

January 2024 | [www.iucc.org](http://www.iucc.org) | Catch up with us on Facebook, Insta, Tiktok, and YouTube!

OPEN AND AFFIRMING · JUST PEACE · GLOBAL MISSION · CREATION JUSTICE/GREEN FAITH

## Our Christmas Pageant on December 17 had a great message!

Youth and friends of MYP presented “Who is my family?” at the Christmas Pageant - a heartwarming reflection on all the kinds of families there are and the love they share. Special thanks to our Pageant Director/Writer Myrna Bohan and the many actors of all ages for the practice and spirit they shared to weave such a touching performance!



*(Photos courtesy of Tristen Reineccius, Tricia Aynes, & Lauren Louie)*





# Advent Workshop on Dec. 2

MYP celebrated the Advent Season with crafts, hot chocolate, and snow play!

Photos courtesy of Tristen Reineccius, Tricia Aynes, & Lauren Louie, with captions by Lauren Louie



Grown-ups had fun making crafts too!



Card making station, ornaments, cookie decorating, and more! So many cool things to make and do!

Special thanks to Alex Ingal & Princess Daisy for the hot cocoa bar and treats!



# Special thanks to the Scouts who set up the snow this year and cleaned it up too!

*Photos courtesy of Tristen Reineccius, Tricia Aynes, & Lauren Louie*







**2024 Winter Congregational Meeting**  
**Sunday, January 28, at 10:30 a.m.**

**(Hybrid - both in-person and electronic)**

IUCC will be conducting our annual Winter Meeting to approve the 2024 Budget. In order for us to conduct business at this meeting, we need a quorum of 25% of corporate members. Please be sure to attend!

**Budget Forum: Sunday, January 21, at 12:30 p.m. via Zoom**

**Our Christmas Concert on Dec. 3 was lovely!**

*(photo courtesy of Glenda Wyant)*



Thank you to our amazing IUCC Chancel Choir for another wonderful choral performance. You always do such a beautiful job!



## Snowman Square Dance & Barnyard Ball on Jan. 20



The IUCC and Fellowship Committee invite you to break free from the digital world and step into a night of pure, analog joy at our Annual Winter Party: “Snowman Square Dance and Barnyard Ball”!

Date & Time: Saturday, January 20, 2024  
 Time: Starting at 6:30 PM  
 Location: Woodbridge Village Association

Escape the virtual realm and embrace the rustic charm of our snow-kissed hoedown celebration!

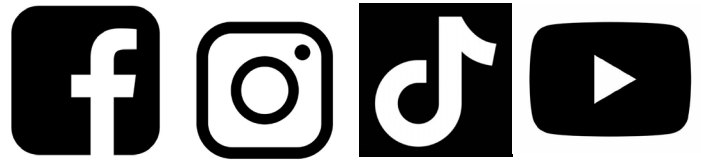
### Event Highlights:

- Delicious BBQ: Indulge in the warmth of delightful barbecue flavors.
- Square Dance Lessons: Kick up your heels with professional square dance callers guiding the way.
- Ticket Sales: Grab your tickets during coffee hour and secure your spot for this memorable night.
- Dress Code: No pixels, just pure charm! Feel free to express your inner cowboy or cowgirl—flannel is encouraged but entirely optional.

This isn't your typical winter party; it's a chance to unplug, unwind, and revel in the simplicity of good company and classic fun.

Mark your calendar, invite your friends, and join us for an evening where the only thing digital is the fun we're bound to have. See you at the Snowman Square Dance and Barnyard Ball! #IUCCWinterParty #SnowmanSquareDance #BarnyardBall

## Catch up with IUCC events on SOCIAL MEDIA!



<https://www.facebook.com/irvineucc>  
<https://www.instagram.com/irvineucc/>  
<https://www.tiktok.com/@iucctiktok>  
<https://www.youtube.com/c/iuccorganic>

*Many thanks to Alex Ingal for providing this information!*

## Stop Anti-Asian Hate Talk presentation on Jan. 28

IRVINE UNITED CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,  
 FILIPINO MIGRANT CENTER, & GROUNDSWELL  
 PRESENT

# STOP ANTI-ASIAN HATE TALK



Join us in an important conversation about anti-Asian hate crimes and incidents where we will discuss the experiences of the Roques and Arriola-Ochengcos, Filipino families who were victims of physical and verbal attacks. We are raising awareness of the ongoing occurrence of hate activity motivated by race, ethnicity, and/or national origin bias, engaging in necessary dialogue to spark change, and supporting the Asian American Pacific Islander community.

