ALL CHURCH WORK DAY A BIG SUCCESS!

As a part of this year’s Stewardship Sunday on Nov. 10, IUCC hosted the First Annual Stewardship Sunday All-Church Work Day to improve the look of our campus and do some fall cleaning while reminding us that service is part of the spiritual act of stewardship. Check out the photos from this successful event! We had approximately 70 people stay after worship to work on various projects.

Photos by Paul Shirey & Sarah Fiske-Phillips
The big winner of the Chili Cook-Off was Alyssa Cornett, who impressed everyone (once again!) with her impressive culinary skills. *Left photo by Sarah Fiske-Phillips, right photo by Chris Goodrich*
Just a couple of weeks ago, I was reminded of the great gifts that are present in this congregation, and I hope you noticed, too.

You empowered the Building Task Force to set about the work of finding us the best way forward as we have grown out of some of our space, while other parts of our campus have become worn out.

A few weeks ago, there was a congregational forum, and our task force presented their findings to over a hundred church members.

The most compelling arguments about moving forward involved vision and legacy. We enjoy what we have now because of the vision of those who went before us, leaving us in a beautiful sanctuary, and the smaller Plumer Hall before that. What is our vision for the chapter that is next?

You will read more about what happened further on in this issue, but it was so clear that we are poised to move into some real forward motion. During that week and right up to the congregational meeting on the 24th, checks began coming in accompanied by some very positive remarks about both the work that the Building Task Force accomplished, and the outlook for the future.

Each member was given a colored index card with which to vote. I don't think anyone was prepared for the sea of colored paper in the air that afternoon as you voted, without a single “nay.” And, when the meeting was over, quite a few of you came forward and made sure that we had the funds we needed.

Again, there are great gifts present in this congregation. We are blessed by good congregational leadership, confidence in our future, and a sense of joy that goes beyond the season we are now entering. I remain your greatest cheerleader—and you are, each of you, great gifts to our family.

And yes, the season is upon us. Our Ministry for Young People team put on their first Advent workshop, and it was a great success, from craft-making to singing to the highly competitive Chili Cook-Off.

The choir concert is always a highlight of the season, and I hope to see you there on the 8th at 7:00 p.m. The following Sunday brings Ebenezer Scrooge and thirty other characters, played by my own favorite character, Carl Whidden. Some of our youth will be taking the sermon time that day for a special piece they have prepared. All the while, the young people will be practicing for the Christmas Pageant, which means…Christmas Eve will be here very soon. Watching the light being passed candle by candle through the sanctuary to John’s choral arrangement that leads into Silent Night is one of my favorite and most memorable moments of each year. I hope to see you there in the glow of the candles surrounding the Christ candle—those of hope, peace, joy and love.

See You in Church—

Pastor Paul
On Sunday, Nov. 24, the Sanctuary was ablaze with color as those in attendance enthusiastically cast their votes with brightly colored index cards. In a unanimous vote held at a Special Congregational Meeting, the development of a Master Plan for the IUCC campus was approved as the first step toward a capital campaign in the next couple of years.

Developing a Master Plan and securing approval from the City of Irvine via a Modified Conditional Use Permit will allow IUCC to move forward with staged phases of building. The first stage may include a new administrative building with church offices that include privacy for our pastor, a more welcoming atmosphere, and meeting rooms; remodeling the Early Childhood Center and play yard; creating improved patio space and kitchen facilities; and better identification signage.

At the meeting, congregation members heard presentations by members of the Building Task Force, including Jim Raver who offered a comprehensive outline of what will be involved in developing this plan. Jim also shared the best metaphor of the day, suggesting that doing a Master Plan without moving forward to the capital campaign/construction stage would be like buying a vacation motor home but never filling it with gas. Cindy O’Dell recounted the history of prior building project discussions while Lindy Garber shared details about the aging conditions around our facility. Treasurer Mark Allen reviewed the financial implications. Keith Boyum offered a compelling argument for how important it is that we honor the legacy entrusted to us by IUCC’s founders.

