone at the table that God has set in our honor. No one is to be turned away.

This was, of course, a rather radical teaching and witness in the culture of Jesus' day—a culture that was built upon the purity laws that divided people up into the clean and the unclean, the included and the excluded. Ironically, table fellowship was a primary means of enforcing this system of separation and exclusion. It was widely recognized that to sit at table with another was to acknowledge him or her as your equal. Therefore, table fellowship with those who were considered to be unclean was strictly forbidden. In fact, to violate this understanding was to risk becoming unclean oneself. This was, of course, something Jesus managed to do on a regular basis.

While our current culture does not have an officially recognized purity system that includes and excludes, we are, nevertheless, aware that this system tends to operate in more subtle, but no less serious ways in the attitudes and judgments that are part and parcel of our culture. Perhaps nowhere do we find these attitudes and judgments more tangibly coming to the surface than in matters concerning those who are homeless. In cities and towns across the nation, there is an ongoing discussion /debate about what to do with the growing problem of homelessness. Suffice it to say, this discussion is far from over.

While the reality of homelessness needs to be addressed on many different levels, including the systemic issues that help to create and perpetuate this problem to begin with, it is important for us to recognize that we have the opportunity to offer our own response on a very basic and personal level. We have the opportunity to sit down at the table and break bread with those individuals who are so easily excluded or neglected in our culture. We have the opportunity to communicate God's radical acceptance—not to mention our own—in the simple act of eating together and engaging in the table talk that evolves naturally in such a setting.

As you know, we have been doing this on an annual basis for the last few years with our Winter Nights two-week commitment to provide shelter and food for those who have no other place to go. Bob Baker is, once

Your Words—*Continued*

again, leading our Winter Nights program, which will take place beginning on March 11th and conclude on March 24th. Our church has supported this important ministry in a number of wonderful and generous ways.

More recently, Horace Crawford and Dick Lam have joined forces to provide a new, weekly opportunity break bread and share fellowship with those who are homeless. This ministry takes place every Friday (11:00 – 2:00 P.M.) at the Trinity Center in Walnut Creek. It consists of an excellent noontime meal and a Bible study / discussion for those who wish to stay after the meal. The name of this new ministry, “Food for Thought,” could not be more appropriate, as we not only provide food that satisfies the stomach, but also, food that satisfies the soul. Thus far, we have had some very lively and moving experiences as we share together in the nourishment provided by various scripture passages.

I am grateful not only for these who are leading these efforts, but also for the many more who are supporting this work through their willingness to cook, clean, prepare, and serve. There is, indeed, something important that takes place when people take the time to sit down at the table together and share in the simple conversations that grow out of those moments. In the table talk that takes place, we are reminded, once again, that in the reign of God, there is room for everyone to join in the conversation.

♦ Rev. Gail Doering Clayton Valley Presbyterian Church

One of the hardest elements of dissolution of a pastoral relationship, for both the members of the congregation and the pastor, is the necessity to really terminate the asking for or the offer of professional services. It's especially true in the case of weddings, funerals, baptisms, hospital calls, or counseling. Because such occasions have been so integral a part of our close association over the past 5 ½ years, it's very tempting to assume that there would be no harm for me, if asked, to come back to perform them again.

But long experience in countless congregations declares otherwise. Real damage is done when former pastors return to perform such services because it serves to delay, confuse, or even undermine the bonding that should rightfully occur between the members of the congregation and the new pastor.

I am sure you will agree with me that forming a good, strong relationship with your future pastor, both interim and called, deserves the very best each of us can offer. And that “best” surely includes a commitment from you and me not to ask for, nor to offer such services. Please know this is not about a lack of genuine care and affection I have for this congregation. For after all, we are but the “actors” in this grand drama of God’s redemption. And even though we come onstage or leave, the Author abides unchanged and eternal!

That's really all that matters. Thank you for allowing me to serve you and God's blessings as you continue to minister.

♦ Cantor Leigh Korn Temple Isaiah, Lafayette

“Mishenichnas Adar –

When Adar arrives we increase our joy.”

With the arrival of the month of Adar, we shake off the doldrums of the (rather cold!) winter months by welcoming in a month of joy and frivolity. Yes, it's that time of year again. Dust off your costumes, break out the groggers, and get ready to boo Haman. It's Purim!

