

Ministering Together

"News, Comments, and Events of concern to the Religious Community"

The Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County

Winter Edition 2014

Dear friends,

This season's newsletter comes to you with many voices coming from across the county. I get to make many connections in any given month, hearing news and stories that rarely make it out of the corner of the county in which they occur. Sometimes the newspapers hear about those feel good stories, however, most stories that make it to the headlines or nightly news are full of dread, shock and awe.

This year marked the 23rd annual celebration of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This was the first year we haven't been in civic park in Walnut Creek and we are very thankful to St. Paul's Episcopal for opening their doors and hearts to us as we sang, remembered and were challenged by the message of Rev. Kamal Hassan of Sojourner Truth Presbyterian Church in Richmond, who reminded us of how "inconvenient" the message of any prophet can be. The Voices of St. Benedict's Catholic Church in Oakland blessed with some fabulous music that had us up on our feet and our hands clapping. It was a full house and we got to hear from Rep. George Miller, State Senator Mark DeSaulnier, and Elizabeth Ramos from Assemblywoman Susan Bonilla's office. Dwight Stone shared an original piece on the piano to remind us that light overcomes darkness and we were inspired once more to live out the ways of Interfaith peace and justice.

Another story I heard recently was publicized in the Rossmoor News and is noteworthy for us as a Council. For years, some groups have put up public Creches – or Christian nativity scenes – near the entrance to Rossmoor to mark the season. Years ago, it was a custom in many places across the country to allow such Christian displays every holiday season. For some, it was assumed that this was a Christian nation and the presence of the Creches was a reminder to religious minorities of the privilege experienced in our culture by Christians. Eventually, in some places Chanukah Menorahs and other religious symbols of the season were placed nearby the Creche in town squares, and in other places such requests were denied. This year, for the first time the Rossmoor Atheist and Agnostic Club got permission to erect a "Freethought Tree of Knowledge" near the Creche. The tree was decorated with copies of book covers representing free thinkers, such as Darwin, Sagan, Spinoza, and others. Similar "Freethought Trees" are displayed in other cities around country during the solstice season. Four days after being erected the tree was vandalized and scattered. Some passersby would reassemble the tree, but eventually the tree was gone and all that was left were some evangelistic tracts.

I and many others who met at the Rossmoor Interfaith Council meeting found it troubling that someone would go to the trouble to vandalize and steal such a marker, regardless of who placed it there. We don't know who may have done this or what their motivation was. Perhaps there remains an element of Christian privilege alive within our culture. One of the co-leaders, Eric Stone said, "It is my impression that there is an element of violence in the intensity behind the act. The management of the Rossmoor community was supportive and encouraged us to reassemble it. Some people from the churches stopped by with words of support. All in all, sometimes negative events turn into good things."

As Dr. King said, "Hatred paralyzes life; love releases it. Hatred confuses life; love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; love illuminates it." He also said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." Friends, can our Interfaith hospitality be extended to those who claim no faith or tradition? I think it must. I've seen some councils start to use the word "Inter-religious" as a way of welcoming Atheists and Agnostics into their circles of conversation and service, recognizing that people of good faith and conscience also seek to work toward the peace and harmony of our communities. May we all feel safe and welcome in our neighborhoods, because *"We Belong to Each Other..."*



Left to right: **David Marshak**, B'nai Shalom; **Rev. Will McGarvey**; **Margli Auclair**, Mt Diablo Peace & Justice Center; **Rev. Kamal Hassan**, Sojourner Truth Presbyterian Church, Richmond.



A full house at St. Paul's Episcopal Church at the Dr. King Event on January 20, 2014.

Shalom, Peace, Salaam, Om Shanti, Solh, Amani, Paz, 평화, Ping On...

Rev. Will McGarvey

“We Belong to Each Other”

Religious and Cultural Observances

February

- 2
 - Candlemas - Christian
 - Four Chaplains Sunday- Interfaith
 - Presentation of Christ in the Temple - Anglican Christian
 - Imbolc - Lughnassad - Wicca/Pagan Northern and southern hemispheres
- 3
 - Setsubun-sai - Shinto
- 4
 - Vasant Panchami ** - Hindu
- 14
 - Saint Valentine's Day - Christian
- 15
 - Nirvana Day ** - Buddhist - Jain
- 16
 - Triodion begins – Christian
- 25
 - Meher Baba's birthday (1894) – Sufism Reoriented
- 26 - March 1
 - Intercalary Days * - Baha'i
- 28
 - Maha Shivaratri ** - Hindu

March

- 1
 - Saint David of Wales - Christian
- 2
 - Transfiguration Sunday - Christian
 - Meatfare Sunday - Orthodox Christian
- 2 - 20
 - Nineteen Day Fast * - Baha'i
- 3
 - Clean Monday - Lent begins - Orthodox Christian
- 4
 - Shrove Tuesday - Christian
- 5
 - Ash Wednesday - Lent begins - Christian
- 9
 - Orthodox Sunday - Orthodox Sunday
- 13
 - H. Ron Hubbard birthday - Scientology
- 16
 - Magha Puja Day ** - Buddhist
 - Purim ** starts on eve of March 15 - Jewish
- 17
 - St Patrick's Day - Christian
 - Holi ** - Hindu
 - Hola Mohalla - Sikh
- 19
 - Saint Joseph's Day - Christian

- 20 Equinox
 - Ostara * - Wicca/Pagan northern hemisphere
 - Mabon * - Wicca/Pagan southern hemisphere
- 21
 - Naw Ruz (News Year)* - Baha'i
 - Norouz (New Year) - Persian/Zoroastrian
- 25
 - Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Christian
- 28
 - Khordad Sal (Birth of Prophet Zaranhushtra) ** - Zoroastrian
- 31
 - Hindu New Year ** - Hindu
- 31-April 8
 - Ramayana ** - Hindu

April

- 8
 - Ramanavami ** - Hindu
- 12
 - Lazarus Saturday - Orthodox Christian
- 13
 - Palm Sunday - All Christians
 - Mahavir Jayanti ** - Jain
- 14
 - Baisakhi New Year - Sikh
- 15
 - Lord's Evening Meal - Jehovah's Witness Christian
 - Hanuman Jayanti ** - Hindu
- 15-22 *
 - Pesach (Passover) - Jewish
- 17
 - Maundy Thursday - Christian
- 18
 - Good (Holy) Friday - All Christian
- 20
 - Easter - All Christians
- 21
 - First Day of Ridvan* - Baha'i
- 23
 - St. George Day - Christian
- 27
 - Yom HaShoah * - Jewish
- 29
 - Ninth Day of Ridvan * - Baha'i

May

- 1
 - National Day of Prayer - Interfaith USA
 - Beltane - Samhain * - Wicca/Pagan Northern and Southern hemispheres

Chaplain's Corner

Rev. Dr. Charles Tinsley
Juvenile Detention Facilities
Chaplain



For the duration of my service in this ministry, now nearly twenty years, I have maintained contact, often close contact, with dozens of young people following their encounters with the juvenile detention system in this county.

