ALL CHURCH BOWLING NIGHT!

Adults and kids had a blast when IUCC went bowling on March 16th. Participants enjoyed bowling, pizza, and soda at nearby Irvine Lanes. A great time was had by all!
The culmination of the Lenten season is right around the corner. Palm Sunday will bring a procession led by children waving palms while the church sings, “All Glory, Laud and Honor.”

Maundy Thursday will see our church family together—a smaller audience no doubt than what we see on Sunday morning (although this year we have a ride program for those who don't drive at night). Our seminarian, Laura Kemp, will be taking a big part in our worship that evening, and there will be special music as we all occupy the middle of the sanctuary with the altar in the center. Like our Ash Wednesday service, it is much loved by a portion of our congregation, and this year I will take my cue from you as to how important these services are to maintain for the future by seeing how many people choose to come. This is one of my favorite services—in the creation of an alternative worship space, we are able to bring a more intimate worship experience into our community.

But here comes the one Sunday of the year that has most preachers quaking like the ground around the empty tomb—Easter. For most of us, the assumption is (false or not) that everything we say from the pulpit during the year will be eclipsed by the quality of the Easter sermon, as on that day we are supposed to make reasonable sense of unreasonable scriptures. Our church musicians (I suspect) feel the same way—they call in their brass instrumentalists before anyone else can book them, and the music is rich and plentiful. Then, there are all those lilies! Weeks before Easter, our worship chair takes great care that people have the opportunity to “adopt” a lily so that the chancel is full of them.

Banners go out on the lawn, an ad goes into the newspaper and our website is “Easterized.” Special mailers are created, a breakfast is planned, and an egg-hunt will take place on the lawn for the children. We pull out every stop for this one Sunday, and for the guests who will come.

What about those guests? We will see people who gave up looking for a church last Christmas and decided to come out and try again. We will welcome them as family. Then there are the “Spiritual but not Religious” friends who defy reason by feeling compelled to come on what is arguably the most religious day of the year. Among these friends will be the few who, when given a multiple choice test, marked down that Easter is when Jesus came out of the tomb, and if he saw his shadow, there would be six more weeks of winter.

Matt Fitzgerald, in the April 2 issue of Christian Century writes, “If people came to church to hear reason, Easter would not be the most popular Sunday of the year because there is nothing sensible about resurrection.”

Those of us within the church have spent our lives struggling with the parts of our faith stories that bend reason into a theological pretzel. As Progressive Christians, we are confronted with illogical stories and we have, each in our own ways, come to grips with how we feel about them. And yet...Easter arrives, and so do we—with a sense of expectancy and hope. The story of the empty tomb reaches us on some deep level that transcends the literal interpretation.

We are privileged to have one of the finest music ministries in Orange County. I am personally very grateful to them for bringing us such wonderful music every Sunday during this season, and we all know that what we have come to expect will be topped again this year as we head into Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Easter. The message of new life will fill the chancel once again.

And, Easter Preachers have the privilege of making this proclamation: that at those moments when despair, pain and hopelessness try to claim a soul-defeating “no” over our lives, we can always expect to be greeted by the incomprehensible “yes” of Easter. There is always the opportunity for the Phoenix to rise from the ashes—a time of resurrection. We come to hear that this can be true in our own lives, and as a race of people facing the human-made disasters that confront us. We have the opportunity to say “no” to the ways of death, and “yes” to the life that is truly life. We can be, as someone once said, “Easter people in a Good Friday world.”

See you in church!

Pastor Paul
The Youth Need Your Help!
We are very busy this summer. Senior high youth will be going to Seattle, Washington, for the Western Regional Youth Event (WRYE). Here, our youth will gather with other churches of the United Church of Christ from the west coast. While doing service in the city and developing their leadership skills, our senior high youth will also be making connections with like-minded youth!

