



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

Local Clergy at GRIP Harmony Walk (left to right):
Revs. Sara Schultz, Jen Chapman, Debbie Weatherspoon,
Melinda V. McLain and Marcus Liefert

After at least nine months of waiting and making various changes, we **finally received approval from the building department** of our 98-page plan set so that we can move forward again. We've also signed a contract for the **installation of fire sprinklers** and are now working to get our contractor **Sam White** of **SDW Construction** back to work so that we can have rough inspections of plumbing, electrical, and structural soon. If all goes well (fingers crossed) **we could open in late Spring/Summer of 2024.**

Meanwhile, with encouragement and support from **Supervisor John Gioia** and **Richmond City Council member Soheila Bana**, we are working to get our **Planting Justice El Sobrante Farmer's Market** up

and running by closing down **Sobrante Avenue** in front of the property on **Sunday afternoons** while we continue construction. **Sam Lustig** of **Planting Justice** is the point person and we look forward to announcing our first market before the end of the year. Stay tuned!

Due to the holidays, **Upcoming work days** will be held from 12n-3p on the **first Saturdays, December 2 and January 6**) at 5166 **Sobrante Avenue**. Wear sturdy shoes and clothing suitable for gardening or cleaning projects or just stop by for a tour! We go back to last Saturdays on **Sat. Feb 24, 2024**. 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.

Winter Birthdays & Anniversaries

December Birthdays

4th Sylvia Sugg

9th Nancy Lemon

13th Rev. Dr. Celestine Fields

21st Iris Ridgway

21st Matt Kavanaugh-Lynch

22nd Sally Dunham

23rd Rev. Roger Ridgway

30th Andrew Noble & Benjamin Noble

January Birthdays

7th Colleen Rodger

15th Rev. Davena Jones

16th Margaret Kavanaugh-Lynch

19th Angela Jernigan

February Birthday

1st Barbara Cook

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

Choice Tidbits



We are having new “faces” with our logo made for the **large monument sign** on the property. Sadly, **someone in a red Ford SUV stole the unbroken Adachi sign** that we planned to use as part of a memorial to the Adachi family. If you see the sign somewhere or know who took it, please return it.

After Bank of the West was bought by BMO, we decided to move our LLC accounts to **Community Bank of the Bay in Oakland**, a local bank that specializes in nonprofits and better fits our mission priorities. Does your bank reflect your values?



Summons

by Aurora Levins Morales



*Last night I dreamed
ten thousand grandmothers
from the twelve hundred corners of the earth
walked out into the gap
one breath deep
between the bullet and the flesh
between the bomb and the family.
They told me we cannot wait for
governments.
There are no peacekeepers boarding planes.
There are no leaders who dare to say
every life is precious, so it will have to be us.
They said we will cup our hands around each
heart.
We will sing the earth's song, the song of
water,
a song so beautiful that vengeance will turn
to weeping.
The mourners will embrace, and grief replace
every impulse toward harm.
Ten thousand is not enough, they said,
so, we have sent this dream, like a flock of
doves
into the sleep of the world. Wake up. Put on
your shoes.
You who are reading this, I am bringing
bandages
and a bag of scented guavas from my trees. I
think
I remember the tune. Meet me at the corner.
Let's go.*

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

What Will the Live Edge Readers Read Next?

From the New York Times bestselling author of *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor's *Learning to Walk in the Dark* provides a way to find spirituality in those times when we don't have all the answers.

Taylor has become increasingly uncomfortable with our tendency to associate all that is good with lightness and all that is evil and dangerous with darkness. Doesn't God work in the nighttime as well? In *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, Taylor asks us to put aside our fears and anxieties and to explore all that God has to teach us "in the dark." She argues that we need to move away from our "solar spirituality" and ease our way into appreciating "lunar spirituality" (since, like the moon, our experience of the light waxes and wanes). Through darkness we find courage, we understand the world in new ways, and we feel God's presence around us, guiding us through things seen and unseen. Often, it is while we are in the dark that we grow the most.

