



The Good Table Café & Nursery News by Melinda V. McLain

Plan to attend our first **Planting Justice El Sobrante Farmer's Market** on **Saturday, April 7, 12-4p.** **Sam Lustig** of Planting Justice is the point person for the market and it promises to be fantastic. We'll be closing the street down in front of our site and having a lovely collection of food vendors and live music each Sunday afternoon. We are so fortunate to have had lots of wonderful support from **Richmond City Councilmember, Soheila Bana, Contra Costa County Supervisor, John Gioia** and many, many other **community leaders** to reach this fabulous milestone. It will no doubt be a great celebration!

We are also delighted to say that **Fortify** is now installing fire sprinklers in the building.

Our architect **Darrel DeBoer** with a table that will be our community table in the cafe - our Good Table! He made it for a client who couldn't use it and the top is made of salvage old growth Sequoia that is 100's of years old.

Having to add fire sprinklers to our construction plan added **significant costs and delayed us for many months** while we waited for designs to receive all the necessary permits, but we are finally now able to do the work and move forward.

Do put our **Last Saturday Community Work + Fun Days** at 5166 Sobrante Avenue on your calendar for the rest of the year. Wear sturdy shoes and clothing suitable for gardening or cleaning projects or just stop by for a tour! Our workdays are organized and led by **Sam Lustig** of Planting Justice, if you have questions, or would like to help out at other times.

Thanks to everyone who has **financially contributed to the project** and if you haven't given yet, please help as you are willing and able. We're delighted to receive **your tax-deductible contributions in any amount** and we would really appreciate introductions to other **individual donors and/or foundations** that would be interested in our project. You can give online through the-good-table.org or **save the processing fees** by mailing a check to: The Good Table LLC, 780 Ashbury Avenue, El Cerrito, CA 94530. All donations are 100% tax-deductible.

Choice Tidbits

Easter Sunday will be on **March 31st** this year in Western churches using the Gregorian calendar. Easter is a "moveable feast" that is held on the first Sunday following the first ecclesiastical full moon (14th day of a tabular lunation or new moon) that occurs on or after the dates of the fixed date for the ecclesiastical vernal equinox on March 21st. The earliest possible date for Easter is March 22 and the latest possible date is April 25. Easter can never come as early as March 21, though because, by ecclesiastical rules, the vernal equinox is fixed on March 21 even though the scientific-determined date for the equinox for this year is March 19.

Spring Birthdays & Anniversaries

March Birthdays

5th Patsy Severson
7th Patsy Stubbs
12th Kathe Kiehn
24th Gavin Raders

April Birthdays

1st Dan Hariton
4th Joan Thompson
7th Bill Willcutts and
Rev. Paul Honigs
10th Cordell Britt
23rd Mary Ivas

May Birthdays

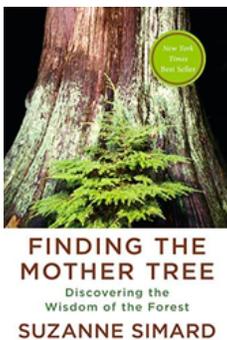
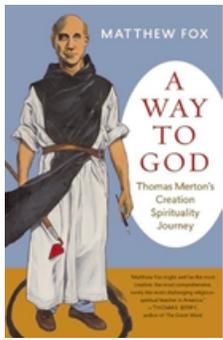
1st Eliot Hariton
2nd Andy Weill & Tim K. Murphy
5th Niels Teunis
7th Marilyn Colbert
14th Rev. Tom Emanuel
19th Rev. Dr. Melinda V. McLain
22nd Wendy Mahoney
29th Ken Alborn

May Anniversaries

26th Nancy Lemon & Blaine Devine
27th Angela Jernigan & Niels Teunis

*Let us know your birthday or anniversary date
and we'll celebrate you here!*





What Will the Live Edge Readers Read Now?

We're currently reading ***A Way to God: Thomas Merton's Creation Spirituality Journey*** by Matthew Fox and we will finish this book before Easter on March 31st. **Live Edge Readers** currently meets via zoom on **Wednesdays, 2:30-4p.**

Our next book will be: ***Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest*** by Suzanne Simard and we will likely begin this book in April, so that would be a good time to get a copy and join us. Here is a bit more about Finding the Mother Tree from Goodreads:

From the world's leading forest ecologist who forever changed how people view trees and their connections to one another and to other living things in the forest--a moving, deeply personal journey of discovery.