**JANUARY 28, 12:30-2:00 PM,  
 AT IUCC: 4915 ALTON PKWY,  
 IRVINE, CA 92604**



**SIGN UP ON  
 EVENTBRITE:**  
<http://tinyurl.com/stopantiasianhatetalk>

Please spread the word to those you think may be interested. Organizers hope people will fill out the RSVP, but no one will be turned away at the door if they have not done so. Snacks and refreshments will be provided.



# From the Senior Pastor

by the Rev. Dr. Sarah Halverson-Cano, Senior Pastor



Happy New Year!

I'm writing from 39026 feet in the air, the day after Christmas, on the way to visit my husband's side of the family for a Christmas celebration and then to visit Puerto Rico so my children can see the island of their family and cultural heritage. In Puerto Rico, they celebrate the 12 days of Christmas and get very excited about the coming of the kings. In fact, you might say Kings Day (Epiphany) is even bigger than Christmas for Puerto Ricans! I'm looking forward to the celebration, but we'll be back with you for the actual day of Epiphany and our celebration of the star on January 7<sup>th</sup> next year! (Well, by the time you read this it will be 2024 already!) Until then, let's continue celebrating the season of Christmas with Jerri Davenport at the pulpit.

What a year we shared together! There are a lot of highlights to remember: we launched a new contemporary service, completely renovated our preschool (talk about a refresh!), celebrated a lot of amazing services (like our Fat Sunday celebration with David Caruthers' band - they're coming back this year!), our Lenten series on The Four Agreements, Easter, the inception of our very popular drag queen bingos, Pride Sunday with Cucu Chanel and other guests, our Animated Faith summer (oh, that fun music!), potlucks, comma groups, and Bon Vivant dinners, welcome luncheons and new members, choir concerts and the intern recital, Labor Day, church picnic, Spooky Sunday, Christs Among Us, an exciting Thanksgiving service filled with surprises, a goodbye to our dear Rabbi Arnie, and a whole lot of love. Then snow, parties, singing Noel (a lot), and a celebration on a silent night.

We've cried, and we've laughed. We've mourned. We've ached for a world at war, and wailed with deep sorrow at our helplessness while we pray for peace and work for justice. We've been at city council meetings, County board meetings, School board meetings, and with workers offering comfort and solidarity.

After a long and weary search, we finally staffed our ministry with young people, welcoming Tristen, Dustin and Jackie to our team. They were worth the wait and have brought us so much joy and creativity!

And let's not forget our Administrative Pastor Craig Tyril, whose first day was Sunday January 1, 2023, who has dipped his toes into lots of different pools this year while taking on this new role. (Happy Anniversary!) So many memories, so many connections, so much joy! 2023 was a great year, and I'm so thankful to have such an incredible church family with so many leaders who care so deeply for our church and serve with such whole hearts.



There is a lot to look forward to in the new year. I don't know if you're a resolution type of person. I like to make goals and so tend to appreciate this time for its intention setting. I hope that you will be inclined to consider how you might connect with your church family. Maybe attend a Bon Vivant dinner, or volunteer in Sunday School? Consider joining the choir (they have so much fun)! And talk about fun - don't miss out on the Snowman Square Dance and Barnyard Ball!

There will be lots of Bingo opportunities this year - it's such a great way to reach out to our community and have fun while raising money. Join in at our next one in February or volunteer to help make it a success. Invite friends, share on your social media, and let people know about the good news that is IUCC!

I hope we will continue to grow together in faith, in numbers, in impact, in hope, and joy and love. How can you resolve to make IUCC a better place, a more joyful community, a more active presence, and a more welcoming sanctuary? It starts with presence. I look forward to being present with you this new year.

May the light of the Christ live in you throughout all of 2024!

*Pastor Sarah*



## A Few Pix from the Preschool Holiday Concert

*Photos courtesy of Renae Boyum*



Our Preschool Holiday Concert is always a joy. Santa was a big hit with the kids!