The Building Task Force will work collaboratively with domusstudios architecture, a well-respected firm based in San Diego with considerable experience in both church and school projects. Read more about them at http://domusstudio.com

The Building Task Force members include: Martha Selby (chair), Mark Allen, Keith Boyum, Lindy Garber, Cindy O’Dell, Anne Rosse, Michael Spindle and Paul Tellström. Laura Long will join the group to provide essential input on issues related to the Early Childhood Center.

Phase I, which includes the development of the Master Plan and submission of a Modified Conditional Use Permit to the City of Irvine, will cost approximately $150,000. Many folks stepped up to meet the fundraising goal of $75,000 to ensure that no new debt will be incurred during this phase. We are pleased to share that the goal was not only met but exceeded! Our gratitude and appreciation to all of these ‘early investors’ whose support is enabling this next step in shaping IUCC’s future.

A progress report will be provided at the January 19, 2014 Congregational Meeting and be sure to check the IUCC website for regular updates as well. The Building Task Force hopes to be able to present the Master Plan, along with renderings and drawings, in May 2014.

What exciting times at IUCC!

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Jessie Billings
Austin Brazille
Bill Dietrich
Taelor Exelby
Andrew Figueroa
Paul Figueroa
Alaina Haynes
Anne Hoang
Sharon Holdt
Tommie Kozlov
Sean Larkin
Nat Rynn
Pat Sutcliff
Bob Terry
Todd Thompson
Marie Trout
Carol Welsch
Maggi Wiita
During the season of Advent, we are reminded to watch expectantly for the coming of Jesus Christ. In fact, the term “Advent” is derived from the Latin word adventus, meaning “coming.” The season calls on us to be awake to the very presence of Christ in the world. On Sundays during Advent, we celebrate the important themes of: hope, peace, love and joy. I would like to share some of the ways I see them embodied here at IUCC.

- **Hope**: One of the most loving gifts we can give each other is hope. It doesn't cost anything, you don't have to line up outside a big box store at 3 a.m. to buy it and, best of all, it can help bring a friend, family member or new acquaintance through tough times.

- **Peace**: As a Just Peace congregation, we believe that there can be no peace without justice and there can be no justice without peace.

- **Love**: We offer extravagant welcome and abundant hospitality to all, heeding Jesus’ call to love all of our neighbors as ourselves. We believe in the separation of church and hate. As we are reminded in 1 Corinthians 13:13, “now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

- **Joy**: For me, joy is what happens to us when we allow ourselves to recognize how good things really are. Or, to quote Dr. Seuss: “Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened.” Here at IUCC, we find joy in the shy smile of a child, choral voices raised in praise, and a warm handshake by our greeters, to name just a few.

All of these emotions filled my heart at our Special Congregation meeting on November 24. At the meeting, I witnessed congregational decision-making at its finest -- a thoughtful exchange of information, judicious consideration and a glorious leap of faith when a unanimous decision was reached to proceed with a Master Plan and a Modified Conditional Use Permit from the City of Irvine. My heart was full as I looked out at all those brightly colored cards that signaled a congregation coming together to share a vision for the future. It was a privilege and an honor to be part of that process, and I am tremendously excited to be on this building journey together.

During this holiday season, I extend the very warmest of wishes to you and yours. May your season be filled with hope, peace, love and joy. And, please know how very blessed we are to have you as part of the IUCC family. 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.
What a fantastic month! From the Advent Workshop to the All-Church Workday to our Thanksgiving Service at the Synagogue… Wow wow wow! The Ministry for Young People is active and growing, and I am excited about what is coming in Advent and then in the New Year! Here are some highlights and upcoming events:

Youth
The Youth Group made blankets this month for our local Catholic Worker house in Santa Ana. Though they cannot make it to the weekly volunteer shift, they wanted to contribute in some way. Thanks to the many generous donations from IUCC, they were able to make about 20 blankets. The youth are planning their advent reflection for December 15th, so make sure you join us in the 9:00 a.m. or 11:00 a.m. service.