"Aftercare" for several hundred young people has included the introduction to higher education opportunities. Select numbers have gone on to earn college degrees. Others who went away to school but did not "finish," have in many instances, come home to conduct lives in different, positive fashion, having been exposed to more productive, legal and moral ways of doing so.

Sadly, a significant number of individuals didn't quite "get it." They continued to get into serious trouble, as adults. Some have found themselves away in dangerous, hostile and disagreeable situations, for very long periods of time, even for life. Tragically, some have died in those places.

I have hundreds of letters from these, some now not-so-young people who currently suffer and languish in prison facilities. Excerpts of some of these communications have been shared in this space over the years.

Recently, a young person with whom I spent much time during his teenage years, and into his early twenties, wrote a letter addressed specifically and deliberately to young people currently in custody and/or on probation. He seeks to impart the wisdom borne of brutal lessons he learned, likely too late. He shares the following, in hopes that the hearers/readers will pay attention and NOT follow in his footsteps. It is transcribed, with his permission, in its entirety below as it was written, uppercase and all:

Dear fellow brothers and solders in the struggle. I pray this letter reaches all of you in good health and spirits. We continue to fight this everlasting battle but yet and still stand strong in the face of adversity. I do not wish incarceration upon any human being because its design is not meant to rehabilitate but to do just the opposite which is to demoralize and strip a man of his dignity and self-respect! I am currently an inmate being housed at one of the most notorious violent prisons in the state of California! I am surrounded

by murderers, gang bangers, and criminals and it's not uncommon to see stabbings and yard riots take place on a daily basis. Correctional officers are armed with mini 14 assault rifles and there are no warning shots fired!

This is the equivalent of living in a third world country and you are on the frontline of a warzone! There's times when we go on 2 to 3 month lockdowns which means you stuck in a cell for 23 hours a day sometimes 24 hours a day and you only get to come out for a shower! I'm giving it y'all raw and uncut there is NOTHING glamorous or exciting about prison life! I live in a constant state of paranoia not being able to trust no one and constantly having to be aware of my surroundings. Over 75% of the prison population where I am being housed at have life sentences including myself. This is the only life a lot of these guys will ever know!

I did not write this letter to scare or preach to nobody. I simply wrote this letter to give insight and a reality check to those of you who want to continue being knuckleheads! This is the last place I want to see any of you end up! It hurts my heart to see young brothers' losing they lives to the streets or the prison system. Rev. Tinsley has been the closest person to a father figure that I've ever had. He's always been there for me thru the good and the bad. I love rev. Tinsley like a father and he has a lot of love to spread around to those who choose to embrace him. He has given so much to me and he is part of the reason I'm giving my story and testimony to all of you!

Please stop taking freedom for granted. I am fully aware and understand that a lot of you come from violent and poverty stricken neighborhoods like myself or have dysfunctional families or have a messed up childhood. I have experienced all of the above and even though I'm where I am at I continue and strive to have a positive outlook on life. We all have decisions my brothers to make in life so I urge you all to make the right ones. It's time to stand up and be men and take accountability for our actions. I am living proof that it's never 2 late to change your lifestyle. I pray and hope that my words motivate and encourage you all to follow a path of righteousness. My brothers continue to keep y'all heads held high and stand strong. And remember this struggle is what defines a man's character!

*Much love and respects 2 you all,
Brother Jeremy*

Your Words – Windows on each other's lives of faith

❖ **Rabbi Roberto Graetz**

Temple Isaiah, Lafayette

Every year, when December comes around, newspapers are filled with “Share the Need” stories; our mailboxes fill with requests from all kinds of worthy (and some not so worthy) organizations that need our help to continue doing good works. And, don't forget: get your check in the mail before year's end and you can take a charitable tax deduction! Sometimes I turn into a cynic and feel that the tax deduction is what it is all about. For as soon as December is past, the headlines change: the underprivileged are back to being those who milk the system, abuse our emergency rooms, and drive our government deficits up.

It is one month out of twelve that we are urged to look at the good, and then we can go back to our regular selves as we watch poverty levels grow faster than our GNP. When the cycle is complete, we'll return to plead for help since the need has only grown exponentially while the wealth continues to be concentrated in an ever smaller cohort.

I am delighted that we are becoming, once again, a congregation committed to work year-round to change this pattern. To our many hands-on social action projects, we are adding the potential of collaboration with other faith communities, non-profit organizations, corporations, and government agencies that are looking at the whole picture with the intent of reducing the levels of poverty in a serious way. Our Values in Action (ViA) Isaiah Team, under the tireless leadership of Jasmine Tarkoff and Casey Sasner, have been working intensely to better understand the root causes of hunger and homelessness and the overall landscape of poverty in Contra Costa County. In Jasmine's words “Since September, the team has engaged in numerous research action meetings with non-profit executive directors, service providers, funders, and county officials in the interest of learning about the challenges and opportunities that surround these issues. We are considering and evaluating how we might affect policy and systemic change as well as engage in potentially new direct service to help the underserved.”

As partners in the “Roadmap to Cut Poverty” Campaign, an initiative of the United Way, we encourage many more of our dedicated Temple members to join the ViA Isaiah team. At the end of the day, if we are serious about the commitments we make, ViA Isaiah can't be just another committee; it has to be a team, and though some may sit at the sidelines and root for the team, if we are to be successful, many more need to enter the field. If you are ready to advance this effort, do not hesitate to call Jasmine, Casey or me.

The task ahead of us is enormous and we may not be able to complete the work that needs to be done but, as Pirke Avot (the Teachings of Our Ancestors) reminds us, we are not exempt from doing our part.

❖ **Rev. Leslie Takahashi Morris**

Mt. Diablo Unitarian Universalist, Walnut Creek

One of my New Year's resolutions is to continue to fight false dichotomies where I see them. This kind of “either/or” thinking seems to be one of the traps that keeps humanity from realizing its full potential and we Unitarian Universalists, for all our love of ideas and exploration, are not immune. One of the false dichotomies I am especially eager to lay to rest is the idea that one must choose a religious path that EITHER tends to one's personal spiritual development OR cares about making a difference in the world. To me, this is like saying we either choose our left-hand or our right, our firstborn or our second, breathing or being!

Without engagement in the world, spiritual development becomes too inwardly focused. While not everyone relishes the outer edges of activism, many paths exist for engaging with the real issues and concerns of the world. In relationship with these, we test out true spiritual mettle, as it were!

And without the discipline of inner growth, activism soon becomes shrill and self-righteous, devoid of the humility and rueful truth-telling which gives one a true path for going the distance. One must tend the health of one's inner life to continue to see a world truly more just and fair.