In August, junior and senior high youth will be trekking to Kanab, Utah, for a week of service at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary. This is one of the largest sanctuaries in the United States taking in thousands of cats, dogs, bunnies, birds, horses, pigs, and other animals in need of homes. We will be living in a house and cooking our meals together, as well as serving animals and the Kanab community. I did a similar trip to Best Friends as a youth myself and learned so much about the problems of animal over-population and how many animals are desperately in need of a home. Rather than just playing with animals all week, we will be cleaning, gardening, and painting to make sure the facilities are in good shape for the animals. Check out the website for the sanctuary here if you are curious: http://bestfriends.org

These are going to be life-changing experiences for our youth who will be expanding their knowledge and serving two communities. While we are working hard to keep the cost down for both of these trips, we are in desperate need of help from the congregation! Seattle is going to be about $600/person (including airfare) and Utah is $350/person. In order to reach these fundraising goals, we are asking congregants to sponsor some of the cost for these trips! Families will be contributing to these costs, but we want to make sure these trips are available to all youth who are interested regardless of ability to pay.

Here is a table of the breakdown of how much these trips are going to cost for our youth:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th># of youth going</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>Seattle</td>
<td>$600</td>
<td>4</td>
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Upcoming fundraisers:
- APRIL 13: Selling “Youth Stock” - Invest in our youth! (Receive a post card from where we travel!)
- MAY 18: We will have a All-Church Scavenger Hunt followed by a Spaghetti Dinner and a “Services Auction.” Need a tree picked? Babysitting? Bid on a service and the youth with come do it! More details to come in the next couple of weeks.

If you are able to help our youth, we will be holding several fundraisers in the upcoming months. Please keep these dates in mind!

Thank you for your time in reading this and willingness to support our Youth Group. We can’t wait for a meaningful summer that will enrich the lives of our youth as well as our congregation, who will get to learn about these trips from our youth.
Like many people at IUCC, my husband, Edward, and I are part of the “Sandwich Generation” – folks who are both supporting their children and caring for aging parents. Our daughter, Sarah, is a new college graduate who is forging her own path - our challenge now is to find a comfortable place in her life where we are close enough to catch her but not so close that we are interfering! Both of our fathers have passed but we are blessed to share our lives with our mothers. My mother has very few needs and is quick with a retort if I hover too much while Edward’s mother, on the other hand, is declining steadily and it is taking an emotional toll on us. The physical consequences of a life marked by hard work are showing while her cognitive processes are becoming sketchy. She no longer recognizes pictures of her children and her English has deserted her, with the unfortunate result that she and I no longer share a language in common. I have no way of telling her how much I respect her choices, how she lived her life, and how grateful I am for the gift of her son in mine.

Edward’s father immigrated to this country from China during World War II, serving as a decorated officer in the Army-Air Force. Post-war, he brought his young bride over; they quickly had 4 children and eventually were able to purchase a laundry business. Edward literally grew up in that laundry, playing among the equipment as a toddler, then later helping every afternoon after school and on weekends. As a result, Edward can iron a shirt like no one’s business – lucky me! All of the kids graduated from a University of California campus with science degrees, each of them successful in both career and family. And, most of their children will earn advanced degrees.

Edward’s childhood home was modest for a family of 6 but there were never just 6 people living there. Money was tight but his parents systematically sponsored each of their siblings, distant “cousins,” and countless others, often hosting families for a year while everyone learned English, found jobs or went to school. All of these sponsored folks have found success here, whether as professionals, educators or manual laborers. No matter what their job, all of them share a collective commitment to hard work and community. They help and care for each other in deep and lasting ways – no one is left behind.

I feel tremendously fortunate to have married into this family, to be a small part of that community. I struggle occasionally with sitting at the table of honor at weddings – I have done nothing to earn it – but this is how the community shows its respect to my mother-in-law – an unassuming woman of modest education from a small Cantonese village who quietly changed the lives of family after family. What courage she and my father-in-law showed in coming here and how selflessly they lived.

I am the product of privilege – I come from very hard working people but we’ve gone to bed each night with a roof over our heads, knowing where our next meal will come from. My whole frame of reference is defined by not having to make difficult decisions - whether to purchase gas for the car or medicine for my child. I keep a gratitude journal as a spiritual practice to never forget how lucky I have been – yes, there has been hard work – but considerable luck as well. My parents did a great job in keeping us grounded, reminding us: “to whom much has been given, much is expected.”