Young Adults
The young adult group had the privilege to meet with Colleen McNamara and Felicity Figueroa about immigration and how it affects our lives as young people of faith. We continue to discuss new topics and get to know each other better. The young adults participated in the Advent Workshop, the Synagogue/Church Thanksgiving service, and the All-Church Workday. We continue to work on our group identity as well as how we fit into the wider church community.

Children and Young Families
The children have been working on preparing to sing in the 11:00 a.m. service on December 8th. They will be singing two songs - Dona Nobis Pacem and Angels We Have Heard On High. Big thanks to John St. Marie for teaching our young people how to sing. The children also participated in the Advent Workshop and made cards for shut-ins at the All-Church Workday.

Many thanks to the volunteers who made the Advent Workshop and All-Church Workday so successful. What great people we have at IUCC!

Immigration Sunday started out with a great sermon by guest preacher Dr. Jerry Stinson that highlighted the call to welcome “the alien in our land.” Following the service, we had a joint event by IUCC’s Mission & Service and Advocates for Peace & Justice Ministries showcasing a documentary entitled “The Wall that Binds Us” and a panel of Dreamers to discuss their experiences. Jessica Bravo gave a particularly poignant account of her efforts to convince legislators of the need for immigration reform. Tony Ortuno spoke about the special obstacles faced by LGBT immigrants in detention.

Attendees enjoyed lunch and were given an opportunity to learn about Friends of OC Detainees (FOCD), a program that organizes visits to immigrants in detention. Many detainees are held for a year or more, and some have no visitors except for volunteers with this program. This humanitarian effort helps to ease their isolation and show them that someone on the outside cares. To learn more about FOCD, contact Tricia Aynes at: tricia_aynes@yahoo.com.
Mark your calendar now for our December & January events!

**WOMEN’S FELLOWSHIP**
**WEDNESDAY * DEC. 4 * 7 p.m.**
Come to an old fashioned New England Christmas Celebration, including dinner and a carol sing-along with Larry Gates. See Pat Souter with any questions.

**WINTER SOLSTICE CONCERT**
**SUNDAY * DEC. 8 * 7 p.m.**
Our Chancel Choir presents its Winter Solstice Concert on December 8th. Tickets are $10, with proceeds going to IUCC’s general fund. Purchase tickets on the patio after second service.

**SANDY HOOK MEMORIAL BELL CEREMONY**
**SATURDAY * DECEMBER 14 * 9:15 a.m.* SANCTUARY LAWN
We will not forget Newtown. Pastor Paul will speak at this brief event. Other clergy of various faiths will share their remarks before the reading of the victims’ names and a bell-ringing ceremony at 9:35 a.m., marking the time of the attack. You will be invited to hang paper bells in honor of the victims, in a symbolic pledge to recommit to the cause. Learn more: www.facebook.com/MomsDemandActionCA/events.

**A CHRISTMAS CAROL**
**SUNDAY * DEC. 15 * 7 p.m.**
Charles Dickens’ masterpiece “A Christmas Carol” is one of the world’s most beloved Christmas stories, combining comedy and heartbreak to tell the tale of penny-pinching Ebenezer Scrooge. Join us at IUCC on Sunday, December 15, at 7 p.m. as Scrooge, Bob Cratchit, Tiny Tim, the Christmas Spirits, and all the rest of the characters are brought to life by our own Carl Whidden! Carl has adapted the story into a one-man, two-act production in which he performs all 30 characters. Get tickets on the patio after services.

**CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES**
**TUESDAY * DEC. 24 * Family Service 5:30 p.m. Candlelight Service 9:00 p.m.**
Join us for a meaningful service to celebrate the season.

**2014 BUDGET FORUM**
**SUNDAY * JANUARY 12 * 12:30 P.M.**
A discussion of the 2014 budget prior to the Congregational Meeting.

**MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR THE REV. ERNIE FOWLER**
**SATURDAY *DECEMBER 14 * 2:00 p.m. * SANCTUARY**
A service honoring the life of the Rev. Ernie Fowler, will be held here at IUCC on Saturday, December 14th at 2 p.m. Ernie died on Monday, November 11th. He would have been 101 years old on January 22nd.