I celebrate that we have a tradition which allows for both—the free and responsible search for truth and meaning and the engagement in a quest for justice and equity.

Within the embrace of both these essential goals, the heart of the religious journey is found for me: inner peace and outer peace, engagement with one's own truths and the truths of the world, opportunities to grow as a person while being part of growing compassion in our world. Our congregation, guided by its goals to be both a place where people grow as individuals and a place of deep engagement with the issues of the world, offers one a chance to step out of one's comfort zone and into a new exploration. My wish for this New Year is that we continue to hold BOTH in this, our beloved religious community.

❖ **Rev. John Sutton**

St. Anselm's Episcopal Church, Lafayette

When we gather around the Thanksgiving table with friends and family, it is the annual occasion when we offer thanks. We think about what we are grateful for. It is a ritual as familiar as receiving communion, and like all rituals can become moribund.

We are truly grateful as we gather at that moment

Your Words – Continued

for the loved ones who are sharing the meal with us, some of whom have traveled great distances to be there. We remember the freedoms we enjoy and the opportunities we have been given.

And yet...how deep does the thanksgiving go?

Anne Lamott wrote in *Traveling Mercies* that her favorite two prayers are 'Help me! Help me! Help me!' and 'Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!' We can tend to focus on that first one and miss the life-changing power in the second one.

Thanksgiving can become a more meaningful ritual when we reflect on it more deeply. Here are some thoughts to consider annually that can lead us into deeper appreciation before we say grace at that great meal:

- What did I lose this year that I now value more greatly as a result of having lost it?
- How can I learn from that loss in order to appreciate what I have now while I have it?
- What are the blessings with which I have been endowed that are beyond the vagaries of time?
- How can I weave those blessings into my life to act as a bulwark against the inevitable losses of this world?

I think we all know at a deep level what I am talking about. And with some reflection, we can realize it even more strongly. It can become the central blessing that is actualized in our lives, a spirit that moves from our head to our heart and out into the world around us.

Gratitude is to life like an appetite is to food- It makes everything better. But there is a difference. Because when we are sated with food our appetite is gone. But we never really get sated when we live into the fertile spirit of gratitude. Its warmth can spread from us to others and become an engine of joy that knows no limits.

❖ Rev. Glenda Wilson

St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Walnut Creek

You have heard the old warning, "Never discuss religion or politics at the table". The warning should probably be, "Never discuss religion or politics with people who do not share your view", since it tends to lead to an argument. It's been a long time since I enjoyed a theological argument. Arguing about theology was once one of my favorite pastimes, particularly during my seminary years but, something changed along the way. After a few years, I began to notice no one ever changed their minds. I would rigidly hold to my position, and the other would just as tenaciously hold on to theirs. The same thing happens in a political discussion. You rarely get anywhere, so a long time ago, I simply stopped arguing. Oh, I might say, "That's not my understanding," or "That's not how I interpret scripture," but for the most part, I refrain. I refrain because it's the kind of conversation that does not go anywhere 'helpful', and there are reasons for this stalemate when it come to our understanding of God.

Theologians and philosophers have categorized stages of faith in religion. By the way, this applies to all faith traditions not just Christianity. The stages show us we are not all at the same level. I think we intuitively know this, especially if we have a conversation with someone who seems 'ahead' of us in some way, more centered, peaceful, kind, gentle, less defensive and more able to for- give. I've broken down the stages into four for the sake of brevity. Masses of research have been done on this topic and the following does not do it justice. The following introduces the topic.

Stage One (Baby/infant): This is the beginning stage. Here we have the babies, the new converts, excited, enthusiastic. There is little understanding, but there is an exuberance that is delightful. They have tremendous faith and are often full of joy. The 'treasure' in the field has been found. In a congregational setting, the congregation and everyone in it is perfect, including, me!

Stage Two (Pre-critical): Here, there is a need for strict limits. Tell me the rules and I'll follow them. There is black and white thinking, right and wrong, insiders and outsiders, often a literal understanding of Scripture. There is a need for absolute certainty. This is the one who will not hesitate in telling you where you are wrong, as you are sitting around the dinner table. In a congregation it would be, what is the churches position on abortion or capital punishment, gay is- sues? etc... The authority comes from an outside source.

Stage Three (challenging/sceptic): In this stage, the rules are questioned. There's a challenge to the belief system, the institution or church, and many difficult questions are asked. This is when people leave the church, saying, "I don't believe this anymore." If one can hang on in there, a breakthrough to new deeper understanding will come and is necessary to grow. All previous 'givens' come under scrutiny.

Stage Four (mystic/communion): Less dogmatic and rigid. Non dualistic thinking. There is a longing to grow deeper faith- wise. There is a greater level of engagement in the community. There is wisdom rather than mere knowledge. Inner transformation. Knowing we are all in different places can help us deal with others we disagree with. Spiritual maturity has a capacity to relate to people regardless of their religion, politics, faith or non-faith. We see this modeled perfectly in Jesus, who always looked beyond the surface view/position/question and spoke to the heart of the matter. Each one is challenged to follow and grow. May we all grow deeper in our faith this New Year.

❖ Rev. Jack Shriver

Clayton Valley Presbyterian Church

We have before us a brand new year of life, a time to ponder its meaning perhaps, and then to act on what we discover. Let me share some thoughts on this subject from one of my favorite authors, Robert Raines,

Your Words – Continued

from his book, *To Kiss The Joy*.

"What time is it in my life? I want to touch the tapestry of my life, melt its meaning, taste its fruit. I reach for permanence only to taste transience.

What time is it in your life? We all seem to reach for permanence as time goes by. But we confuse duration with significance-- as I was reminded recently at the funeral of a sixteen year old boy. The significance of his life is not to be measured in terms of its length, but in terms of the depth of his every day, the fullness, the totality, the wild, open abandon with which he gave himself, day by day, to his days. Duration in a marriage or friendship can kill a sick relationship, or deepen a healthy relationship. Predictability in a person, in a relationship, in an institution, is boring. Sameness is death on a platter. For eternity is not linear, not stretching out ad infinitum, ad nauseam. Eternity is not permanence, but significance; not duration, but depth."

So, what time is it in all our lives? What are we searching for, permanence or depth? Are we stuck or growing? May 2014 be for all of us a year to live life moment by moment, a year of fulfillment and compassion as we serve the God who loves us so deeply.