## In Loving Memory of Jen Mirmak



Beloved former choir member and friend of IUCC Jen Mirmak peacefully passed away on Thursday, December 28, with her family at her side. A Memorial Service will be held at IUCC on Saturday, January 27, at 11 a.m.

The family asks that anyone wishing to send flowers please make a donation to Planned Parenthood of OC LGBT Center instead.

Congregational Care is supporting the family by scheduling meals to be dropped off at their home. Meals can be hand delivered or ordered through meal delivery. To pick a date and support the family, please visit this link:

<https://www.mealtrain.com/trains/kkm032>



## Stewardship Update



Dear fellow IUCC member,

Hopefully you have been enlightened with prospects of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love for our church and the New Year following our observance and celebration of Advent and Christmas.

The entire Fund Development Committee wants to thank everyone for their 2024 pledges and we especially want to think those that during the pledge season increased their pledges over last year or increased their original 2024 pledge when it became evident that we were experiencing a shortfall with regard to our pledge goal of \$400,000.

We would also very much like to thank those that made end-of-the-year donations which will also help to lessen our pledge shortfall of approximately \$321,000 versus our goal of \$400,000. It's never really too late to make or increase your pledge, so here is the donate link if you are able to do so: <https://iucc.org/give>

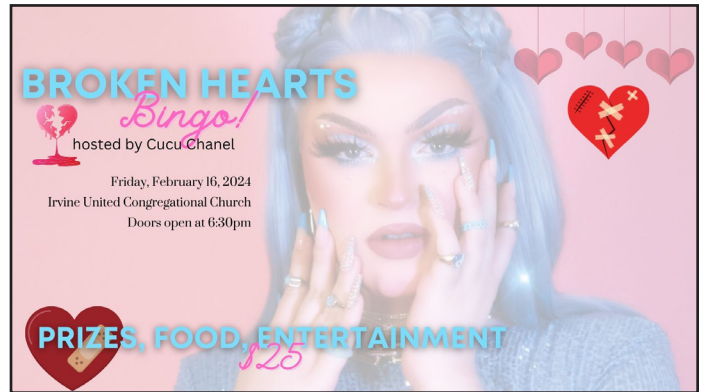
Again, we truly want to thank everyone for the generosity they have shown towards IUCC and we look forward to helping make 2024 a very fulfilling year for IUCC and all its missions.

With utmost gratitude,

The IUCC Fund Development Committee



## Broken Hearts Bingo on Feb.16



IUCC is proud to present Broken Hearts Bingo hosted by Cucu Chanel and her Drag Queen Divas. Who needs a Valentine when you have performances celebrating music's greatest stories of heartbreak?

Friday, February 16, 2024 at 7:00pm at IUCC:  
4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine CA 92604 in Plumer Hall

\$ 25 Entry Fee

GREAT PRIZES! GREAT PERFORMANCES! GREAT FOOD & DRINK

The entry fee gains you access to the games and show. Dobbers, food, and beverages will be available for purchase. Must be 18 years old or older to play.

Childcare provided!

Limited capacity!

Doors open at 6:30pm!

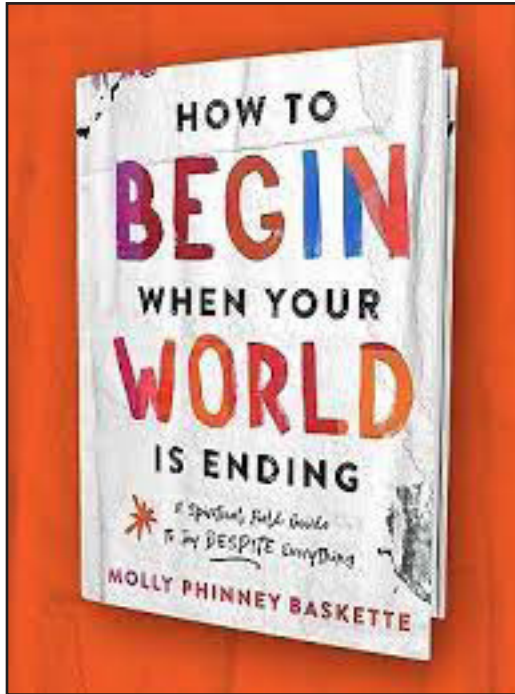
Questions? Please email Pastor Craig at [iucc@iucc.org](mailto:iucc@iucc.org)