Purim is the one holiday that gives permission to let loose in shul. Purim is a notable spike in mood when we consider the Jewish festival cycle. Pesach is full of bittersweet joy, Yom Kippur is full of awe and reverence, and Simchat Torah is all about rejoicing. Each of us in our own lives experiences the same range of emotions throughout the year; and the Jewish calendar gives us many opportunities to express each of those feelings. Some of these human emotions are rather challenging for us to express – for example, joy or grief or guilt.

What is especially interesting is that it seems it is easier for many to feel repentant on Yom Kippur than it is for them to act foolish on Purim. Purim calls upon us to give in to the aspect of our personalities signified by the phrase *ad de-lo-yada*. This is the state of not knowing the difference between good and bad, between right and wrong. Specifically, in the story of Purim, this means a time when we can't tell the difference between Haman and Mordechai, a time when rules and all our inhibitions are swept under the rug. Many achieve this state by getting drunk on Purim. Let me assure you that we don't need alcohol to become blissfully ignorant of reality.

The Talmud says that we fully accept the *Torah* only on Purim, for only when we can mock the tradition can we fully accept it. Rabbi Michael Strassfeld writes that the threat of the mountain of Sinai hanging over our heads evaporates on Purim. All the smoke and sound of Sinai vanishes and we see clearly the *Torah*, its great potentials and great dangers. We accept the *Torah* knowing that once a year on Purim there will be a time to laugh at our own self-righteousness. We can live by the *Torah* the rest of the year knowing that one day we can let out our repressed feelings as we break all the rules, even turning the *Torah* on its head. We need Purim to laugh at what we value and therefore gain a real sense of self-worth.

So, fear not and let loose. Let the Mordechais and Hamans within your soul mingle and rejoice. Remember, Purim is not just a children's holiday. It is also a holiday for adults to let out their inner child and celebrate with wild abandon. I hope you will join us to celebrate Purim on Saturday, **February 23**, at 6:30 p.m. children and adults alike. Don't miss out on this opportunity to let your Jewish soul express your emotions of foolishness and glee.

Your Words—Continued

♦ Rev. Glenda J. Wilson St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Walnut Creek

Time Magazine, included an interesting article on the extraordinary success of Google, the innovators of one of the search engines, of which those of us who use are familiar. By the time a company like Google is worth 100 million dollars, people began to wonder what their secret is. Why are they so successful? A part of Google's success is their value on creativity. Google is willing to do things other companies don't do, for example, when Google hires, it does not hire for a specific job. If you work for Google you're hired because you excel at what you do. You do not interview for a specific job, you interview, get accepted, join the company, and then you take on a job that fits your gifts and abilities. I wonder if Google is aware that this is a biblical model for the local church?

The apostle Paul says, every one of us has gifts, strengths and talents.

"Whatever you do whether in word or deed do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Colossians 3:17

The key there is, 'in the name of the Lord Jesus,' meaning in the power of Christ. Our gifts, combined with the power of God, equal a powerful combination, enough to turn the world around, as we see in the Book of Acts, following the resurrection.

The gifts we have collectively are varied and inexhaustible. Some people have great gifts of hospitality – you walk into their home and immediately want to take your shoes off and relax, every fiber of your being is refreshed when you leave their house. Some have an amazing capacity for administration, some teach, others have gifts of working with people or children, some pray with or for others, while others quietly help out in the background not bringing any attention to themselves simply being kind, giving presence to everyone they encounter.

The apostle Paul says, "Whatever you do," it can all be used to encourage and strengthen those around you and bring others to Christ. The main message after the resurrection is, "Get the message out, however you can, God is alive and well and desires to be known." I was reminded of this again this week when speaking to a visiting pastor, he said, "We are new to this area and people are so open to learning about Christ. When I speak to them about God they are eager to learn more. They are empty and looking for God." It was a good reminder for me and a bit of a wakeup call. How easily we can forget the main thing and get distracted.

If you have ever wondered what God wants you to do here at St Luke's, here is a simple place to

begin. Choose something you like to do, prayerfully dedicate it to God, and then see if you can put your gifts to use. Do you like to read books? Consider leading a book study. Do you have a heart for the homeless? Consider helping at the Shelter. Do you love kids and want to shape their spiritual lives? Think about teaching. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than it is to receive." Christ knew there is something life-giving about doing the things you love to do. This is how you know where your place is in a local congregation. This is how to bring glory to God. Simply, being you is enough. You, fully dedicated to God, your gifts, talents, all that makes you, changes the world.