❖ **Jasmine Tarkoff and Casey Sasner**

VIA Isaiah: Values In Action

VIA ISAIAH: Where Social Action, Direct Service and Community Organizing come together

When Temple Isaiah began community organizing four years ago, it was with two goals in mind: to further develop our congregation's relational culture and our pursuit of social justice. A listening campaign led to over 1,000 conversations and has trans- formed our culture at Temple Isaiah. This way of relating to each other has infused many areas of Temple life from committee and board work to social events like our annual Neighborhood Havdalah. It has even informed the way we deal with conflict in our community—that is, stepping into the conflict instead of out. To truly be "in relation" with each other is to listen with deep curiosity, compassion and empathy. Temple Isaiah has a long tradition of commitment to social action direct service initiatives. In fact, we are about to mark our tenth year of involvement in Winter Nights. Our direct service projects marry our congregants' resources (time, treasure, and talents) and passion for tikkun olam to the needs of the underserved in our county. Our four focus areas are hunger, homelessness, education, and community of care (health care and the Angel Network.) These four areas are supported by hundreds of TI volunteers throughout the year. We are moving ever closer to our vision of becoming a true social action synagogue. Many of the leaders involved in these direct service activities experienced frustration as they saw poverty deepening and felt that their efforts were insufficient for such growing and serious problems. They determined to continue their invaluable direct service efforts while

simultaneously endeavoring to understand the root causes of hunger and homelessness. The team is looking for gaps in the system and considering how our voice might affect policy and systemic change. Temple Isaiah, as an over-900 family congregation with strong ties in the faith community, can harness the collective will to positively impact change for those less fortunate. In addition, our learning will surely lead us to other direct service initiatives to address poverty in our county. The Hunger and Homelessness Root Cause team is meeting with non- profit executive directors, service providers, and county officials in the interest of learning about the challenges and opportunities that surround these issues. We intend by the end of the year to invite our entire congregation to engage in action. Stay tuned!

❖ **Father Brian Joyce**

Christ the King Church, Pleasant Hill

This weekend we begin the first of four Sundays in Advent. Our Advent theme is "Wake Up and Welcome the Light". Advent is not only a season of light and darkness as we wait for the coming of Christ, but also a clear signal Christmas is near. Of course, no one needs to tell you that, whether you were busy on Black Friday or Black Thursday or you are neurotic, like me, and started your Christmas shopping in July. We know it is the time for gifts and the season for giving.

Perhaps one of the greatest gifts in my life time has been the work of the Second Vatican Council. This Wednesday, December 4th, we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of its greatest achievement. Fifty years ago this Wednesday, in a landslide vote of 2,147 and four against, the Council, set in motion a reshaping of the way Roman Catholics worship unlike anything tried before. You may not all remember it, but until 1963 Catholic worship, especially the Sunday mass, was fixed, rubrical, clergy oriented, unchanging and often unintelligible. Our worship was largely stressing external actions and what the priest did with his back to the people "up there", while the people were passive viewers, and it was all in Latin! Fifty years ago this week the Bishops at Vatican II changed all this. Before long, lay men and women read the scripture for the first time and became Eucharistic Ministers. Catholics received the consecrated bread in their hands and were offered consecrated wine from the cup and a wide variety of Scripture readings were introduced. Four principles guided the Bishops renewal in worship: 1. Full active participation by everyone as our right and duty; 2. Adaption of worship to local circumstances, especially important in missionary countries; 3. Authority of local Bishops and Bishop's Conferences to make decisions for local circumstances and culture; and, 4. Bringing worship in line with contemporary special needs, education and maturity of Catholics.

As you may have noticed some of these principles are being challenged, compromised and even reversed today. A dramatic recent example must be the new

Your Words – Continued

English translation of the mass for English speaking countries, imposed on us all since 2011.

❖ Rev. Kathi McShane

San Ramon Valley United Methodist Church, Alamo

*“By committing themselves to meet regularly together, Christians become aware of those who are not gathering together, —those who are absent. This is how the community develops the practice of pastoral care and evangelism, the skill of memory for those missing, the virtue of love for the lost, and the notion of the communion of saints.” ~Samuel Wells, in *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics**

Maybe this quote caught my attention because I am writing on Halloween, the eve of All Saints’ Day. Or maybe it’s because I’d have to count on at least two hands the number of people who have said to me in the last few months, “I haven’t been to church in a long time, and I’m not sure anyone’s even noticed.”

Sometimes when I hear this I’m pretty sure someone’s trying to tell me that it’s the pastors’ job to keep track of who is and is not in church on Sundays. And it’s true, I do often notice, and miss, people when I don’t see them for a few weeks! But I’m not sure it is solely the responsibility of the pastors, or even the official greeters, to let people know they’ve been missed. I think this is work we share—to be aware not only of the people who are around us on Sunday mornings, but those who are absent.

I used to wish we could convince people to move out of their “regular” pews, to sit in different areas of the sanctuary on Sunday mornings. But my thinking on this has changed. Now I realize that people make little neighborhoods in the pews; that you get to know the people who sit around you, and that often, friendships begin in those casual conversations as worship begins or ends. That’s a good thing! And if you don’t know the names of the people who sit near you week after week, I hope you’ll risk the embarrassment of saying, “I’m really sorry, but I can’t remember your name. Can you tell it to me again?” And then ask a question that will help you remember something about that person’s story, “Are you in one of the small groups around here?” Or even, “How about those Red Sox?”

Everyone wants to be noticed—whether it’s in their presence or their absence. When I don’t show up for a meeting of a group I feel I’m a part of (or would like to be a part of), I never resent it if someone calls or e-mails to say they missed me; it actually makes me feel included, as if my presence matters.

If there’s someone you’ve noticed you haven’t seen at church for a while, I hope you’ll write a note or make a phone call and let them know you’d be glad to see them again. It’s not an intrusion or pushy; it’s kind and thoughtful. And no doubt, you will make someone’s day.

❖ Amer Araim

President of the Islamic Community Outreach of California, Walnut Creek Islamic Center

Reflections on 2013, and Hopes for 2014

First of all, I wish to share my best with the members of faith communities in this area and peoples of the world for 2014 and many years to come. Such transitions in time always encourages us to think about the positive developments in our life, and to work to overcome matters that are contrary to our beliefs and aspirations. The Holy Land and the entire Middle East represent a challenge to our common hope to ensure the spread of true democracy, peace and justice despite the saddening violence and civil strife.

I wish to share my experience while working at the United Nations –particularly those years during the struggle against apartheid. The passing away of the great South African leader Nelson Mandela highlighted his success in becoming the voice and aspiration of his people. There continues to be great respect and admiration of the world for this man who inspired not only South Africans of all races, but peoples everywhere. The international community, particularly the UN, as well as nongovernmental organizations and activists everywhere provided very important support for the struggle of the people of South Africa. I feel proud to be part of those efforts, as a delegate and as the staff member of the United Nations responsible for sanctions against South Africa. The work of the United Nations to help end the diabolical system of apartheid became a model for the success of the United Nations in assisting oppressed peoples to end tyranny, ensure respect for human rights, establish justice, and achieve prosperity. Even in his prison Nelson Mandela was a great inspiration to black South Africans to continue their struggle to end the system of apartheid by peaceful means despite their great sacrifices. After his release from prison, he led South Africa to a peaceful and democratic society and rejected retaliation or vengeance, even against those who inflicted great harm and pain on black South Africans. Nelson Mandela decided to serve one term, contrary to the tradition of many revolutionary leaders in the Global South, particularly Africa and the Middle East. His lifestyle after leaving the presidency represented his attachment to simplicity, and concern about the ordinary people.