To buy tickets, click here:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/broken-hearts-bingo-tickets-787604144197?aff=oddtcreator>



## Book Clubs of Interest

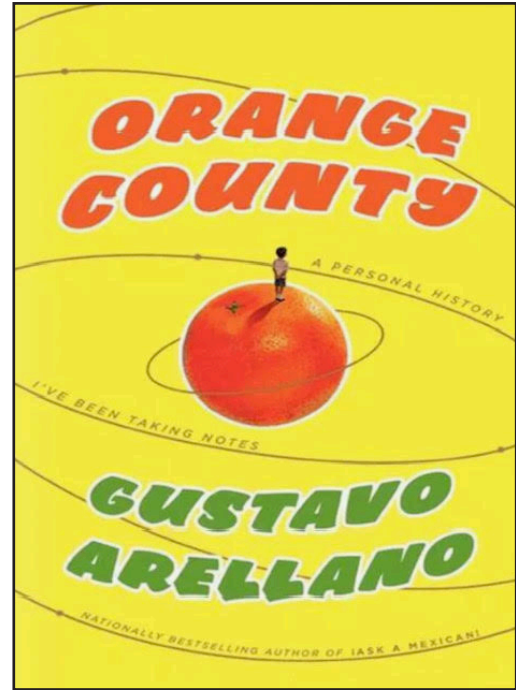


### Women's Book Club

How To Begin When Your World is Ending, A Spiritual Field Guide to Joy DESPITE Everything by Molly Phinney Baskette.

Weaving together her own story of battling cancer and the stories of those she encountered in her life of faith, Baskette mines joy from all the hardest parts of being human. In doing so she reminds us that whatever you are going through, someone has been there before you, and found meaning in the madness.

This IUCC Book Club meets on Fridays this fall at 1:00 pm via Zoom. For Zoom link and more information, please contact Robinmarie McClement.



### DEI Tuesday Book Club

Join us on January 9, 2024, as we begin reading and discussing Orange County: A Personal History by Gustavo Arellano.

Nationally bestselling author, syndicated columnist, and the voice of the Mexican-American community, Gustavo Arellano delivers the hilarious and poignant book about Orange County. This book not only weaves Gustavo's family story with the history of Orange County and the modern Mexican-immigrant experience but also offers sharp insights into a wide range of political, cultural, and social issues.

Copies of this book are on the DEI shelf in Plumer Hall.

Orange County: A Personal History  
<https://a.co/d/dkq2swd>





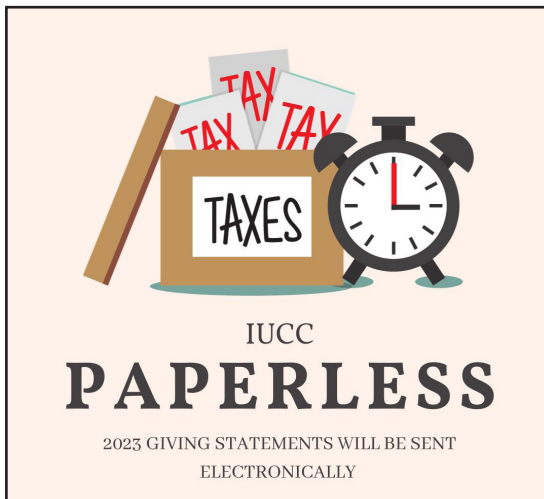
# Welcome

Please welcome these new members, who joined December 10. *Photos courtesy of Renae Boyum*