May you experience the power of the resurrection this Easter season.

♦ Rev. Roger Reaber Grace Presbyterian Church, Walnut Creek

A few weeks ago as I entered the narthex I was surprised by a "bag lady" who was quietly reading the Bible as she sat on the bench. She left half of her possessions outside but kept four waterproof grocery bags at her feet. It was a cold-wet day and she was enjoying some warmth and respite. At 3 pm I said "We will be leaving in about an hour and need to lock the doors so you will need to pack things up soon." At which point I fully expected her to request money for food or lodging. Instead she said "the Bible tells me to tithe and I want to give the church some money." I suggested that she give money to a friend in need but she insisted that her desire was to give it to the church. She then pulled out a wad of money and handed me \$20. I was floored by her faithfulness and generosity in spite of her great need.

She walked into the cold and soon afterwards it started to pour. An hour later I went to lock the front door and she was simply standing under the awning, frustrated that the last bus didn't stop and wondering when the next one would come. She would have to wait another hour so I invited her back inside, hoping that I could find her some assistance or get her to where she was headed.

Her story is very confusing because it is mixed with some mental illness exasperated by being on the streets for so long. Hotels wouldn't accept her because she didn't have ID and she wasn't comfortable going to a shelter even though I was willing to take her to Richmond and an intake counselor was on the phone ready to talk to her. Police had suggested the night before that she go to Solano County, probably to move the concern to another jurisdiction. I ended up taking her to BART and helping her buy a ticket with her money.

Your Words—*Continued*

The last I saw her she was making her way through the turnstile at BART. I still think of her often. Knowing that she has made it through many cold nights before gives me some hope. Luke 6:20 records Jesus as saying “How blest are you who are in need; the Kingdom of God is yours.” And I wonder...and I pray... Please join me in prayer and actions.

♦ Rabbi Jerry Levy Congregation B'nai Tikvah, Walnut Creek

Everyone has a digital camera in hand or in the pocket. That is not to say that everyone is photographer, it just means that everyone has a visual mode of expression within reach.

We all post to email, Facebook, to Instagram, or to our cloud chamber albums somewhere out there in digital space. So here are some suggestions next time you point and shoot:

First, please do not “TAKE” a picture. That would be stealing and we are commanded not to do that. You may record a composition, make a picture or capture a visual moment. All are Kosher ways that elevate camera-speak.

Second, focus on the eyes of the person in your image. The eyes are sacred. They are the passageways into the depths of a person. Somewhere in the other is the resonating soul and the Holy-seeking heart.

Next, every click of the shutter stops history in motion. The family, friends and events existing in time that you record are your footsteps, your impressions left in the trail, your personal journey from one passage to another. Make us proud of you walk-about encounters.

Every image posted to the internet is there forever. Its far more permanent than a tattoo. And finally, this question: Is your camera Jewish? Do you use your camera to record the sparks of the divine, to stop beauty in action, to define yourself through your choice of subject matter?

My cameras are certainly Jewish and photography is for me a religious ritual. My goal is to record surprise, to stimulate the mind and the senses and to inspire within a Jewish context. To capture in the moment a wondrous sight and to give someone pause to reflect and to consider it may, in fact, bring the viewer right up to the portal of Shabbat.

I wish you good shooting and sharing.

♦ Rev. David C. Lee St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Pleasant Hill

As I write to you, I am fine-tuning the message I plan to offer on the second Sunday in our Lenten Journey. I'll be addressing that familiar passage from the Hebrew Scripture (Genesis 15), in which God asks Abram to look up into the star-filled sky, promising to make people as numerous as the stars from Abram's offspring.

Abram (who will later be renamed Abraham) is invited by God to embark upon an epic journey, a journey of faith. It isn't a journey Abram immediately embraces; his initial reaction is to protest the seemingly absurd promises of God. Only when he receives reassurances does his resistance give way to acceptance, and finally to trust. He sets forth and, as we all know, along his journey he will encounter challenges and surprises, trials and triumphs. And, in the end, Abraham will be become not only a progenitor of Israel, but of all people who venture forth with God.