In the March 27th e-newsletter from Progressive Christians Uniting, Executive Director Timothy Murphy writes:

During a sermon I delivered for Ash Wednesday, I recommended that we practice dismantling whatever unjust privileges we happen to have for Lent. In fact, I am convinced that divesting of such privileges is one of the most important spiritual practices that American mainline Christians can do in order to be faithful to the way of Jesus today. These can be issues of class and consumerism, ecological domination, race, heteronormativity, etc.

Why is this a relevant Lenten practice? Each of us experiences oppression in some ways, and we each receive advantages from the oppression of others in other ways. Christian faithfulness today involves uncovering these dynamics and helping us heal from these wounds - some self-inflicted and some other-inflicted. Whenever we or our churches ignore our complicity in these social sins, or say that they are irrelevant to matters of doing church, we end up supporting the status quo in our culture and in us.

As Easter approaches, as I continue to explore my own
Lenten journey, these words are especially meaningful to me. Being a Christian is fundamental to how I define myself – but how close am I really coming to living my life as Jesus would? Because of this lens of privilege, how faithful to his ways can I really be?

Lots of my friends have given up chocolate or alcohol for Lent. Those decisions are proving surprisingly challenging for many of them but how about we, at IUCC, consider Timothy Murphy’s challenge and give up the status quo? How about we strive to both heal our own wounds and try to help heal those around us? And, how about we celebrate being a community, striving to be one in which no one gets left behind?

I’m not sure how many more Easters my mother-in-law will get to enjoy. No matter how long, I hope she knows how “privileged” I have felt to share this journey with her. Over the years, she has taught me many things, failing rather spectacularly at sharing her love of fish heads, sea cucumbers or countless other ‘delicacies’ that she spooned onto my plate over the years. But I promise her that her unspoken lessons found their way into my heart, into how I try to live my life. And, I thank her for the lasting legacy she will leave behind, a vibrant and loving community, and most especially her youngest child, Edward, whose quiet acts of selfless love enrich my life every day.

As always, I invite you to share your thoughts. You can catch me on the patio, pull me aside at one of our terrific events, send me an email or give me a call. I look forward to hearing from you.

Moderator’s Column continued from page 4
Comma Groups have a service component — and IUCC benefits tremendously by groups being “in action.” Many coffee hours have been graciously hosted by various Comma Groups. For example, the March 16th St. Patrick’s Day-themed offering from Barb Carse’s group was great! Tricia Aynes’ group has taken responsibility for sprucing up the kiosk, with fabulous results (see photo at right). On March 16, Cindy’s group “8 Bacon Lovers and an Incredibly Tolerant Vegan” (pictured at top left and right) tackled reorganizing the Christian Ed closet, installing new shelving, along with sorting/donating/getting rid of years of accumulated stuff. The closet project was a ton of work but we enjoyed ourselves doing it — and we were able to spiff up a small corner of campus in the process.

Other Comma Groups are likely pursuing great projects as well. Let us know what YOUR group is doing (and take a photo if possible) and we’ll feature you in an upcoming newsletter!

- Anne Rosse

The “8 Bacon Lovers and an Incredibly Tolerant Vegan” group spiff up the Christian Ed closet (above and top right)

Laura and Pat paint the kiosk

The Cahills have started a new Comma Group
Building Project Update

By Anne Rosse

In late November 2013, the congregation approved the development of a Master Plan for the IUCC campus. The project is on track to be presented for review and approval at the Spring Congregational Meeting. If approved, we would then submit the plan to the City of Irvine for a Modified Conditional Use Permit. With no unexpected delays, the target timeframe would be a January 2015 congregational vote on whether to proceed with a phased build-out and associated capital campaign.

The Building Task Force has been meeting regularly with domusstudio (http://domusstudio.com/), developing a strong collaborative relationship. The Master Plan is being developed to ensure maximum flexibility – giving us options for phased build-outs, depending on church priorities, needs and growth, along with our financial capabilities.

To help with our planning, the task force has made a couple of field trips to view other domus-designed church projects, including Irvine Presbyterian Church and Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church in San Clemente. At both sites, we were impressed by the careful attention to meeting the functional needs of each congregation and enjoyed hearing positive endorsements of domus and the projects they designed.

The Building Task Force continues to be very encouraged by the excellent work being done by domusstudio and the progress being made. For more information, please contact any member of the Building Task Force: Martha Selby (chair), Mark Allen, Keith Boyum, Lindy Garber, Laura Long, Cindy O’Dell, Jim Raver, Anne Rosse, Pat Sauter, Michael Spindle and Paul Tellström.