Above: *Dustin Nguyen & Joanna Luu*

Below: *Mike Bullis & the Rev. Dr. Michael Holland*



- |      |                      |      |                   |
|------|----------------------|------|-------------------|
| 1/13 | Tricia Aynes         | 1/18 | Joan Mortenson    |
| 1/22 | Adele Bloom          | 1/10 | Barbara Ruris     |
| 1/18 | Felicity Figueroa    | 1/09 | Cesar Sangalang   |
| 1/09 | Sarah Halverson-Cano | 1/13 | Bonnie Shaffstall |
| 1/23 | Nancy Harris         | 1/18 | Bill Sheak        |
| 1/05 | Eric Houston         | 1/19 | Marilyn Smith     |
| 1/07 | Janet Johnson        | 1/02 | Paul Strasma      |
| 1/20 | Marilyn KeslerWest   | 1/12 | Steve Swope       |
| 1/23 | Mary Lyons           | 1/05 | Chris Walsh       |
| 1/03 | Ian McClement        | 1/16 | Melissa Walsh     |
| 1/26 | Joan McDonald        | 1/07 | Jan Wilson        |

## A New Baby Girl!



*Expectant mom Nasi Rasolli (L) with Carol Tuch at baby shower*



*Mersana Rasolli  
7 lbs, 8 oz  
Born December 21*



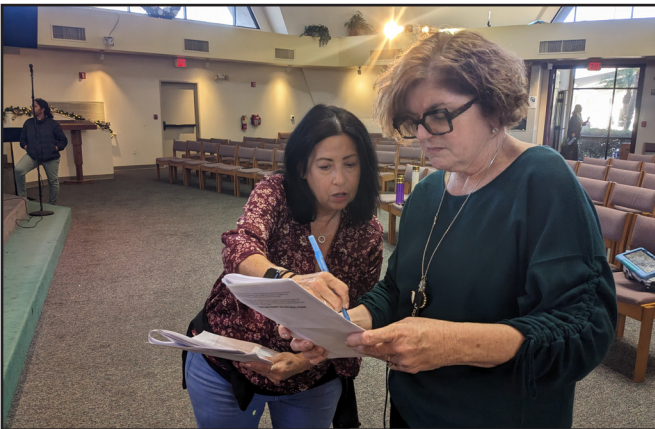
# Ministry With Young People

Photos & Captions courtesy of Lauren Louie, Co-Chair of MYP, and Tristan Reineccius, Director of MYP

## Christmas Eve crafts and game



Some “behind the scenes” glimpses of Pageant practice. That’s Myrna & Nora on the left hard at work making the magic happen, and Myrna on the right directing the actors.



**IUCM MYP Hosts**  
**Parents Night Out**

Leave your children in a safe, inclusive environment. Snacks, games, and fun included! \$25 per child!

**26 January**  
**07.00 - 10.00 PM**

Contact [tristen@iucc.org](mailto:tristen@iucc.org) for questions  
pre-register your children for drop in here:

**IUCM Presents**  
**Queer Education:**  
**A panel**

HOW TO SUPPORT LGBTQ+ YOUTH IN EDUCATION

CHILDCARE AVAILABLE ON SITE

**January 26, 7-10 p.m.**

This event is dedicated to having conversations in a safe space on how to support our LGBTQ+ youth in schools. Our goal is to empower parents, youth, and allies by listening to educators, advocates, parents, and more share their ideas, views, and support! It is open to high school age youth and up.



## A NOTE OF



Thank you to all the IUCC kids and their families! All their time and hard work created a wonderful and meaningful joy filled pageant.

Thank you to: (in order of appearance)

- Jackie – Narrator
- Jennifer and Mollie – Field Reporters
- Eric and Nathaniel – Athletes
- Micah, Lewis, Hudson, and Elliot – The Bros!
- Joy – Musical Artist
- Nora and Samuel – Long distance Family
- Ellie and Sarah – Girl Scout Sisters
- Jaime and Jasper – Giant Families!
- Alex and Princess Daisy
- Archer - Shepard
- Pastor Sarah, Michael, and Baby Rocky – The Holy Family

A special thank you to Nora Webb and Jeanne Halverson for their roles as “actor wranglers” to Lauren Louie for picking up all the pieces, Tristen for photographing the performance, Donnie and Pastor Craig for the AV assistance.

- Myrna Bohan, Co-Chair of MYP

In the next two months, we now know of 5 young people “aging out” of an ORR (Office of Refugee Resettlement) shelter in the local area without support. These kids are turning 18 without family or friends anywhere within the United States. Without someone stepping in, each of these kids will end up homeless. Sadly to say, the better shelters are at capacity and don’t have open beds, so we’re not even talking “homeless but in a youth shelter.” They’re very much facing living on the street.