Suzanne Simard is a pioneer on the frontier of plant communication and intelligence; she's been compared to Rachel Carson, hailed as a scientist who conveys complex, technical ideas in a way that is dazzling and profound. Her work has influenced filmmakers (the Tree of Souls of James Cameron's Avatar) and her TED talks have been viewed by more than 10 million people worldwide.

Now, in her first book, Simard brings us into her world, the intimate world of the trees, in which she brilliantly illuminates the fascinating and vital truths--that trees are not simply the source of timber or pulp, but are a complex, interdependent circle of life; that forests are social, cooperative creatures connected through underground networks by which trees communicate their vitality and vulnerabilities with communal lives not that different from our own.

Simard writes--in inspiring, illuminating, and accessible ways--how trees, living side by side for hundreds of years, have evolved, how they perceive one another, learn and adapt their behaviors, recognize neighbors, and remember the past; how they have agency about the future; elicit warnings and mount defenses, compete and cooperate with one another with sophistication, characteristics ascribed to human intelligence, traits that are the essence of civil societies--and at the center of it all, the Mother Trees: the mysterious, powerful forces that connect and sustain the others that surround them.

Simard writes of her own life, born and raised into a logging world in the rainforests of British Columbia, of her days as a child spent cataloging the trees from the forest and how she came to love and respect them--embarking on a journey of discovery, and struggle. And as she writes of her scientific quest, she writes of her own journey--of love and loss, of observation and change, of risk and reward, making us understand how deeply human scientific inquiry exists beyond data and technology, that it is about understanding who we are and our place in the world, and, in writing of her own life, we come to see the true connectedness of the Mother Tree that nurtures the forest in the profound ways that families and human societies do, and how these inseparable bonds enable all our survival.

Our **Interfaith Meditation** group meets [via zoom](#) Meeting ID: 416 454 2723 each **Thursday from 6-6:40p** for a restorative session of shared silence. No previous experience with meditation is necessary and all are truly welcome.

Ask for the Ancient Paths

By Rev. Dr. Melinda V. McLain

Pastor for The Good Table UCC



Colleen Rodger walking the labyrinth at Ghost Ranch near Abiquiu, NM

From Leap Day to Mar. 6th, I will be on retreat at the **Monastery of Christ in the Desert** in a remote area of Northern New Mexico. (about 2 1/2 hours northwest of Santa Fe) In 2018, I took vows at this monastery as an “oblate”, a lay member of the monastery who agrees to support the community and to live in accordance with the Rule of St. Benedict. I also took the name of Sister Hildegard after the 11c. Benedictine abbess Hildegard of Bingen. This will be my first time back at the monastery for a full week’s retreat since the beginning of the pandemic. For those of you who don’t know me well, you **might wonder why** a protestant pastor ordained by the United Church of Christ is an oblate at a Benedictine monastery.

Well, while there is, of course, a LONG story I could tell about my love of monasticism and Christ in the Desert, it is really the ancient **Rule of St. Benedict** written in the 6th century that speaks to me from across the centuries with amazing clarity about **how to nurture and create healthy communities** based upon shared spiritual practice, not belief.

The Rule is only 73 chapters/paragraphs long, but the precepts it contains have are both specific and general enough to nurture a strong community. The ideas contained in the Rule that I have witnessed in practice in the monastery that I am applying to our Good Table project are: **hospitality, humility, “ora et labora” or “work and prayer”** and the invitation from the very first line of the rule to **“listen with the ear of the heart”**.

Continued → 4

Benedict's insistence on **hospitality** permeates the Rule and is a bedrock commitment for all Benedictine monasteries. By the Middle Ages, this requirement to offer hospitality to all - as if they were Christ incarnate - led to what were essentially the first hotel "chains" that allowed people in Europe to travel more freely and safely knowing they could find food and shelter among the monasteries. Our development of a "pay-what-you-can" and "pay-it-forward" community café and gathering space is all about creating spaces where all are truly welcome.

As 21st century Americans, the practice of **humility** is no longer given much value in our culture. We are much better known for our hubris and rugged individualism than our humility. In fact, some sociologists have named "narcissism" the great social disease of our culture. On the other hand, the line between being humble and becoming a doormat for other people's violence and oppressions is not always clear. Learning to be humble, not weak, is a 12-step process in the rule and it is essential to learn because healthy communities only thrive when all the members of the community are willing to approach develop mature personal humility.