Condolences may be sent to:
The Fowler Family - c/o Phillis Graham
1411 Calle Christopher Encinitas CA 92024

**WINTER CONGREGATIONAL MTG.**
**SUNDAY * JANUARY 19 * 12:30 P.M.**
This meeting will feature the presentation of the 2014 church budget for the congregation's vote, and there will be a report from the Building Task Force. All voting members are requested to attend.
One of the greatest memories of my youth was earning the rank of Eagle Scout on October 27th, 1986. It is the highest honor that is bestowed on 4% of all youth who join the Boy Scouts. The honor of earning the Eagle Scout rank is the cumulative result of seven years of experiences and lessons that I learned as a young Boy Scout. Overnight camp outs, earning merit badges at summer camp, learning how to tie knots, participating in service projects, building pioneering structures and participating at the 1985 National Scout Jamboree are among some of the experiences that were the result of my participation in the Boy Scouts.

When the National Executive Board of the Boy Scouts of America was discussing repealing the ban on gay youth members and adult leaders in February, I spoke with Pastor Paul about this issue and the possibility of Irvine UCC sponsoring a Boy Scout unit should the Boy Scouts decide to open their ranks to all. On May 23, 2013, the National Council of the Boy Scouts of America approved a resolution repealing the ban on gay youth members. Although the new membership policy is only a half step for the Boy Scouts becoming a fully inclusive organization, the Administrative Board of Irvine UCC agreed that this is a step in the right direction and approved the proposal to sponsor a Boy Scout unit.

There are three programs that are part of the Boy Scout program:

- Cub Scouts (boys 6-10 years old)
- Boy Scouts (boys 11-17 years old)
- Venturing (co-ed 14-20 years old)

Just like our sponsoring organization, Irvine UCC, all of our units are Open and Affirming and all youth and adult volunteers are welcome to participate. You do not have to be a member of Irvine UCC to participate. If you want more information about joining a Scout unit at Irvine UCC, please email me at irvineeaglescout1987@gmail.com.

Thank you for your support. I am looking forward to this new venture of creating exciting and challenging Boy Scout programs and experiences for our youth and families.

Sincerely,

Matt Mirmak
Eagle Scout (1987)
Chartered Organization Representative

Our most recent activity was the Advent Workshop on December 1, where we had a table for kids to make holiday themed neckerchief slides and lanyards while providing information about our Scout units.
New Members
November 17, 2013

Alvaro Galvis and Iris Pecson
Iris was born in Manila and raised in San Francisco. From a born-again family, she appreciates God's humor in bringing her from a conservative religious background in San Francisco to a progressive church in Orange County. She values education, having been the only one in her family to graduate from college and pursue graduate school. She is a former high school Biology teacher for LAUSD and a huge sports fan. Iris would like us all to keep the people of the Philippines in our prayers.

Iris is joining with her fiancé, Alvaro, also a sports fan. Alvaro attended IUCC with Iris for several years. He is both an MD and a PhD candidate at the UCI School of Medicine, in the Medical Scientist Training Program and a leader in the Program in Medical Education for the Latino Community. He is Colombian, having lived in Bogota as a child, but his family was forced to flee the political turmoil, and he grew up in Daly City. In the future, he hopes to provide equitable healthcare and conduct clinical research in areas that target undeserved populations.

Nancy Harris and Nancy Parker
Newly married on July 18, Nancy Harris and Nancy Parker have moved down to Laguna Woods from Long Beach, where they were members of the First Congregational Church of Long Beach. Nancy Harris was raised there, and her career was in education. Nancy Parker was born in New Jersey, but raised in the Pasadena area. Her background was Catholic and Baptist. She is a realtor, but now both Nancy’s enjoy golf, RV-ing and travel.

Teri Houston and Katherine Inouye
Teri Houston is a returning member, having joined IUCC many years ago. She grew up all around the country, as her father’s work for Hughes Aircraft caused them to move around. Teri is an Investigator in the Department of Fair Employment and Housing. She has one son, Eric.