With her characteristic charm and literary wisdom, Taylor is our guide through a spirituality of the nighttime, teaching us how to find our footing in times of uncertainty and giving us strength and hope to face all of life's challenging moments.

Order or check out a copy and join us when the **Live Edge Readers resume meeting on: Wednesday, November 29, 2023, 2:30-4p via zoom**. Meeting ID: 868 7644 9214. Get a copy and join us! We'll begin with the introduction. This is also a perfect Advent to Epiphany book. Let me know if you have any questions or need me to order a copy for you. Give a listen to this interview with the author during the pandemic where she talks about this book in particular about 9:16 minutes in.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgUjV5Pdfw8>

Seeking an Extraordinary Advent

By Rev. Dr. Melinda V. McLain

Pastor for The Good Table UCC



Another year is coming to a close and I do wonder what's next. As a community, we are on the brink of beginning a completely different model of ministry. As a country, we are in the midst of so many disasters due to climate change that it sometimes feels as if our "new normal" is chaos. The wars in the Middle East, Ukraine and at least five other places too, strain our compassionate hearts to the breaking point. At the same time, some of the "normal" shifts in health, wealth, and stage of life are also shaking us as families and individuals into new patterns of living.

Traditionally, the liturgical season of Advent invites us to embark upon an extended period of mystical waiting and introspection in order to prepare our souls for the miracles of Christmas. For me, it is hard to imagine intentionally embracing the implied stillness of "waiting" right now when there is so much change taking place and so many new "needs" arise each day from increasing injustice, violence, and natural disasters.

And yet, Advent is indeed upon us - even if controlled stillness seems impossible. We are now in a period of almost life-threatening waiting to hear Good News from somewhere, anywhere. Without taking up a new spiritual practice or reading a new tome on spirituality, we are longing for comfort and peace instead of another round of terrible news.

Are you longing for peace, yearning for comfort, and waiting for hope? Guess what, these are exactly the elements of a deep experience of Advent. So the invitation for us this year is not to adopt a new set of spiritual practices to mimic holy waiting, but instead we are invited to join John the Baptizer and cry out in the wilderness to get ready for the presence of God to be among us again.

This year, we will need to believe even more deeply in the power of love to transform the world and double-down on our commitments to justice and peace - even if it seems impossible to keep moving forward.

This is the season for miracles. May they come swiftly into our lives.

I Have All the Stability I Need

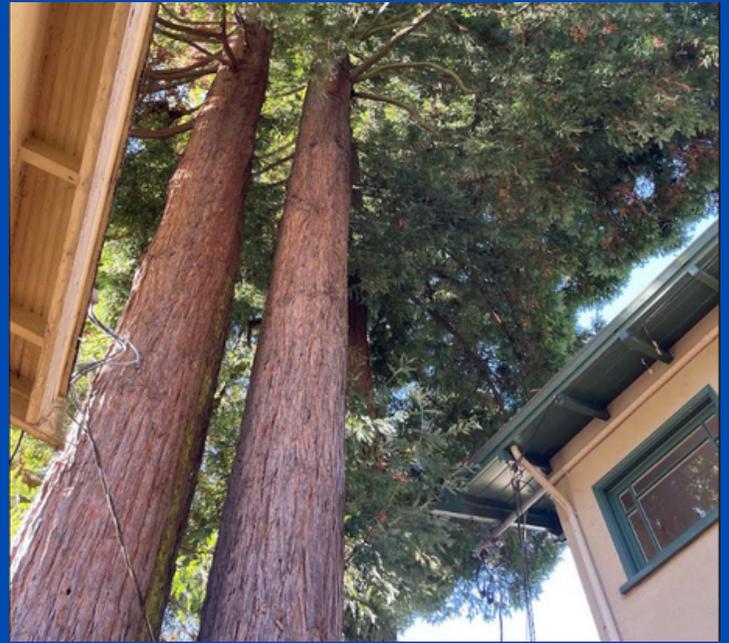
By Nancy Lemon, *GTUCC member*

In 1962, when I was 8 years old, my family moved into a house in Berkeley, California. I still live there. There were two beautiful tall redwood trees growing in front of the house, on either side. My parents soon realized that one of them had almost no room for its roots and had it removed. I did not feel upset about this as I understood that this made sense, and I knew the other tree would still be there, protecting the house from the sun, offering homes to squirrels, birds, and insects, and growing an ever larger and deeper root system to support its three trunks, forever.

