Advent is upon us! The sanctuary will be dressed for the season when you come to church, beginning December 2. The Rev. Ernie Fowler will be “The Voice of Isaiah” all throughout Advent and Christmas Eve ... just a month or so short of his 100th birthday. Two favorite events, the Advent Workshop and the Winter Solstice Concert, will both occur on December 9. Don’t miss them! Bring the kids to the concert after the workshop, as child-care will be provided.

I hope you enjoyed our 24th annual Church-Synagogue Thanksgiving Service. Father Boyle was an inspiration. His book, Tattoos on the Heart, was given to our Confirmation class along with a Bible, and the Young Adult Group has been reading it. There are four signed copies on our book cart if you would like to pick up some good reading for yourself or as a Christmas present.

**Important:** If you, or someone you know, wishes to receive this News & Notes but cannot access the Internet, please do either of the following: [a] let the church office know at (949) 733-0220, and we can mail a printed copy; or [b] just pick up a printed copy in the narthex on a Sunday morning.
Pastor Elizabeth and I have been working with a team at the church on something serious that I would like to share with you.

Here is why the topic of “abuse” became important to me at an early age.

It was 1964, and I was packed off to camp in upstate New York. I learned archery, rifle marksmanship, horseback riding, boating, hiking and crafts. I can still make boondoggle key chains and wristbands, if anyone wants to commission me.

At night, we watched old, bad sci-fi films in the lodge—my favorite kind. Zsa Zsa Gabor was the “Queen of Outer Space.” Larry Crabbe played both Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon, and they used the same cheesy rocket ships and costumes for both series.

I lived in Mohawk Cabin with my bunkmate, Jon, and I can’t remember how many other bunks, all occupied by boys, filled out the cabin along with our requisite footlockers. I had the top bunk and Jon took the bottom. We became best friends.

I remember feeling very protective of him, and it turned out there was a reason. Jon was being abused by our counselor. He told me what was happening, and made me promise not to tell or “he would get into trouble.” It went on the entire time we were at camp.

I am fortunate to have never been a victim of abuse. But as a friend of a boy who was being repeatedly molested, I still think about it from time to time. “Why couldn’t I have gone to the main office and told? It would have stopped it.” But, a nine year old does not think of challenging authority, and takes seriously a promise made not to tell.

Why am I writing about this? In the wake of the scandals in the Catholic church and the growing awareness that people in all stages of their lives are experiencing many kinds of abuse, I suggest that it is time for our church to adopt a “Safe Church Policy,” so that a policy and a plan are in place IF something were to occur.

We say in worship, “This is a safe place.” That is a rather idealistic statement unless we can back it up with a plan that is pro-active, rather than finding ourselves being reactive if and when an incident occurred. There is no reason I
know of to believe that such a thing will ever happen, but since it has occurred in other churches, it is sensible to believe that we should examine the issue and have a policy.

Church of the Foothills and IUCC have teamed up to learn about creating a Safe Church Policy from Dr. Jaime Romo, himself a victim of childhood sexual abuse. Dr. Romo has spent his adult life working to help churches and institutions learn how to protect themselves and their people from both predators and well-meaning people with sloppy boundaries who don’t understand why their familiarity with others can feel uncomfortable.

We don’t know how many people in our midst have been abused in some hurtful way at some time in their lives. In order to make ours a “safe sanctuary,” we need to be intentional in raising our consciousness on this issue. Dr. Romo calls the program, “Safeguarding God’s Children.” I would like to rename it, “Safeguarding God’s People,” as folks of all ages have either felt uncomfortable by crossed boundaries or even traumatized by out and out abuse.

Our team is: Stephanie Sanders, Laura Long, Erika Sanders, Martha Selby, Pastor Elizabeth and myself. In our future meetings together and with Dr. Romo and the Church of the Foothills team, we hope to draft a policy to be voted on at our Spring Meeting. The process will include having a “Response Team” made up of people to whom incidents can be reported and discussed for further action, and an education component, whereby the congregation receives training and education at special forums.

In addition, we are in the early stages of considering an optional sex-ed course for youth called, OWL, or Our Whole Lives. This is a curriculum that was developed by the Unitarians and the United Church of Christ. From the curriculum description on our UCC website:

“Our Whole Lives, helps participants make informed and responsible decisions about their relationships, health and behavior in the context of their faith. It equips participants with accurate, age-appropriate information.”

We applied for and received a grant for Safe-Church training from our Conference for $1,000, so this important training is free, thanks to the largesse of our Conference Executive Board of the UCC and their commitment to having our churches be truly safe places.
If you have questions or comments, please direct them to us—the team listed above.

Now, back to our preparations for a season of peace, hope, joy and love. See you in church!