Discipleship is a journey for which there are no guarantees, no mileposts except for the sure promises of God. Like Abraham, each of us is called to journey forth in faith, faith which is trust in the promises of God who is trustworthy. As Elton Trueblood said, “Faith is not belief without proof, but trust without reservation.” Faith is all about having a willingness to journey forth, not knowing exactly about the destination. For Christians, Lent is a time set apart in our journey of faith, to test our continuing willingness to walk boldly with Jesus; to give up distorted goals; to “die” to old ways and reject new temptations; to steadfastly look beyond the cross, confident that God’s love in Jesus Christ “lives” in us, and through us, and takes hope into the future. It is a time to examine the deep places of life where we may need to make changes, or at least check our priorities, to gain strength to continue by God’s grace our journeys with Jesus...to renew our faith for the continuing journey.

Marcus Borg has written: “Faith is thus

Rev. Margaretmary Staller, currently the co-chair of the ICCCC, greeted the audience, which was then welcomed by Rick Levano, the Youth Pastor from Christ the King. He expressed on our behalf that we felt the absence of our host, Father Brian Joyce, who was unable to attend. We offered our congratulations to Father Brian who is celebrating his 50th anniversary at Christ the King.

Music burst from the starting gate with the

Your Words—Continued

about setting out on a journey like Abraham's in the posture of trust and seeking to be faithful to that relationship that we are called into. We are invited to make that journey, that journey of faith, in which we learn to trust our relationship to God and learn to be faithful to that relationship, and learn to see in a new way. We will be led in that journey into an evermore wondrous and compassionate understanding of our lives with God. Indeed, if this is not what life is about, namely, growth and wonder and compassion, then I don't know what life is about."

The story of Abraham leads us to that marvelous question asked by the contemporary poet Mary Oliver. The question is, what are you going to do with you one wild and precious life? (Mary Oliver, *New and Selected Poems*) Are we going to remain in the world of dull, the repetitive, the same old same old, or are we, like Abraham, going to respond to that voice that invites us to leave our old way of being and enter a life beyond convention and beyond our domestications of reality? The voice speaks of promise to us. "I will show you a better way, a better country."

♦ Rev John Sutton, St Anselm's Episcopal Church, Lafayette

The Argument Against Giving Something Up For Lent

Defending the position of it being wrong to give up something for Lent is like having to defend slavery in a high school debating class.

Except it isn't. And I will now lay down my case: Let's start with an example:

Say one is considering giving up sweets, drinking or _____ (fill in the blank.) What will that do for that person?

- It might help her feel better about herself
- It might make him aware of how much he has in his life without that which has been given up
- It might remind her of the strength God plants within.

What is wrong with any of those outcomes? Nothing. Except they don't begin to approach what the season of Lent is all about.

In engaging closely three weeks of the season's readings, I see lurking beneath the readings a profound sense that no matter what we do, we aren't going to get it, not all of it anyway. There is a Yiddish expression, "Man plans, God laughs."

I imagine God can see the humor in the things we 'do' to draw closer to him, but I would also guess that at times it might make God sad.

And that would be at those times when the

relationship between God and us is defined by our efforts. I am not against giving something up for Lent. I do believe however that Scripture and our relationship with that-which-is-unknowable asks us to keep our efforts in perspective before that which can make all things new continually.

Robert Burns wrote the following in his poem "The Mouse:"

*The best laid schemes of mice and men
Go often awry,
And leave us nothing but grief and pain,
For promised joy!*

There was a plan that went terribly awry and resulted in a holy man suffering on a cross. He died a terrible death in grief and pain, and yet it resulted in a promised joy.

Who knew?

THE INTERFAITH COUNCIL



CELEBRATES ITS DIVERSE MEMBERSHIP WITH THE FIRST INTERFAITH CONCERT OF 2013

Celebratory refrains of "All Are One" reached up to the high rafters of Christ the King Church in Pleasant Hill on Sunday, March 3rd, echoing the feelings of those who had gathered to share music and the warm camaraderie that have become the hallmark of ICCCC concerts. This concert, which shared the title "All Are One: A Musical Interfaith Offering" with its opening signature musical and dance piece, was offered as a fundraiser but the gathering provided an opportunity to draw together our community in the bright spirit of interfaith.