There’s an existing network of volunteers who have been working with young folks in this situation - IUCC has been a big part - but the sudden increase in case flow - we had 8 for all of last year vs 5 in two months - is straining our existing volunteer pool to the limit and beyond. We need help!

If you’re interested in helping, we could badly use the help. Specifically, we’re looking for:

- **Volunteers** - Folks willing to take these kids to social services, help them enroll in local high schools, visit a doctor, and all of the minor logistics which go into establishing a life.
- **Short Term Host Homes** - The tentative plan is to get these kids into shared apartments or rooms for rent, but with each turning 18 on a different day, we have a nasty timing coordination problems. Funds for rent assistance are extremely limited, and someone willing to take a young person in for a couple of weeks help us line up pairs of kids to share rent.
- **Introductions** - This batch of kids happens to all come from countries in Africa (Angola, Chad, and Guinea). None of our prior cases have, so we’re really scrambling to find community organizations familiar with their backgrounds, and who speak their languages.

If you’re interested in getting involved, please email Philip Reames at [philip@philipreames.com](mailto:philip@philipreames.com) or hit him up at coffee hour.

**CAN YOU**

**HELP?**



It's cold and rainy and our unsheltered neighbors need your help.

We need clean, gently worn or new  
Men's, Women's, and Children's:  
Coats ~ Jackets  
Sweaters ~ Blankets  
Raincoats or Ponchos  
New Socks

**AND/OR**

Any of the following individually wrapped small, unopened items to help us make hygiene kits:  
Shampoo ~ Conditioner ~ Brush ~ Comb  
Toothbrush ~ Toothpaste  
Soap ~ Face & Body Wipes ~ Lotion  
Lip balm ~ Ibuprofen/Acetaminophen

Bring **bagged donations** to IUCC  
Bins available for drop off  
**January 7<sup>th</sup> through February 4<sup>th</sup>**  
**Monday – Thursday**  
10 am – 4 pm  
**Sundays**  
during and after services

**Mission & Service** will give donations to **Housing Is A Human Right OC** for distribution.



# Worry or Wonder?

by Vivian Elaine Johnson



The worry was all in vain. Remember the fear and consternation that reined when we approached the year 2000, the new millennium? Computer users and programmers feared that computers would stop working on December 31, 1999. The phenomenon was referred to as the Y2K Scare and also as “The Millennium Bug.” Government, businesses, organizations, and individuals – all

worried that our technology would go haywire and that vital information and important records would be lost. In short, there was concern that our society would cease to function. However, moving from December 31, 1999 to January 1, 2000, the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, didn’t result in glitches. The worry was unnecessary. Of course, some religious groups prophesied that 2000 would bring the end of the world. When it didn’t, they once again blamed faulty calculations and changed the date for the world’s demise. They estimate that it’s coming soon. I’m not holding my breath.

That was twenty-four years ago. I didn’t think I’d live long enough to see 2024, but here I am. And happy, at that. I wonder what the new year will bring.

Oh yes, I assume there will continue to be chaos, violence, hatred, and inequity. That causes me to worry. But I also assume that kindness, generosity, love, and peace will continue in the lives of many. Of course, you and I want to be a part of the latter.

The first church festival of 2024 is Epiphany, January sixth, a celebration that commemorates the visit by the magi to the infant Jesus. I like the word *epiphany* and its synonyms *insight* and *inspiration*. As we step into the new year and approach Epiphany, I pray that we may be gifted not with gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but with insight and inspiration.

One way in which I’m inspired, and also gain insight, is through contact with nature. Love of the natural world is like a deep current within me, first initiated by my Swedish and Norwegian ancestors who had a longtime romance with nature. As a child, I lived on a street called Forest. Our three-room house was perched on a hill with a winding creek lapping at its feet. I spent numerous hours by that creek, dipping fingers and toes into its luscious wetness. Next to our home was a small wooded area where I often took my heart on walks, and listened to the awe-inspiring sounds of trees. All these, plus the gardens my father and I planted, introduced me to the glories of nature, a gift beyond price.