Nelson Mandela, Bishop Desmond Tutu, and other South African leaders have referred to the fact that the Palestinians were suffering just like their South African brothers and sisters during the apartheid regime. After the death of PLO leader Yasir Arafat, Nelson Mandela called him “... an icon in the proper sense of the word,” and “Yasir Arafat was one of the outstanding freedom fighters of his generation... It is with great sadness that his and his people’s dream of a Palestinian state had not been realized.” Immediately after Mr. Mandela’s

Your Words – Continued

release from prison he refused to visit Israel. He decided to do so in 1999 when there were hopes for achieving peace based on ending the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. Mr. Mandela conveyed to the Israeli Foreign Ministry the following: "Talks of peace remain hollow if Israel continues to occupy Arab territories..... I understand completely well why Israel occupies the lands....There was a war. But if there going to be peace, there must be a complete withdrawal from all these areas."

The best way to appreciate, and maintain the legacy of Nelson Mandela is by supporting peace, justice and true democracy in the Holy Land, and all over the world.

❖ **Rev. Susan Meeter**

Mira Vista United Church of Christ, El Cerrito

Over the past month we have been celebrating the stories of Jesus' birth, from the moment the angel appears to Mary right through the magi bringing gifts from the East. How beautiful, creative, and affirming of our own humanity -- a marvelous story! Those drawn by love, shepherds and magi, cross all barriers and boundaries in love.

But how quickly hatred and fear enter the scene: those drawn by fear and hatred tragically cross the boundaries of morality and the borders of justice to annihilate the beings all humans seem to hold sacred: newborn babies. Overnight, a place where all was peaceful and was calm became another tragic story of vulnerability and violence and refugees. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, in fear for their lives, crossed boundaries and borders to alight in Egypt.

This is the nature of the world into which Jesus came and still comes. We know wailing and lamentation alongside hopeful longing alongside celebration alongside apathy. Love has arrived and is yet to come.

We at Mira Vista UCC are drawn to take risks with and for one another, like Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, like the shepherds, like the magi. We travel beyond our familiar boundaries because we have seen a great light...and we are also people who are at times captured, imprisoned, by our own greed and fear.

Fr. Richard Rohr says: "Our story is not the pleasant parts only. We have the capacity to shine with the light of love and to disappear into a dismal slime of selfishness. We are made alive and ridiculously threatened by the promise of God-with-us. We are the whole Christmas story, both beautiful and fearful, bright and full of shadow, hidden and revealed."

With this New Year we celebrate a symbolic rebirth of time. It's a kind of starting over, a clean slate to begin again. We will continue searching for a new home for our faith community, a place where we can more fully live our public mission of loving God's world, each other and our own selves. We hope God will use our gifts and skills and desires in a brand new way. We hope to travel with love and creativity, never leaving a trail of fear and

hatred. We hope that we will be welcomed at the borders and boundaries of our lives, and with joy we hope to open our lives and our doors to fellow travelers.

Our liturgical season, Epiphany, is about beginnings, too, about the beginning of Jesus' human ministry and how he came to let his inner light shine so that anyone who was not blinded by fear could see it. Perhaps our call this particular year is to make our light much more visible, in each of us, in all of us. Any way that we can love and serve God's creation, let's go!

Any way that we can celebrate life and love, let's do it! Any way that we can shed light on our particular manifestation of the Spirit, let's go! Any way that we can breathe and wake and turn it into a song of gratitude, let's go!

As we go forward, remember Marianne Williamson's advice for how to prepare for a New Year, or newness of spirit: "forgive everyone; let go of everything; let God take charge." Can I get an amen?

❖ **Pastor Hubert Ivery**

St Mark's United Methodist Church, Orinda

At a recent conference, I and other attendees were invited to a Drumming Circle. I had not attended one of these in a long time. In fact, it was during a California-Nevada Conference Pastor's School. I don't remember the location, but I do remember is that the session was led by Michael Strathdee, the son of good friends Jim and Jean Strathdee. Michael complimented me on my playing one of the percussion instruments, although in my opinion it was nothing special. Michael was a good teacher and very talented; sadly he ended his own life in 2002.

We all showed up at the drumming. The event had been timed so that it would experience drumming under the Full Moon. Apparently this was a community event as people from around Petaluma attended, bringing their drums, bells, shakers, or whatever with them. Under the moon we blessed the cycle at hand, we blessed each other, and we were invited to contemplate the purpose for which we are called so that we could better manifest that calling in life.

What I found most profound was the progression of the experience. We drummed for about an hour and half at three intervals. Each time we started a new drum session it was a disharmonious experience. Everybody was doing his or her own thing, not a harmonious pair could be found. But gradually the sounds of the twenty or so people gathered begin to blend and harmonized—we became a single tapestry of sound.

I am reminded that often we begin our relationship with others with our egos taking center stage which often results in confusion and disharmony. There is a hidden force however that pulls us toward one another. This is love. This is Truth. This is what Christ calls us toward. We are much more together than we can possibly be alone.

Your Words – Continued

❖ **Liliana De Valle**

Shell Ridge Community Church, Walnut Creek

I think all beginnings are exciting. When a new baby is born, everyone celebrates the possibilities of the new life; when we move to a new home, we embrace the tasks of furnishing and decorating with gusto; and when we buy a new car, well, we feel at the top of the world. Beginnings are also somehow loaded with anxiety. Will I be any good at that new job? Will this new marriage work? Excitement and fear play together to provide the spice of life.

As we begin this year 2014, I want to invite you to be full of wonder and expectation for what God is able to do in your life and the life of our church. Trust God with your problems and thank God for your blessings. Would you make this your motto for 2014? The combination of trust and gratitude will help you walk the journey with confidence. We are children of the living God. A God who knows us intimately, and yet loves us; who knows our shortcomings, and yet forgives us; who feels our pain, and yet heals us.

Sometimes, when I hear about difficult circumstances in the lives of people, especially when I see the 6 O'clock news, I wonder how people can manage some situations without God in their lives, or without a faith community for that matter.

The beauty of church is that we are not alone. We always have people we can trust with our troubles and know they will carry us in prayer before the presence of God. At times, they will also have a good word to offer us, or even some practical solutions to our problems.