Your Words—Continued

Dr. Harmesh Kumar from the Sikh Temple in Pittsburg set the tone for the afternoon's program, opening with a prayer from the Sikh tradition. Rev. Margaret-mary Staller, currently the co-chair of the ICCCC, greeted the audience, which was then welcomed by Rick Levano, the Youth Pastor from Christ the King. He expressed on our behalf that we felt the absence of our host, Father Brian Joyce, who was unable to attend. We offered our congratulations to Father Brian who is celebrating his 50th anniversary at Christ the King.

Music burst from the starting gate with the White Horse Chorale and Dancers from Sufism Reoriented, who rocked the house with "All Are One", a crowd favorite performed last fall to delighted audiences in India. The dancers, wearing white emblazoned with bright symbols of many faith streams, twirled around the lead singer, Mischa Rutenberg, whose inclusive style encouraged the audience to join in.

The ensuing program included prayers from the Baha'is of Contra Costa, lively popular songs from Christ the King Church's youth cover band, elegant vocal pieces performed by St. Mark's Lutheran Choir, Dances of Universal Peace in the tradition of Native America, and polished classical duets performed by the accomplished artists Glenn Staller on guitar and Stephanie Chang on violin. Rev. Will McGarvey, our Interim Executive Director, offered up Bob Marley's "One Love" as the freewill offering was taken.

The program concluded with the chorus of Sufism Reoriented performing original music who invited the audience to join in the singing of an excerpt from their piece, "The New Humanity": *"East and West will come together, like two streams that merge when they meet; East and West will come together, all as one, life's circle complete!"*

Many felt the program's highlight to be the Youth Service Award presented to our 9 year old guest, Vivienne Harr, who was honored for her work toward the abolition of child slavery. Vivienne began last year to raise money to help enslaved children all over the globe via her "Make A Stand" lemon-aid sales in her Marin neighborhood. Her spirit has inspired many and she has raised thousands of dollars for this cause – and, as she told the assembly, "I'm not done yet!" Rev. Will McGarvey presented Vivienne with her award plaque which she twirled over her head during a standing ovation. After the concert, Vivienne set up her stand in the sun-drenched portico of Christ the King Church where departing concert-goers stopped to buy a cup of her lemon-aid and to extend their congratulations to this young world citizen whose determination serves as an example to us all that we can make a difference. You can support her work at www.makeastandlemonade.com.

Coming Events

■ Swing wide the doors of hospitality!

Church Women United is celebrating its traditional May Friendship Day on Friday morning, May 3rd in Martinez. Please join us, everyone welcome!

We will be welcoming guest presenter, Rena Meyers-Dahlkamp from the Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church Congo Team. Please join us to learn more about the situation faced by the Congolese people. Program will include time to share ideas about what individuals and congregations can do to be of service both at home and abroad. This educational service will be followed at noon by a festive potluck salad luncheon. Please bring a salad of your choice for every 3 persons attending from your congregation or group. Childcare will be available in the nursery.

Friday, May 3rd, 2013

**Registration: 10:30a.m., Program begins at 11:00
First Congregational Church of Martinez
1229 Court Street, Martinez (cross street Susanna,
no parking lot but plenty of free street parking in the
area)**

A few special notes:

If your group has collected a Least Coin Offering, please bring it to this event. Also, the LOPC "Crocheting for Congo" Team has been making and selling necklaces to support education for girls in schools and we have invited them to bring along their wares for this special event.

■ Fracking Boom Threatens California!

Do you know that hydraulic fracturing (or 'fracking') is NOT just a New York or Colorado problem and set to boom in California unless we stop it?

Fracking is an unregulated method of drilling for oil and gas using over 750 toxic and carcinogenic chemicals while poisoning up to 7 million gallons of water per well, yet the Bureau of Land Management auctioned 18,000 acres of the Monterey and Sousa shales to oil and gas companies on December 12, 2012 for fracking. The only thing that has stopped fracking so far is communities organizing to halt it, often in combination with legal challenges.

National Equal Justice Association's (NEJA) environmental film series includes the documentary *Gasland* which shows the devastating effects of this technique on people, animals and the environment. Call Gail at NEJA (415) 552-5833 if you or your organization are interested in hosting NEJA for a showing of *Gasland* to your group.