The remaining tree was a constant presence and joy to me. Every time I walked up the street to the house, every time I entered or left the house, every time I was in the upstairs or downstairs front room of the house, every time I was in the backyard and looked over the roof toward the front of the house, the tree was there. It was very healthy and lush, growing larger and larger over the years.

I went away to college at UC Santa Cruz but visited home often, and a year after graduating I moved back into the house with my brother and a good friend, as my parents were temporarily moving out. I have lived here in the family house ever since, with various other people including my parents, husband, and son. I put down my own roots in the neighborhood, building relationships with many neighbors and starting annual block parties. My husband rebuilt the house and fences and tended the large garden.

Years passed and my husband started saying that we might need to remove the redwood tree. It was getting so large, over 130 feet, that it was in danger of falling over. Its roots broke the sewer and gas lines and the neighbor's walkway. It regularly dropped large branches in windstorms, which fell on our house, the neighbor's house, and our yards.



The neighbor started saying the tree needed to be removed. I invariably told my husband and neighbor that removal was never going to happen, that I loved the tree, and I would never agree to kill it. We hired arborists to trim it every few years, and cable the three trunks together to minimize the chances of it falling in a windstorm.

Last January in an unusually large storm a 3-trunk redwood tree similar to ours fell over unexpectedly a couple miles from our house. So did a big cedar a few blocks away. My husband became more insistent that we remove our tree. We consulted with several arborists. We talked about more trimming, new cables, moving the sewer and gas and water lines out of the tree's way. I continued to be adamant that removal was out of the question, and cried a lot in my counseling sessions about how much the tree meant to me.

Finally I realized that my husband was worried about the tree ending our lives -- my life -- and that he too loved the tree but valued our lives and the neighbors' lives even more. The falling branches were larger and larger, and the windstorms were getting bigger and bigger, thanks to the climate crisis, *continued ->*

and would only increase in intensity in the future. I reluctantly agreed that it was time to remove it. Our son, who loves making and tending bonsai trees, suggested that we try to save part of the redwood so he could make it into a bonsai in a pot, 5-10 feet tall, to take the place of the large redwood, and offered to prune and tend it. I eagerly agreed.

As the date for removal approached, I continued to grieve in counseling sessions about how much I loved the tree. I took photos, planning to paint a picture of the tree. I posted an announcement on the neighborhood list telling them what we planned, why, and when it would be cut.

I led a goodbye ceremony for our family and any neighbors who wanted to join us to appreciate the tree and pay it our respects. I read *Trees*, a poem by Vachel Lindsay – “...Poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree.” My daughter in law took a photo of my husband, son and me cradled between the trunks.



I moved across town for the time when the removal was happening, as I couldn't bear to be present. In one of my counseling sessions that week, my counselor asked when I first saw this tree and what it meant to me. I realized that when we moved into the house I had been forced to move two years in a row, once from West Virginia to Pinole when I was 7 and again from Pinole to Berkeley a year later. Both times I had to leave friends, neighbors, schools, behind. I had to leave my first kitten behind in WV. I had also been through two life threatening medical emergencies before I was 3 and had not healed emotionally from them.

The month before we moved to Berkeley my parents and my brother David drove from Pinole to WV to rent a truck, pack up our possessions, and drive back to Pinole. My 5 year old sister Mary and I were left with the Pinole landlady, who rented out our parents' room to a big alcoholic man, which was scary until she got him to leave. I felt responsible for keeping Mary safe.