As a congregation, 2014 will present us with a world of possibilities, challenges, and blessings. In preparation for the selection of a new pastor, we must be in prayer and dialog. We are coming to the end of our Days of Discovery, and with it, close to the time when we must find a new identity for the future. One of the most important points of discovery through this journey is that we ought to live according to our commitments.

Shell Ridge is a welcoming and affirming church, but we have not yet joined the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists. Why? Are we ready to declare that we fall short of our commitment to who we are? Along the same lines, we love to proclaim our welcoming nature as a church, but I know we can do better in the way we welcome those who are new among us and incorporate them to our ministry. Now that we are growing in numbers, it is time that we also grow in diversity, spiritual maturity, and ministry capacity.

The year 2014 brings with it the challenge of restoring our financial development. We cannot separate the people from the church, because the church is the people. So, when you think about the financial status of the church, think what you can do, as part of this church, to make it better. Sometimes Christians are called to give sacrificially, above and beyond their plans, in order to build Christ's church. My dear friends, we can do all

things in Christ, who strengthens us, if we remain together in love and peace. Our ideals of equality, service, creativity, and peace will flourish if we are faithful in loving one another, supporting the church with our gifts, and extending the stakes of our tent. God bless you all, and Happy New Year!

❖ **Loel Bartlett Miller, Board Member**

Interfaith Center of the Presidio

COUNCIL FOR A PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS, A GATHERING IN CHICAGO, NOVEMBER 16, 2013

In 1893 Chicago witnessed the birth of the interfaith movement when representatives of the major religions gathered there for the first Parliament of World's Religions. More than 6,000 people crowded into an assembly hall (now the Art Institute of Chicago) to hear an opening address delivered by a 30-year-old monk, Swami Vivekananda. His electrifying address, delivered with passion and eloquence, in which he called for the end of religious bigotry and intolerance, brought the assembled representatives to their feet. In this galvanizing moment, Vivekananda's fiery message forged a pathway for the previously separated faith streams of East and West to meld their currents for the first time. With this dynamic call for unity, he initiated a global interfaith dialogue and established himself as a leading religious figure worldwide.

The year 2013 marks the 120th anniversary of Vivekananda's speech as well as the 150th celebration of his birth. To commemorate these events and to refresh the interfaith community's awareness of its work between Parliaments, the Chicago-based Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR) invited interfaith workers to Chicago for a program on November 16. They entitled their program "Living Out the Vision – Celebrating the Anniversary of a Movement: 1893 Parliament, 1993 Parliament, and our Dynamic Future." As can be gleaned from this broad-ranging title, the Council invited participants to join them not only in a review of that breathtaking moment in 1893, but to share the anticipation of the exciting potential of interfaith in America in the years to come. I was fortunate to attend this November's Chicago celebration, participating as a representative of the Interfaith Center at the Presidio.

In 2013 the interfaith movement is gaining momentum around the world. In the United States, interfaith activism has tripled in the last ten years. Governments at home and abroad are investing in interfaith work because it brings people together. Interfaith is good for societies everywhere – and it's catching on. And, as I write this in the Chicago airport awaiting my flight home, I smile to myself as I hear over the airport public address system, "The interfaith airport chapel is located on level two. Everyone is welcome." Case in point!

The morning of November 16 I made a beeline for the Art Institute of Chicago, the site of the original Parliament in 1893. Walking past city workers draping trees with holiday lights and cheery skaters spinning over the temporary ice

Your Words – Continued

rink in Millennium Park, I retraced the footsteps of Swami Vivekananda and his fellow delegates who assembled here 120 years ago. The Art Institute has grown and flourished around the site of Vivekananda's speech. In 1893 the space was a large outdoor patio that was tented to accommodate 6,000 attendees. On this ground now stands Fullerton Hall, a jewel box of a concert hall located within the Art Institute, just down the stairs from its superlative Impressionist art collection.

On the morning of my visit, Fullerton Hall was locked, but a docent, noting my earnest interest in the space, and learning that I was on a pilgrimage to the place of the first Parliament of World's Religions, generously sought out a guard to unlock the door for me. As he escorted me through the hall, he described where the stage had been placed 120 years ago and where the delegates had packed into the tented space. The current elegant little theater seemed to glow from its legacy; it is naturally illuminated by the light coming through a dome constructed of golden-hued Tiffany glass. Additionally, at the back of the hall is mounted the memorial plaque honoring the spot where the Baha'i religion was first spoken of in America, at the 1893 Parliament.

The Council's celebration began in the afternoon, convening at the Sinai Congregation in downtown Chicago. Several hundred attendees, from as near as the Vedanta Vivekananda Society in Chicago and from as far away as India and Tanzania, gathered for an opportunity to savor retrospectively Vivekananda's historic speech, to learn how women had advanced interfaith work in 1893, and to assess the last century's evolution in interfaith understanding.

After welcoming words from members of the current Board of the CWPR, a senior sadhu of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Swami Varadananda, recapped for us the scintillating and groundbreaking message offered 120 years ago by Vivekananda. Swami Varadananda believes the tremendous impact of Vivekananda's message came not simply through the delivered words but by means of an invisible conduit that the young monk carried from his vibrant Hindu guru, Ramakrishna. Swami Varadananda shared that Vivekananda felt that the West had acquired tremendous energy with its mastery of the material world and technology, but he viewed the United States as "an empty case." Well acquainted with the spiritual wealth of the East, Vivekananda sought to merge the two. The swami conveyed his belief that this melding initiated by Swami Vivekananda in fact awakened in the slumbering hearts of Westerners a yearning for spiritual light. It is his feeling that this yearning, native to the hearts of all people, forms the basis of the potential of harmony between religions.

Many attendees of this current gathering were unaware of the potent role women have played in the development of interfaith expansion in America. Rev. Dr. Allison Stokes, Founding Director of the Women's Interfaith Institute, in the Seneca Falls area, enriched our afternoon with her review of a lesser-known gathering, the Parliament of Representative Women which convened earlier in the year of 1893 in Chicago. (Apparently the Chicago World's Fair, called the Columbian Exposition, attracted a number of smaller specialized meetings, or parliaments.) In May of 1893,

45 years after the Declaration of Sentiments at Seneca Falls, women gathered at a Parliament to assess the progress of their pressing agenda for equality. It featured the now-elderly centerpiece of the historic 1848 Seneca Falls gathering, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, as well as other women prominent in the advancement of women's equality, such as Susan B. Anthony and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Eight women – five Unitarians, two Universalists, and one Congregational — spoke to a large assembly comprised of both men and women on issues of exclusion and inclusion. Julia Ward Howe presented a talk entitled, "What Is, and What Is Not, Religion?" to further promote the advancement of interfaith acceptance.