Coming Events

■ Saint Paul's Episcopal Church invites you join their choir in a Fundraising Concert for Contra Costa

Interfaith Housing

Friday, May 17th, 2013 at 7:30 pm

1924 Trinity Ave., Walnut Creek

The Program will be:

The Heavens are Telling from The Creation F. J. Haydn
Exultate Jubilate W. A. Mozart – Erin Findley, Soprano
Intermission:

The Messiah G. F. Handel

Hallelujah Chorus and all of Part 3

We will have four professional soloists/section leaders joining us for this concert: David Auerbach, Jonathan Smucker, Kindra Scharich, Erin Findley. This literature should be familiar to most choral singers. There will be four Tuesday evening rehearsals at 7:30 p.m. prior to the concert: April 23, April 30, May 7, May 14. All expenses for the program are being covered by memorial contributions to St. Paul's Episcopal Church so all proceeds will go to Contra Costa County Interfaith Housing. Music will be provided if you need or you may use your personal copy. If you would like to participate as a singer in this concert, please contact John Stump, Music Director at St. Paul's Episcopal Church at jstump@stpaulswc.org or (925) 705-6220.

Tickets for the concert are going to be sold at a suggested donation of \$20.00.

■ Habitat for Humanity "Build the Dream" Brunch Event

Saturday, May 18, 2013

Brunch opens at 10:00

Presentation from 10:30-11:45

Veterans Memorial Building

3780 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette

The Spring 2013 Fundraising Brunch will be a beautiful, mission-focused event showcasing Habitat East Bay/Silicon Valley's accomplishments over the past 26 years and looking ahead as we continue our journey to serve even more families in the years to come. We have so much to celebrate ... and with the Carter Work Project just months away, we have so much more to do. Delicious Brunch Entrée, Fruit Parfait and Pastries Free (RSVP's are required to VBom-marito@HabitatEBSV.org)

Table Captains play an important role in this event, acting as Habitat East Bay/Silicon Valley ambassadors. Each table will have an assigned table captain who will invite members of their congregations, friends, business colleagues, and others to join them at their table during the brunch. The program is quite inspirational, in which

our partner families will share their Habitat journey in a very eloquent way.

May is also the official start of construction at the new Pleasant Creek Development. One of the homes will be the All Faiths House, for which congregations of every denomination are coming together to raise funds and build this home.

Guests will be given the opportunity to make an investment in the future of Habitat East Bay/Silicon Valley, either as a one-time gift or multi-year pledge, and all funds raised at the brunch by members of a faith community or their guests will go directly into the All Faiths Home account, so this is a great fundraising opportunity.

■ The Executive Board of the Interfaith Council offer these words during this time of collective grief.

"We continue to grieve with our nation in the wake of today's mass murder at a school in Connecticut. This is the most gut wrenching of all the recent gun-violence related incidents we have seen in the sad history of such occurrences. We also send our prayers and energy toward those in Portland, Colorado, and Virginia for whom this news brings back fresh memories of trauma. Our hearts go out to the families who lost their children and other loved ones, as well as the families of the survivors as their innocence was snatched away from them. May God comfort them all. We as an Interfaith Council offer our hope, love, strength and prayers in dealing with this tragedy. Events like this remind us of our calling to become more loving towards our children, neighbors and community. Let us renew our dedication to care for those with anger, hopelessness or mental illness."



Have you found and liked our Facebook page?

Homeless Veterans in Need of Housing

Shelter, Inc. of Contra Costa County provides supportive services for veterans in need of housing. www.shelterincofccc.org, (925) 957-7579
Contra Costa County Homeless Services
(800) 799-6599

Social Justice Alliance Of the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County

All are welcome at the May 8 SOJA Meeting

6:00 pm Pot Luck at Natalie Russell's home, 1626 Barnett Circle, Pleasant Hill.

All are welcome. RSVP russell1626@juno.com; or 925-934-0759

SOJA Members and Their ACTION Agenda

Immigration, Middle East Matters, CROP Walk, & Winter Nights Shelter, and Hydraulic Fracturing, are among the topics which interest us.