Adult Education: Exploring Courage to Think Differently

The Rev. George Johnson's series of Lenten classes have been interesting and enlightening. In our first class, we talked about people in our lives who have been courageous, and what that entailed: consequences and risk. Courageous people do what is right despite not knowing what might happen and how perilous it might be. Jesus was courageous when his words and deeds put him and his friends in great danger, yet he persevered.

Our second class tackled the question “Do we create God in our image?” The answer was a resounding “yes.” We talked a lot about prayer and whether or not it had the power to influence God. We decided that prayer is a way of loving somebody, not necessarily changing God's mind about a course of action. Our prayers let people know that we care about them, and sending prayers and positive energy into the world helps surround those we care about with love (even if it doesn't always affect the outcome the way we want). Prayer is part of the positive flow of the universe.

- Tricia Aynes

Kudos & Gratitude

Midway through our Lenten Services Experiment, our thanks and gratitude go out to John, David and our fabulous choir for stepping up hugely to support this endeavor. We recognize that it makes for an early start and a long morning. Thank you for gifting us with such gorgeous sacred music at both services - so appreciated! ~ Anne
“I can handle it by myself.” That’s what many of us think when life deals us a major blow. Sometimes we pull away from people rather than go to them for support. We withdraw and feel very alone. We may not think our problems are bad enough to merit special attention, or we don’t want to bother the pastor with them. But we are deeply troubled about some life event, and it would be nice to have someone to talk to, someone who would listen and ask the kind of questions that would help us organize our chaotic emotions and process through them.

While Stephen Ministry is not intended for major problems like clinical depression, mental illness, or substance abuse issues (all of which require professional help), it is ideal for those who are basically well adjusted but dealing with life’s setbacks or transitions. Good examples of these would be: divorce, job loss, a death in the family, a child leaving home, an illness, and/or concerns about aging.

Pastor Paul has said that many members of our congregation are either entering a crisis, weathering a crisis, or emerging from one. While some members have a wonderful family or friends to provide support through a crisis, others do not (and sometimes their issue is with a family member or friend, and they aren’t comfortable confronting that person). The Stephen Ministry can help ease that burden by providing counseling with a Christian perspective.

The Stephen Ministry at IUCC is an arm of pastoral care. It is a team of volunteers (some of whom are pictured above) who have undergone many hours of training to teach them how to be good listeners. While they are not mental health professionals, they are caring and compassionate people who want to help.

If you would like to be paired with a Stephen Minister, you may contact Pastor Paul or Dave Schofield. Dave will talk with you to determine if you are a good fit for what the program has to offer. Once you are matched with a Stephen Minister, s/he will meet with you weekly for an hour or so, listen, and ask questions to help you process.

Stephen partnerships usually last about a year, but they can be shorter or longer depending on the circumstances. What you share is kept confidential between your Stephen Minister and yourself (but may be shared in general terms within the ministry team as necessary to support your Stephen Minister in providing care).

You don’t need to go it alone. If you are dealing with a life crisis, consider asking for a Stephen Minister to help you deal with it. Dave can be reached at (949) 300-1216.
AIDS Walk is May 17

ORANGE COUNTY AIDS WALK
SATURDAY, MAY 17
GREAT PARK

Join the IUCC walking team at www.ocasf.org or contact our team captain Felicity Figueroa to learn more about how you can help!

Tell Us What You Think ...
About Worship

During Lent, we have had dual services with full choir and Sunday school. While we cannot expect our choir to continue to sing at two services that are an hour apart, what can we do?

Expect to be asked to weigh in on what worked and didn’t work for you during these seven weeks. Should we bring our two services closer together to fully utilize the talents of the choir? Or, should we have a dedicated smaller ensemble that sings every week at one service, while the choir sings at the other? (Choir members—your input will be highly valued.) Now that LCD screens have been approved and budgeted for, how would you like to see them employed?

An expanded worship team will meet just after Easter to help guide me in bringing the best possible worship experience to IUCC. I will be relying on information I hear from you as well as the new ideas that the team brings to the table.