The current Board Chair of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, Imam Abdul Malik Mujahid, offered his concluding remarks regarding the role interfaith has played and will continue to play in our lives. He underscored how it was the churches, not the government, that immediately rallied in New Orleans to assist the victims of Hurricane Katrina. He stated, "Religion is a force for good; interfaith brings out the best of each faith." While the challenge continues to be finding funding for interfaith projects and organizations, he stressed that America should be proud that this is where "interfaith was invented" and should continue its work with volunteers. He asked the attendees, "Where else in the world can you find an organization directed by a woman, with a board chaired by a Black Muslim, and with the entire staff comprised of college interns?" He rallied the gathering with his belief that our diversity, "as American as apple pie," should be celebrated as the source of our strength.

No date or location has yet been determined for the next Parliament of the World's Religions. But while the date is being determined, the Council is strengthening the interfaith movement with its programs of education, such as Sharing Sacred Spaces, the Partner City Program, the Ambassador Program, a women's task force, and an indigenous people's task force. You are invited to learn more by visiting the Parliament's website at www.ParliamentOfReligions.org. To quote from the site, "The Parliament succeeds when strangers become neighbors, acquaintances become friends, and enemies choose to coexist peacefully."

And to quote from Vivekananda's speech to the Parliament in 1893, "As the different streams having their sources in different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee."

The book *'Understanding Islam: Fifty Questions'* is available for purchase, the cost is \$8.00 plus shipping and handling. The author will donate \$4.00 to the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County for each book sold. If you are interested, you may contact the author at the following address: Amer Aram, 31 Midvale Court, Walnut Creek, CA 94597.

Social Justice Alliance

Of the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County

*All are welcome at the February 12 SOJA Meeting
7:00 pm, WC United Methodist Church Wesley Room*

SOJA Members and Their ACTION Agenda

Immigration, Single-Payer Health Care, MLK Day, SOAW, Winter Nights Shelter, and Mid-East Update, Legislative Advocacy were discussed at the last Meeting.

Poverty Coalition. Casey from Temple Isaiah was the guest speaker at the January SOJA meeting. Her topic was the Poverty Coalition, which is being formed and will focus on the causes of poverty in Contra Costa County. She reported on the vast amount of research the founders of the Coalition conducted as they prepared to introduce this action agenda to interfaith individuals in this area. SOJA members invited her to keep us informed on how we can be involved.

Immigration. Michael Fischer, SOJA's Immigration Chair, reported on the MICA DACA Sponsorship Program, which will facilitate the ability of young, undocumented immigrants (referred to as DREAMERS) to apply for a temporary status that protects them from deportation and enables them to get a work permit. Bay Area congregations can enable DACA-eligible youth to overcome financial constraints that might prevent them from applying for the program. MICA would like ten congregations to sponsor ten students at a cost of \$465 (the cost of the DACA application). Dean and Chris Coons invited SOJA members to attend the monthly Vigils at the Detention Center in Richmond on the First Saturday of each month. Delores Loague, is the other SOJA member who is an active member of MICA, the immigration Task Force.

Single-Payer Health Care. The Social Justice Alliance of the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County has endorsed the AllCare Alliance's *Health Care Equality in California Statement*: "We believe that health care is a basic human right, and everyone is entitled to high-quality, affordable, comprehensive care. We support the establishment of a fully publicly financed, single-payer health care system in California and the nation." Pat Synder Chairs SOJA's Health Care Committee.

MLK Celebration. Congratulations to Natalie Russell and her committee for a successful Martin Luther King Celebration held for the first time at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in downtown Walnut Creek. Special thanks to Pastor Sylvia Vasquez for hosting, Margli and the Mt. Diablo Peace and Justice Center for publicity, Anne Crisp and Mary Silva for food and setup, and Will Mc Garvey for the programs.

Winter Nights Family Shelter St. Anselm's Episcopal Church, First Christian Church of Concord, Lafayette Orinda Presbyterian Church, Episcopal Church of the Resurrection, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, St. Bonaventure Church, and Temple Isaiah Synagogue have all provided shelter from a very cold fall and winter for our 31 parents and children. Currently fifteen congregations are signing up for the 2014-15 Session of Winter Nights..Nine of them have already been confirmed as hosts while six are in line to submit their two-week date preferences. Judy Stillman continues to wear two hats: Education Specialist and Director in Training.

Middle East Matters. Dr. Amer Araim, updated the members on current events in the Mideast.

State & Federal Legislative Advocacy. Doug Sibley reported on HR 35 legislation.

SOAW. Father Roy Bourgeois, Founder of the School of the Americas Watch will be in the Bay Area on January 31, and has invited clergy of Contra Costa and Alameda Counties to a lunch at a synagogue in Piedmont.

- Gwen Watson, Chair

Please join us for the February 12 SOJA Meeting

World Interfaith Harmony Week Events

"A Glimpse of Peace in the Middle East"



Tuesday, Feb. 4th

7:00 pm presentation

6:00 pm potluck hors d'oeuvres

First Church of Christ Scientist, 24 Orinda Way, Orinda

Everyone is invited to a talk by Trinka Wasik, a Christian Science practitioner, who recently returned from three years in Dubai where she worked to establish and nurture interfaith relations.

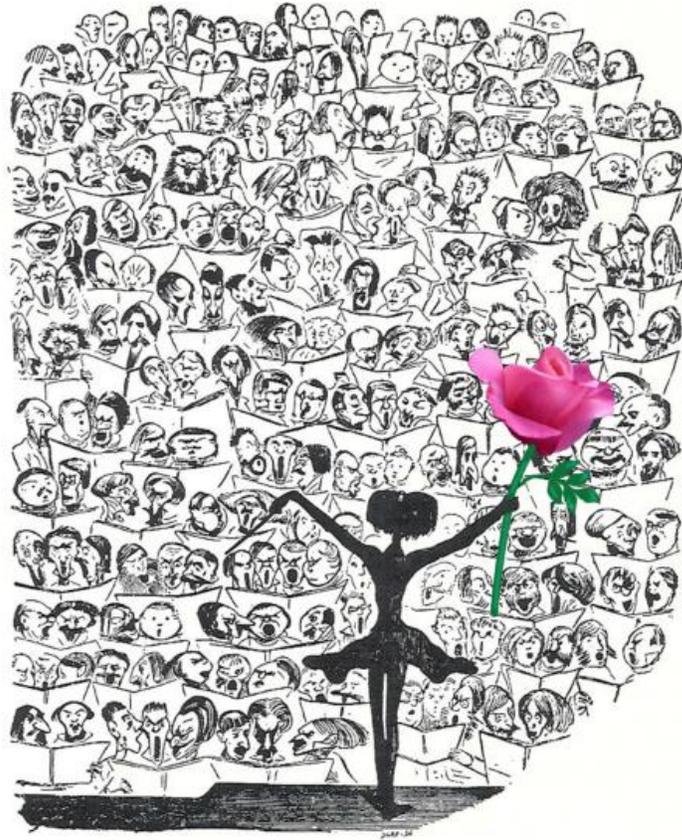
Trinka writes "This talk will be about some of the broader perspectives, practical challenges and profound successes of my interfaith experience in the Middle East. What I found was a great hope for peace. It is a myth that religious devotion divides us. Instead, I saw how individuals who sincerely practice their faith are united at a level so much deeper than doctrine or creed. And I am convinced it is the ultimate source of peace for all mankind. Living one's religious convictions, even though it may look very different from our own or our neighbors, doesn't have to be feared. Worshipping the divine cannot help but bless — in all its infinite forms of expression."