Thomas Berry captures the role of nature well: “*The natural world is the larger sacred community to which we all belong. We bear the universe in our being even as the universe bears us in its being.*” As I view nature, that larger sacred community that bears us in its being, it helps me to put the negatives of our human world into perspective. What is not awe-inspiring about the sunset with its multi-colored glow? Or the itzy-bitsy hummingbird whose wing-flapping rates vary from 12 beats per second in the largest species to 80 per second in the smallest. With such miracles right in front of my face – if I take time to observe them, of course – I am filled with

inspiration and insight. I experience an epiphany.

Nature has the ability to peel open my heart and fill it with wonder and joy. I’m reminded that I belong to the universe, a larger sacred community. Such belonging strengthens me to face the chaos of the human world. Out with the worry. In with the wonder. What gives you inspiration and insight as you enter 2024?

Happy New Year! Happy Epiphany!

# A reflection on Resilience

by Tricia Aynes



A few days before Christmas I attended two social events that included women slightly older than I was. At each one, the word “resilience” kept cropping up in conversation. It’s not a word I hear very often, so it caught my attention. The most noteworthy comment came from a new friend who is physically fragile and battling cancer. She

lowered her voice to almost a whisper, looked me straight in the eye, and said, “You know, when we are young we learn to be resilient. We cope, we recover, and we adapt to change. But as we grow older, it seems like the world expects us to continue being resilient even as our minds and bodies start to fail. We have less capacity to cope with things. Even as circumstances push us to be more resilient, we find it harder to do so.” Almost a plea, her words stayed with me in the weeks that followed and got me thinking about what resilience really means, especially as we grow older.

Dictionary.com defines “resilience” as:

1. the power or ability of a material to return to its original form, position, etc., after being bent, compressed, or stretched; elasticity.
2. the ability of a person to adjust to or recover readily from illness, adversity, major life changes, etc.; buoyancy.

*Resilience*, in other words, is “bouncing back.” Literally. The word comes from a Latin verb meaning “to spring back.” It is widely considered to be a very positive character trait—a strength. We admire people who don’t let obstacles stand in the way of their dreams – people who pick themselves up after a blow, dust themselves off, and march back into the fray. But what does it mean as we grow older and less able to bounce back from adversity?

I still send Christmas cards together with a nice newsy letter. It’s an annual tradition I keep up, partly because it’s habit and partly because I hope friends and long-lost relatives will respond in kind and tell me what is happening in their lives. A surprising number of them do, and I’m grateful for the glimpse into their lives. This year, cards and conversations brought news of all kinds.

One friend in her mid-80’s wrote that her son had died this past year, leaving two 12 year old adopted boys. The kids are with a care guardian, she wrote, and she is trying her

best to help them cope with the tragedy. Several other acquaintances are fighting illness. Still others are dealing with caregiving for a spouse in declining health.

The holidays brought news of great joy as well: weddings, new grandchildren, and new love after the loss of a long-time spouse. But even good news requires resilience, doesn’t it? The ability to “roll with things,” to adjust to the “new normal,” to give up old habits and form new ones. To make room for new people and new circumstances in our hearts. I love my grandkids to the moon and back, but wow – do they ever wear me out! I’ve needed to tap my stores of resilience quite a bit to keep up.

In my experience, some people are more resilient than others – some seem to be born that way, while others struggle to bounce back from problems. Some become bitter and develop a victim mentality. It has a lot to do with temperament, life’s experiences, and what our parents taught us about dealing with adversity.



I recently reconnected with a long-ago friend from early childhood whom I knew had had an extraordinarily difficult life filled with many hardships. We had a wonderful phone conversation that lasted over an hour. Despite all the heartache and loss she’d endured, I marveled at how she’d somehow managed to maintain a generous spirit and a real love of her fellow humans through it all. She was the embodiment of a meme I’d seen on Facebook not long ago: “Attitude is the difference between an ordeal and an adventure.”

Returning to the original conversation, I think my new friend and I tacitly agreed on something of key importance: one of the real joys of growing old is the realization that we don’t have to face setbacks and sorrows alone. By building a community of old and new friends, we can bounce ideas and encouragement around to reach solutions (or at least achieve acceptance). Burdens really are lighter when shared. It helps to talk and seek the wisdom of others who’ve “been there.”