Teri is here with her partner, Katherine. Katherine was born in Colorado, but raised in East Los Angeles in the Catholic tradition. She has one daughter, Kodi, who takes part in our Sunday school, as does Eric.

Sara McComb
Sara grew up here at IUCC, and was a member of our last Confirmation class. She was confirmed here just a few weeks ago, and is now joining as a member. Sara attends with her family: Laurie, Mitchell, Brian and Kerin.

Aidan Mitchell
Aidan came here as a friend of Taelor Exelby, and quickly made this her home church. Aidan was also a part of our last Confirmation class and was recently confirmed as well. She is looking down the road at college and studying Psychology. She and Sara are active in our youth group.
Questions & Answers About Serving as a Stephen Minister

by David Schofield

Question: How much of my time will it really involve?
There are 50 hours of training scheduled as needed – usually once a year. As a Stephen Minster you will visit about once a week (for about one hour) with the person you are caring for. You will also attend one meeting per month for supervision and continuing education.

Question: Will I have to spend money on the person I am caring for?
No, you are not expected to spend any money whatsoever on the Stephen Partner. You are also not expected to personally provide any other specific services for a Stephen Partner, such as transportation or baby-sitting, for example.

Question: Will my phone be ringing constantly?
No. You will care for one Stephen Partner at a time. If the Stephen Partner were to begin calling too often, you will learn to respond to too many phone calls or excessive demands in a loving, assertive manner. It probably won’t arise, though.

Question: Will our pastor still help and counsel people?
Most definitely! Stephen Ministers complement the pastors’ ministry and provide even more care to those who need it.

Question: What if I get in over my head, with people who need more than I can provide?
First of all, you will never be knowingly assigned to people who might be in those situations. The Stephen Ministry training also helps you to know exactly when and how to help your Stephen Partner get professional help when necessary. The Supervision Group, the Stephen Leader, and the pastors are also there to help you make such decisions.

Question: How will I personally benefit from this experience?
You will learn many skills that will be valuable in your personal life as well as in your Stephen Ministry. Also, the satisfaction of helping another person is a wonderful blessing.

Question: Do I have to stop being a Stephen Minister after two years?
No, many people decide to continue as Stephen Ministers after two years. You and your Stephen Leader will make that decision when the time comes.

Question: Who will be the Stephen Partners (Care Receivers)?
Members of this congregation who are experiencing times of special need and other people within our community who may turn to us for help. Thus, Stephen Ministry is also a way to reach out to others as well as to our own members.

Question: Will the Stephen Partner really want my care?
Yes. The referral coordinator will meet first with the Stephen Partner. Only after the Stephen Partner understands Stephen Ministry and has agreed to meet with a Stephen Minister will you be contacted.

Question: Are other people as scared as I seem to be about this undertaking?
Probably so! But the training will eliminate much of this fear because you will not only learn what to say but also, and more importantly, how to listen.

Question: How do I apply?
Fill out the application form that is available from the Chair of the IUCC Stephen Ministry. You will then have an opportunity to meet with Stephen Leaders to ask any questions and make your final decision.

To learn more, contact Dave Schofield, Chair of the IUCC Stephen Ministry, at (949) 300-1216.
Creeds
What is a creed? A creed is a statement of the shared beliefs of a religious community. Creeds are not intended to be comprehensive, but to be a summary of core beliefs. Synonyms would be: faith, conviction, credo or dogma.

The purpose of a creed is to act as a kind of “plumb line” or “yardstick” of correct belief, or orthodoxy. A creed has usually come into being as the result of a theological conflict. Therefore, to accept or reject the established creed puts you “in” or “out” of orthodox belief.