The talk is not a Christian Science lecture, but is sponsored by the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County and is part of World Interfaith Harmony Week. (Trinka is an Interfaith Council member.) Everyone is invited.

The informal potluck is optional. The church does not have a kitchen, so finger food would be best. For further questions, contact Trinka Wasik at trinkawasikcs@yahoo.com or Judy Porta at fjporta@comcast.net.

Interfaith Council • interfaithccc.org • 925.933.6030

Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County Concert Series



Gustave Doré, 27 June 1850, via Wikimedia Commons

LOVE GROWS: *Celebrating Interfaith Unity in Song*

Commemorating U.N. World Interfaith Harmony Week

Join us! The Singing Messengers and choirs and instrumentalists from Multiple congregations will share their musical gifts. Free will offering to benefit ICCCC.

Sunday, February 9th from 4:30 - 6:00 pm

at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
655 Old Orchard Drive, Danville
(Doors open at 4:15 p.m.)

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Over the weekend of February 21-23, 2014 the Interfaith Council will be offering an Interfaith Camp for current 9-12th graders. Those whose applications are accepted will be a diverse group of High school students who want to grow in their Interfaith immersion and leadership skills.

We will meet at 5:30 pm on Friday, February 21st at a local congregation and will be sleeping over at two different congregations, ending our time together (weather permitting) atop Mount Diablo around 1:00 pm on Sunday, February 23rd.

There will be multiple chaperones, vegetarian food honoring of Kosher and Halal standards, and we will expect appropriate boundaries for all of our participants. Our time will include speakers and conversation leaders from the Interfaith community, service projects, mixers, games and experience praying with those of multiple faiths. There will be free time and room for some homework.

Please fill out the application on the back, since we will need to limit participation based on diversity and representation from multiple faith traditions. Have your parents sign the form below, and turn it in with \$25.00. Please make checks to ICCCC or The Interfaith Council. The rest of the costs are covered by a grant from the San Francisco Foundation. Scholarships available!

Download the application at: <http://interfaithccc.org/interfaith-youth-leadership-camp/>



WHITE PONY EXPRESS

We want you to know about an exciting new food rescue program that has been launched by one of our members to help end hunger in Contra Costa County.

Beginnings. Murshida Carol Weyland Conner, Ph.D., of Sufism Reoriented became concerned that, in an area of such abundance, people were going hungry. If we really believe in the essential unity of all people in God, then how can we let our neighbors go hungry? Dr. Conner was also aware that much food goes to waste as food retailers discard food that is still nutritious and healthy once it is no longer suitable for retail sale. The hunger does not derive from a lack of food but from a lack of proper methods of distribution. So Murshida Conner's idea was to enlist these food service businesses to donate what for them would be waste so that it could be used by those organizations in the county that are providing groceries and meals to those in need. That is where the phrase "food rescue" comes from.

Of course, even a willing donor has no way of identifying the service organizations nor does it have the ability to transport the food to these organizations. We learned, too, that the recipient organizations do not have the staff to find the donors nor to deliver the food. So the White Pony Express was created to fill this need.

What does the White Pony Express Do? White Pony Express first identified and interviewed the homeless shelters, soup kitchens, homes for the disabled, pantries and various faith organizations providing to those in need. Then a strong core of over 100 volunteers was organized to act as dispatchers and "runners", so that donors calling the Hotline could be sure of a speedy pickup and delivery of their donated food, throughout the day, every day of the week. The food goes directly from the donor to the recipient. Food is usually delivered within two hours of White Pony Express receiving the call that food is available, often even sooner. White Pony Express operates 9-9 seven days a week, except Friday evenings.

White Pony Express was launched on September 22, 2013, and through December had made almost 1,000 deliveries to 23 different recipient organizations in Contra Costa County. The average donation is over 50 pounds. Much more is needed and much more is possible, as they have just really begun contacting donors. Almost everyone who hears of this program is excited about turning waste into nutrition for those who need it most. The idea of wasting food has become repugnant, especially when there is a ready and easy way to put it to use.

What kind of food? White Pony Express accepts all kinds of food: prepared food, produce, dairy, meat, baked goods, shelf goods.

What you can do. If you know of an organization that is providing food, make sure they know about White Pony Express, so that they can receive White Pony Express help in providing for those in need. If you have contacts among grocers, bakers, caterers, event locations, delis, etc., please let them know about White Pony Express and encourage them to donate their excess by calling the Hotline 925-322-0604. All donations small and large are gratefully accepted.

Good Samaritan Laws Protect Donors. You should know that California law, in order to encourage this kind of food donation, provides broad civil and criminal immunity for food retailers who give their food to a 501(c)(3). Those statutes are reprinted on the White Pony Express website. (www.whiteponyexpress.org). You can also "like" them on Facebook.



The Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County

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To request a paperless newsletter and to receive our bi-weekly E-Blasts,
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The Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County depends on contributions from member congregations and individuals who support our mission of promoting interfaith understanding. To make a tax deductible donation, please make your check to Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County and mail it to our office at 1543 Sunnyvale Ave, Ste. 103, Walnut Creek, CA 94597. For credit card donations, please visit our website: www.interfaithccc.org. Thank you!

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. We'd like to Thank Carol Czarnowski, Judith Moore, Timarla Johnson, Linda Bagsby and Yamiliz Natal for their help with the fall edition.
If you are interested in being part of this joyous band or interested in taking on the role of mail-out coordinator, contact Jessica at (925) 933-6030 or eye4cee@aol.com.

PLEASE PRAY FOR... (in our rotating circle of prayer):
Clayton Baha'i Community • Clayton Valley Presbyterian Church • St. John's Episcopal Church, Clayton • Concord Baha'i Community • Concord United Methodist Church • First Christian Church, Concord • First Lutheran Church, Concord • First Presbyterian Church, Concord • Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Concord • New Life Christian Fellowship, Concord • St. Agnes Catholic Church, Concord • St. Benedicts Monastery Parish (Ageis Living Center), Concord • For those that experience Islamaphobia • For the new Interfaith Youth Council • Congregations going through clergy transition. • The kid-hearted souls who deliver Meals on Wheels. • Those seeking employment. • Those that are homeless. • Those that are ill.