When our family left Pinole, under my seemingly cheerful and well-adjusted exterior, I felt unprotected and fearful. I didn't want to have to adjust again to a new school and church where everyone else knew each other, make new friends, take care of the 2 younger children, and work hard to fit in socially.

Adding to my anxiety about the move, as we drove up the steep hill to our new house in Berkeley, our old car broke down. My father parked it in a stranger's driveway while he went for help, leaving the rest of us in the car. The breakdown and wondering if the stranger whose driveway we were in would be angry with us was very unsettling for me and seemed a bad omen.

So when we first approached the new house and I saw this huge beautiful redwood tree I fell in love with it. I now realize that the tree symbolized stability, something I could count on. As an 8 year old I decided I would never move again. The tree and I would always be there together. It would protect me. I would be safe here. No more medical emergencies would happen to me.

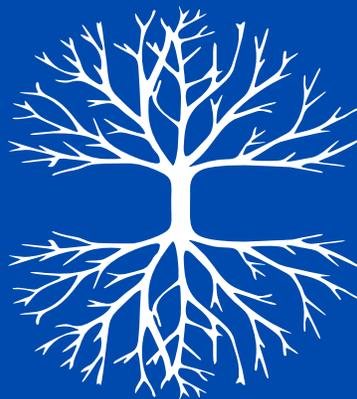
In fact, my exhausted mother fell very sick soon after we arrived, with both hepatitis and mononucleosis. While my father's fellow PSR students helped us out with casseroles, I had to do a lot of caring for Mary and John (who was 2), cooking, cleaning, laundry, etc. But the tree didn't require anything of me. It was beautiful and strong and healthy and always there.

My counselor then asked, "And where do you get stability now?" My mind went to relationships: my husband and I have been together 45 years and have a loving marriage. Our 36 year old son and his wife have chosen to live near us. I have built close relationships with my siblings, my neighbors, with people at my church, with my peer counseling community, with my professional community, with many friends - one of whom became my best friend when we moved into the house and we are still close. And over the years I have become more aware of God as an ongoing presence in the world and in my life.

I am now able to thank the tree for providing stability at a time when I really needed it, tell it how sorry I am that it grew too large for the space available and that I will always miss and remember it. At the same time I can notice that I now have stability from many other sources.

Epilogue: When the tree was removed, the arborist realized that it was about 150 feet, much taller than he had estimated. The base was 10-12 feet in diameter. And the arborist discovered that there was rot inside near the tree's base, which was not apparent from the outside. So it was indeed in danger of falling over.

I was thrilled when Darrel DeBoer, our architect and furniture maker at the Good Table LLC, told me that he will make tables or other things from the tree at our new café and community center in El Sobrante. Another reason for me to come often and hang out there - I can touch the tree! My beloved redwood tree will have a new life and contribute to this wonderful community asset we are creating.



Worth Noting

- Our **Community Work + Fun Days @5166 Sobrante Ave** are usually held on last Saturdays, but due to the holidays, on the **first Saturdays, December 2, 2023 and January 6, 2024, and then February 24, 12-3p.** Wear sturdy shoes and clothing and bring work gloves and gardening tools. Or just stop by for a tour!
- The **Orinda Community Church (UCC) and The Good Table UCC** will have a joint **Advent Taizé Service** on **Wednesday, Dec. 6 @ Orinda UCC, 7p**
- **The Good Table UCC Council** meets each **2nd Monday, 4p [via zoom](#).**
- On Sunday, **Dec. 24th, 7p**, join us for our contemplative **Candlelight Christmas Eve** with beautiful music, carols, and poetry. (Note: we will not meet on the 24th at 12n)
- The **Semi-Annual Meeting of The Good Table UCC** will be held on **Sunday, Jan. 28th at 1p** following our Sunday Gathering. During this meeting we receive financial reports, adopt a budget for the year and elect financial officers.



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 has 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.