UCC Stance on Creeds
IUCC is a non-creedal church. As a “priesthood of all believers” whose separatist ancestors rebelled against a religious tradition that enforced religious orthodoxy both by doctrine and ecclesiastical hierarchy, the Congregationalist side of the UCC does not endorse the reciting of a creed. However, the Evangelical and Reformed contingent of the UCC embraces the idea. Therefore, a “Statement of Belief” was written for churches to use, at their own discretion. Every Sunday, this statement is recited in unison in many of our churches. Adapted by Robert Moss, the words are as follows:

We believe in God, the Eternal Spirit, who is made known to us in Jesus our brother, and to whose deeds we testify: God calls the worlds into being, creates humankind in the divine image, and sets before us the ways of life and death. God seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin. God judges all humanity and all nations by that will of righteousness declared through prophets and apostles. In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord, God has come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the whole creation to its Creator. God bestows upon us the Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races. God calls us into the church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be servants in the service of the whole human family, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ’s baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory. God promises to all who trust in the gospel forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, the presence of the Holy Spirit in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in that kingdom which has no end. Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto God. Amen.

Do these words help or hinder your own understanding of Christian faith?

Nicene Creed: Background to the Most Famous Creed
There was a conflict that started when a Libyan church leader named Arias declared that while Jesus was divine, he had been created by God, and was therefore not “co-essential” with God, which made him less in stature than God. This was called, “The Arian Heresy.” So, in 325 CE, a council was called in Nicea, and a creed, which we know today as the “Nicene” was crafted, and it remains the creed that defines “normative” Christianity today. Look for the phrase, “begotten not made,” as it addresses the “heresy.” Here are the words some of us grew up reciting in church:

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

—Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer (1979)

Can you recite the Nicene Creed from memory?

In his book, Speaking Christian, Marcus Borg states: The creed begins with ‘I believe’ or ‘we believe.’ For modern
Christians who have problems with the creed, the issue is the common contemporary meaning of the word believe. The modern meaning of the word is affirming statements to be true, most often statements that are not transparently credible. Also, the premodern Christian meaning of believe is to 'belove,' to give one's love, allegiance, and commitment not to a set of statements, but to somebody. 'I believe' means 'I give my heart to.'

So according to Borg, to believe does not mean you have to throw your brain out the window. To believe more rightly means to belove. In a conversation with Dr. Borg, our own Joan Thompson asked him about saying the creed in his Episcopal church, and he told her something much like the above quote from his book. He says the words, not believing them literally, but as part of the liturgy of the “beloved” community, where their meaning is in the feeling that is evoked by participating with others in this Christian ritual.

Discussion questions may include:

1. IUCC is a non-creedal church. Take some time to talk about the importance of professing a creed such as the Nicene or Apostle's Creed in your life. Is it a “missing piece” in worship? Why? Did you know that they are printed in the back of your hymnals in case you want to read them?
2. How do you respond to the UCC Statement of Belief? Do these words help or hinder your own understanding of Christian faith?
3. Following up on Marcus Borg’s comments, is it important to you to be part of the liturgy of the “beloved” community, where the meaning is in the feeling that is evoked by participating with others in Christian ritual? For example, at IUCC, we recite the Lord's Prayer together. What feelings are evoked for you? Is this an important part of worship for you or not?
4. Is there a creed you could say in agreement out loud in your own Comma Group? What would the words be to such a creed?

Discuss these and other questions at your December Comma Group meeting!

ATTENTION: 7 DAY REGISTER SUBSCRIBERS!!

In your Dec. 3rd Register, you should have received a gold envelope with a $50 gift check you can designate to your favorite charity (we hope that's IUCC!). Filling out the info and returning the check to them costs you nothing, but helps us underwrite our advertising expenses with the paper (thus freeing up funds for our other programs). Thank you!

New Website Launch

Have you checked out the new IUCC website? Click to iucc.org to explore the new and improved site. Here, you’ll find two portals -- one that offers an intentional welcome to visitors, extending our warm IUCC hospitality to those seeking a church home, and a second portal for current members and returning visitors. There's lots of new content and photos to enjoy as well.

Many thanks to the incredibly talented Matthew Redman for leading the relaunch and Chris Goodrich for lending his considerable expertise to the project. And a very special THANK YOU goes out to Anne Rosse for her dedication and many, many hours of work on this project!