Hydraulic Fracturing. **Gail Williamson, Barbara Elcombe, and Julie** from the National Equal Justice Association (NEJA) spoke of the damage to the earth from fracking. She highly recommends the movie *GasLand*. **Julie**, a student of the University of San Francisco majoring in ethics, said 750 chemicals are required to frack. Rock is drilled into and radium and uranium come out. Water is contaminated. The state of Vermont said No to fracking, as did New York governor Cuomo. Another No was a town in Colorado. Earthquakes in Colorado are believed caused by fracking. Invite a NEJA rep to your church, club, school or home and find out more about how you can join the struggle for equal justice. For movie and speakers, call Gail at (415) 552-5833.

CROP Walk. **Anne Crisp** reminded us that the Walk is October 20, 2013. The Planning Group are pursuing business sponsors. **Jan Warren** recruited the first business sponsor. **Anne** asks that members of the Interfaith Council help find small businesses that would sponsor this hunger walk and reap the benefit of great publicity. If you have a business in mind, please send an email to annecrisp@yahoo.com.

Immigration. Several SOJA members (**Delores Loague, Dean Coons, Chris Coons, and Dorothy Vance**) belong to the MICA Immigration Task Force which meets at the Unitarian Universalist Church. **Dean** reported on the plans for MICA's "Adopt a Dreamer" project to help Dream Act potential clients with encouragement and funding. Spark Point and CCISCO have partnered in this endeavor. MICA is considering participating.

The Prayer Vigils are held every first Saturday at the West County Detention Center where prayers, music, and story telling are shared. **Rev. Debby Lee** leads the Prayer Circle, and a sizable group from the Unitarian Universalist Church and the Mt. Diablo Peace and Justice Center, wearing yellow Immigration T-shirts, attend regularly. Christ the King Church's delegation is led by **Anne Daniele**.

FAITHS. **Dean** invited us to the Tuesday, April 23, Seminar.

Middle East Matters. **Dr. Amer Araim** said he was not happy to report on conditions in Syria and Egypt or the Palestinian issue.

Winter Nights Shelter. **Gwen Watson**, the Shelter's Executive Director, summarized some of the achievements of the 2012-2013 Shelter: As of mid-April, 81 homeless individuals were admitted into Winter Nights, the majority children. **Joe Macaluso**, is helping our families find housing. Two families left the area to travel to cities where their family is located and can provide help and boost their morale. Currently 7 families reside with us for a total of 28. At this time there is only one family with a car. One family's car is in an auto repair shop. And **Mahmood, Bill, and Valerie** devised a plan that would address this issue: They asked **Debra** if she would drive clients to school and work in her sports van until the auto is repaired. She didn't hesitate saying Yes. The generosity of our staff is exceptional.

Two Issues of Interest. Gun Violence and Immigration will be discussed at the May 8 meeting. It is expected that SOJA will study the legislation and take a stand.

The May 8 SOJA Meeting is a 6:00 pm Pot Luck at Natalie Russell's home, 1626 Barnett Circle, Pleasant Hill. All are welcome. RSVP russell1626@juno.com; or 925-934-075.9

- Gwen Watson & Natalie Russell, SOJA Co-Chairs

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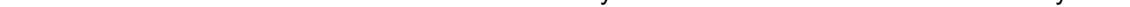
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THANK YOU CORNER:

The Interfaith Council is blessed to have dedicated volunteers who come together to collate, fold, sticker and label our newsletter in preparation for mailing. Your previous issue arrived in your hands, thanks to: Elsie Boarman, Nicholas Costa, Madeline Gomes, Bob and Mary Hogan, Sue Johnston, Tim Michelson, Judy Meigs, and Dorothy Vance. If you are interested in being part of this joyous band, call Lenita at 925.672.1053.

PLEASE PRAY FOR (in our rotating circle of prayer):

Awakening Retreat Center, Brentwood • First Presbyterian Church, Concord • St. Timothy's Episcopalian, Danville • Holy Shepherd Lutheran, Orinda • Pittsburg United Methodist Church • Christ the King Catholic, Pleasant Hill • All those, young and not so young, who suffer from being bullied • Victims of the recent horrific explosion in Texas • All who were affected by the terrorist bombs set off at the Boston Marathon • Sufism Reoriented as they begin construction of their new sanctuary.

The kind-hearted souls who deliver Meals on Wheels
Those seeking employment