Yours,
Pastor Paul

IUCC Photo Directory 2014

Photo sessions are scheduled for May 5 through May 10 in the sanctuary. Online appointment scheduling will be available shortly. Committee Members are: Jean Stewart, Chair; Tricia Aynes; Janet Emery; Tommie Kozlov; and Patty McCarthy.

If you are interested in working as a host for our photo shoots, please contact Jean. She will be glad to give you details.

The Boy Scout Troop and Youth Group go kayaking
In our series on sexual diversity we have covered a variety of sexual differences between people in the hopes that we can use knowledge to counteract ignorance and to increase our empathy and understanding of boys and girls, men and women, who are different from us. Last month we began our exploration of sex and gender and began to consider the particular challenges facing those persons who do not experience comfort in their own bodies, and whose emotional make-up does not match their sexual assignment. People who are transgendered are probably the least understood and most mistreated of the diverse groups we have discussed.

It is particularly difficult for young people having this internal experience because of the extreme loneliness it often produces, and because lack of knowledge and understanding often result in very harsh and punitive responses from parents and other adults in a young person’s life. Research and experience spell out some of the many difficult obstacles for transgender youth:

- They may be thrown out of the house when their family or foster family discovers their identity, forcing them to live on the streets.
- They typically face harassment and abuse in school to such an extent that they quit, which makes it hard from them to get a decent paying job.
- Even if they are able to complete their education, they have difficulty finding and keeping almost any kind of job because of overt or covert discrimination.
- If they live on the streets or are sex workers (due to poverty and lack of other options) they are at greater risk for abusing drugs, becoming infected with HIV, and being subjected to anti-transgender violence.
- Many lack access to health care, including proper counseling and medical supervision. Even if they do get medical care, they frequently face discrimination and hostility from health care workers. As a result some decide to treat themselves by buying underground hormones, which may be dangerous.
- Gender reassignment surgery is beyond the means of most who identify as transgender and is not covered by most health insurance policies.
- The result of their particular challenges is high rates of depression, drug and alcohol abuse, and thoughts of suicide (more than 1/3 report such thoughts).
- Transgender people who can “pass” often seek to remain closeted, so trans youth often do not have visible role models and mentors.

Young people who feel like the other sex and would like to start living congruently with their feelings often would like to begin hormone treatments as many transgender adults do but this is often either difficult to find for someone still legally a “child” or is outright denied because of prejudice or inability to understand the dilemmas such young people face.

Most young people do not have exposure to other people who feel like they do and so they often are deprived of a “support group” of people who understand them and can provide encouragement and company.

Fortunately, we do not have to be like someone to offer them support and friendship. If we are truly to “love our neighbor” as we have been commanded, we must try to find ways to show love to these members of our community. The greatest gift would be to listen to their story without judgment, and to offer opportunities to become involved with whatever communities they choose to affiliate with in a full and equal manner. It is okay to tell a transgender that you are uncomfortable and unsure what to say or ask: this is showing respect and offering friendship. We don’t have to wait to be comfortable or fully knowledgeable before reaching out as one child of God to another. Such an extension of good will is good for young people and adults who are transgender and it is good for us as we seek to embrace the whole of creation, those like us and those different than us.

Being transgender is not the same as being a “transvestite.” A person who is transgender dresses as the opposite sex because they identify internally as the opposite sex. People who are “transvestite” dress in the clothing of the opposite sex because they receive some sort of psychological and sexual gratification from wearing the attire of the other sex, but they do not believe themselves to be the other sex. Transvestites will not want to have surgery to change them from the sex they have been assigned to the other sex. Most transgendered people would like to become the sex they identify with if they can afford it. We might not be able to tell whether a person is transgender or transvestite unless we ask them. Why guess? Why not have an actual conversation with someone you encounter and let them know you are interested in them as a person and would like to get to know them? It will be a treat for you and for them.

Isn’t the world interesting? And we still have more to talk about. Next month we’ll talk about people who are “gender non-conforming” and others who are “questioning.” And when we are finished discussing all of the sexual differences in people, it will be time to talk about ourselves, and take a look at our own prejudices, tendency toward stereotyping, lack of tolerance and affirmation, etc. It’s a good journey to be on together, as we seek to follow our instruction with regard to our diverse neighbors and find the love.