New IUCC Logo

Have you seen our beautiful new logo? It's a clean and crisp design, just right for our progressive and forward-thinking congregation. We'll be using it on our website, newsletter and other promotional materials.
A visit to the Discovery channel (which, by the way, should be on a different channel every night, don’t you think?) will reveal one of nature’s great gifts to us all: a world filled with difference!

Not only are there different species, almost too many to count, but even wide variances within each species. Any study of nature will quickly reveal that God the Creator has no problems with difference. In our current series we have been talking about the diversity of sexualities within various species, including our own human species. Last month we clarified that “deviant” and “abnormal” have no moral meanings, but only point to a spectrum of difference inherent within nature. When we say that someone is “average” looking, we are only saying that someone is not extraordinarily beautiful or handsome, or unfortunately unattractive. But along the spectrum of appearance there is wide diversity of appearance. Being of “average intelligence” is the same: some have unusually low I.Q.’s and others are exceptionally bright: most of us are average, or normal. Why some people are so surprised and even disturbed that there is a similarly wide spectrum of sexual attractiveness can be a little puzzling. In fact, different people than us find people we would not even consider as an affectionate or sexual partner very appealing.

For the next few columns we will give close attention to each of the categories of attraction contained in the letters “LGBTQ” so that we have a clear understanding of what each of these “labels” imply. This is especially important for parents, as kids will often hear only loosely constructed labels thrown around, often to disparage themselves or someone else. Young children often throw words like “queer,” “faggot” or “gay” around knowing only that there is some negative connotation to them, but not knowing what they are actually saying. This is a problem for at least three reasons. One, if they don’t know what they are saying they may cause hurt to another person without taking responsibility for the harm caused by their words. Also, if someone uses a derogatory term toward them, it may be meant to cause intentional harm. In this case, the child or young person should know what they are being called, and whether it “fits.” If it doesn’t fit, we can help them learn how to respond to such name-calling and to remind them that being called something doesn’t make you something. Thirdly, sometimes the label may be accurate. In this case, we will want to help children develop assertive and self-confident responses to avoid feeling degraded and negative about themselves.

The use of labels related to sexuality is especially complicated because there are no outward signs that give “proof” of one’s sexuality. For example, a white skinned child would never be called the “N-word” because clearly it doesn’t fit. Someone who doesn’t wear glasses would not be called “four eyes” and a tall kid would never be called “shorty.” But how one feels is only known internally, so it makes all of us fair game for being mislabeled and potentially mistreated, or being labeled accurately and being mistreated. It is the job or parents to “arm” their children with confident responses to any labels directed at them which will take the power away from anyone trying to use negative labels to hurt them. We also want to remind children that “labels” in and of themselves are no positive or negative. The label “applesauce” on a jar of applesauce is not good or bad, but a description of what is inside of the label. In the same way, calling someone by a description should not be negative, unless someone has decided that being “applesauce” is bad. Unhappily, because not enough people enjoy the wonderful diversity of nature, and difference often causes anxiety in people, some labels, even when they are not “name-calling,” are experienced as negative.

On the continuum of sexuality, some people are called “straight” or “heterosexual,” which means that they have affectionate or sexual feelings for people of the “other” sex. Some people are referred to as “lesbian,” which means which that they are a girl or a woman who has affectionate or sexual feelings for other girls or women. Some people are called “gay,” which currently means either a man who has affectionate or sexual feelings for another man, or either a man or a woman who has same sex attraction – similar to the way the word “human” or “person” refers to both men and women. The term “homo” is short for homosexual and is always meant as a put-down of someone with same sex attraction. Someone who is “bisexual” or “ambi-sexual” has affectionate or sexual feelings for both people of their same sex and people of the other sex.

The words lesbian, gay, or bisexual refer to how people feel about other people. The word “transgender” refers to feelings a boy/man or girl/woman has about themselves, as far as whether they feel inside like the sex nature has assigned them. And “questioning” people are those who, for whatever reasons, aren’t sure about themselves. In the months ahead we will consider the specific issues and challenges encountered by each of these groups of people. For now, we’ll just take a moment to give thanks for the gift of diversity, and how much more interesting it makes the world and our lives. Joy to the World. All of the world. And to all those in the world!