The paired **callings of "ora et labora" or "work and prayer"** also inform a strong community as each member commits to achieve life, work, and spiritual balance. In a monastery, most of the monk's day is spent in prayer, although this is balanced with work. For us, learning to balance our spiritual and work lives is still a rewarding challenge. Also, because we do not live in a monastery, we need to find ways to balance family obligations as well.

Lastly, the underlying theology of the Rule lies in the **praying of the Psalms**. For Benedictines, this is fundamental to their spiritual practice and the Rule requires all adherents to pray all 150 psalms regularly. In our own time, we think of prayer as more of a conversation and as "low" protestants our ancestors rejected every kind of proscribed prayer book - except the Psalms.



Sister Hildegard (Melinda) with Brothers Benedict, Andre, Faustino, & Jude

The Psalms are the prayer book for Judaism and thus the prayer book for Jesus. What wisdom do we gain from this practice and how could it undergird our own spiritual lives?

Praying the psalms, although an ancient practice, can take many forms. They can be chanted, sung, prayed through silently, and studied in multiple translations including some beautiful contemporary versions. For Anglicans/Episcopalians, all 150 can be prayed through in a month by committing to morning and evening prayer - something George Washington did every day. At Christ in the Desert, all 150 are prayed through in any given week.

For me, praying the psalms has become a spiritual practice that helps me **map my interior spiritual landscape**. The words of praise and gratitude draw me to awe. In the psalms of lamentation there is room to acknowledge pain and grief and the need for comfort. Even the psalms that are full of gory and violent images remind me that I too often harbor the desire that God would "smite my enemies". And when I recognize that part of me is praying that way, I am granted the opportunity to be recommit at the deepest levels to "love your enemies".

When The Good Table opens, I hope to find other **lovers of praying the psalms** to join together in praying them through music and silence following Benedict's invitation to "listen with the ear of your heart."

Red Seas

by [Aurora Levins Morales](#)

*We cannot cross until we carry each other,
all of us refugees, all of us prophets.*

*No more taking turns on history's wheel,
trying to collect old debts no-one can pay.*

The sea will not open that way.

*This time that country
is what we promise each other,
our rage pressed cheek to cheek
until tears flood the space between,
until there are no enemies left,
because this time no one will be left to drown
and all of us must be chosen.
This time it's all of us or none.*

Poem submitted by Nancy Lemon and used with permission from the poet.



Rev. Dr. Melinda V. McLain rocking out at the installation of Rev. Jen Chapman at Arlington Community Church
Photo credit : Jeanne DeFrisco Strauss



On Ash Wednesday a local group of clergy braved the rain and wind to offer the blessing of ashes at BART during the evening rush hour. (Left to Right) Pastors Jen Chapman, Melinda V. McLain, Joanne Whitt, Dee Emmert, & GTUCC member Joyce Hedges (front) 6

Worth Noting

- **Joint UCC Good Friday Service**, Mar. 29, Orinda Community UCC, 7p.
- **Community Work + Fun Days @5166 Sobrante Ave** are held each **last Saturdays**, 12-3p (**Mar. 30, Apr. 27, May 25**) Wear sturdy shoes and clothing and bring work gloves and gardening tools. Or just stop by for a tour!
- **The Good Table UCC Council** meets each **2nd Monday, 4p** via zoom.
- **Planting Justice Farmer's Market** on **Sundays, 12-4** beginning **April 7, 2024!**



Regular Ways to Connect



Join us on **Sundays at 12 noon** for our celebration with music, prayer, and preaching in person AND via zoom. We celebrate the sacrament of **Holy Communion every First Sunday**. All are welcome at our table in El Cerrito @780 Ashbury Avenue, El Cerrito (near Stockton) and online everywhere!



Wednesdays, 2:30-4pm - How do we find our true self? What are the similarities between Buddhism and Christianity? Is there something that is real beyond the limits of our perception? These are just some of the questions that our Live Edge Readers have explored while reading and pondering together. If you are interested, kindly send an email to Pastor Melinda to get added to the list: info@the-good-table.org



Thursdays, 6 pm - Interfaith Meditation via Zoom. There is an old Zen saying, "Everyone should meditate for 20 minutes each day unless you're really busy, and then you should meditate for an hour." We sit in chairs in silence for about 45 minutes and no previous experience with meditation is required.