I’m looking forward to revisiting both of these friendships in the new year - with my new friend as well as my childhood one - because both have endured loss with tremendous grace and both have much to teach me about resilience. We’ll figure it out together.



## Did Jesus actually drive out demons? It's a possibility

by the Reverend Doctor Jerry von Talge



*The demoniacs begged him, "If you cast us out, send us into the herd of swine." And he said to them to go so they can come out and enter into the swine and suddenly the whole herd rushed down to the sea and perished in the water. (The Gadarene demoniac: Matthew 8:28, Mark 5 :1, Luke 8:26)*

Don't be too quick to characterize the story of Jesus' driving out the Gadarene demons as only metaphor and not some event that actually took place. When we look at modern psychiatry and psychology, it is a distinct possibility that Jesus did in fact drive out demons.

The Jesus Seminar, which included such luminaries as Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg, went through all of the Biblical sayings of Jesus, deciding which were likely authentic and attributable to him. They voted using colored beads. Their consensus was that fifty per cent of the Biblical sayings of Jesus were not authentic. This raises the question of the authenticity of some of his more miraculous acts such as feeding of the five thousand and the driving out of the Gadarene demons, in which Jesus did some speaking. Did Jesus really speak to the demons in a brief conversation? Many Progressive Christians do not believe that Jesus really performed miracles, which seemed like some form of magic.

Did Jesus really drive out demons? Did he really speak and act in such a way that people possessed by demons seemed to be freed from these demons and released from their suffering? The answer is that it is entirely possible that Jesus did "drive" out demons, if we have a special understanding of the demons in our modern times. Yes, there are demons today, but they are not supernatural, the way they appear in the Bible. There is expression that "everyone has their demons." Demons in this sense are anything that troubles a person, such as fear or guilt.

But there are worse demons than this. There are the demons of mental illness in the form of auditory and visual hallucinations. Hallucinations are imaginative, where the person experiences something that does not really exist. Hallucinations are especially present in schizophrenia, but can appear in other forms of mental illness as well.

My background in mental health includes treating people with schizophrenia, whose thinking and behavior are

split off from reality. Also, my son Greg has schizophrenia, which is dormant at the present time.

Several years ago, Greg's schizophrenia became active in what is called an acute or florid psychosis. He was having auditory and visual hallucinations, hearing and seeing things that did not exist. His hallucinations centered around an imaginary hunting knife with a horsehead handle that was supposedly given to him by his grandfather, my father. This knife never existed. No knife was given to Greg by my father. Greg's hallucinations consisted of the imaginary horsehead speaking to him, telling him to harm others and to harm himself. Fortunately, something inside Greg kept him from acting on these internal messages. Greg was hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital three times that year to treat these psychological demons. Fortunately, Greg has not had any psychotic episodes for many years.

There was something very special about Jesus when he related to people. He had a healing presence. His special nature was soothing and healing. With his agape love, it is entirely possible that people were freed from their demons, released from their psychological suffering. This possibility becomes even greater as we look at the nature of psychotherapy and what makes it effective. I was a psychotherapist for twenty-two years. What got people better was not some specific school of psychology, no special modality, nor any specific therapeutic technique. It was from this relationship that people got better and went on to solve their problems. I believe that it is entirely possible that Jesus formed such an immediate healing relationship with people that the demons within could be soothed and individuals were relieved of their suffering.

One more idea to complete this article: God's grace, the power of agape love, is available to everyone, in many different forms and manifestations. Jesus is the personification of this love. Healing is one of the main attributes of God's grace. The mission of our church is to carry Jesus' agape ministry out into the world, bringing God's grace. God's grace, mediated through Jesus, is double edged: (1) We come to church to receive God's grace. We also receive God's grace out in the world in our individual lives, as we open our hearts and minds to God; and (2) We are commissioned to continue Jesus' healing ministry, which also includes justice, hope, and peace. We too can help in the ministry of casting out demons, through forming loving and healing relationships that set everybody free, with all demons vanquished. Through loving, listening, and being supportive, we too can mediate God's grace and drive out demons. They may be somewhat smaller demons, but nevertheless, human suffering will be lessened as we become channels for God's healing grace.