Yours,
Pastor Paul

Adult Education:
Upcoming Opportunities

Tuesday evening Bible Study meets at 6:30 p.m. in Plumer Hall. We are looking at "Christmas By The Book" in December, studying what the Bible actually says about the birth of Jesus. It doesn’t roll out smoothly as a pageant, but when you know the background, the pageant becomes more meaningful. Bibles are provided, but please bring your own opinions and ideas. The discussions enlighten everyone.

Two events in January are worth mention, even in this December newsletter.

- **Food – Farming and Faith** kicks off in the second week of January. Three different five week classes will be available to take up important issues “at the end of your fork” - a Wednesday evening series that begins January 9th; a Thursday morning series that begins January 10th; and a Sunday morning series beginning January 13th. The Rev. George Johnson will be in the lead. See below a registration form that you may print out and return to the church office.

- **Bill Johnson** is the first openly gay minister ordained in the United States. He will be here on Sunday, January 27 for an afternoon presentation.
Registration Form

FOOD – FARMING AND FAITH
Important Issues at the End of Your Fork

January 9 – February 13, 2013
This five week adult class will be offered at IUCC at 3 different times.

_____ Wednesday evenings from 7-8:30 p.m., beginning Jan. 9th

_____ Thursday mornings from 10-11:30 a.m., beginning Jan. 10th

_____ Sunday mornings from 10:15-11:00 a.m., beginning Jan 13th

This adult learning opportunity will cover topics such as…

a. Why Just-Peace people care about food and farming
b. The ethics and politics of eating. Why our food choices matter.
c. Farming, farm workers and the earth we care about are all connected
d. Organic, local, fair trade, humanely raised, GMOs and eating out.
e. What can we do about the current crisis around food and farming?

Other issues you would like to see covered in this class______________

One of the texts we will use in the class is: The Ethics of What We Eat by Singer and Mason. Copies will be available for purchase. This class is open to members of other churches, or no church. Spread the word. Please sign up even if you indicated interest before. Thank You!

Name___________________________email?_____________________

George S Johnson georgesjohnson@gmail.com
New Book Coming!

**Courage to Think Differently**

An Interview with the author - IUCC’s own
Rev. George Johnson

Rev. George Johnson

So: George Johnson, you’ve established yourself at IUCC as one who offers classes, occasionally preaches, has helped to lead mission trips, and generally shows a heart for the Gospel. Thank you for all of your contributions! And now we hear you have another contribution: a book.

To start, please give us "just the facts": what is the title, who is the publisher, when will it be available, at what price?

The book is called: **Courage to Think Differently**. I am self publishing it to give me more control of content, and have received some financial help with permission fees in order to keep the price low. The cost is $9.95 and it will be available by mid-December at Adventure Publications, Box 269, Cambridge, MN 55008, and also, hopefully, at Amazon.com.

What's it about? And, what was your inspiration to author and to edit the various chapters and contributions?

Since my involvement in social justice issues I have sensed a need to encourage people to think differently. In fact, many people are thinking differently these days. My former book, Beyond Guilt, seemed to open the door to take the next step in addressing the need for a new mindset in finding answers to the political, economic and theological issues we all face. I suppose it was reading other sources that guided and connected things for me.

Books are no small undertaking. How long did you work on this one?

I am editing the book that includes five chapters that I have authored. Vivian will tell you that I have thought about writing this for at least three years, maybe more. But the actual gathering and writing began soon after we moved to Laguna Woods two plus years ago. Vivian will also tell you that she will be glad to see more than the back of my head glued to the computer screen in coming months.
Tell us something about the various chapters. Take two or three of them, perhaps, and tell us why you think what the authors have to say is important.

The first chapter deals with the culture of irrelevant religion and why so much of religious piety and practice is not making a difference in the world. So I deal with the need to examine our theology and let go of some of the idols we worship without knowing it. Another chapter deals with Biblical certitudes and ignorance of the essence of the Bible. Some people have heard religious concepts so much that they now think it is what God says and what God wills. One powerful chapter deals with the culture of silence that paralyzes many well meaning citizens. The prophet Jeremiah could not preach on some subjects in Jerusalem. In this chapter Walter Brueggemann lists some of the things preachers cannot say from the pulpit. Silence is one of the modern deadly sins.

Who do you think is your key audience? What type of readers would especially enjoy or especially benefit from the book?

My audience for this book includes those who are beginning to think differently on some issues and need encouragement. It is for those who are open to listen to other perspectives. I hope it will be useful to classes, small groups and even universities and seminaries where people are raising questions about God and the real world. Discussion questions are included in some chapters.

Do you plan to do anything further with the book? Might you offer a class (or more than one) based on the book’s themes, for example? Or would you design some sermons on the basis of the chapters?

I am very open to accepting invitations to talk about the ideas in the book, whether it might be a class, a sermon, an article or a blog. In fact, I am thinking about writing to clergy in this area and offering to preach one Sunday free if I can have a book signing table after the service. I plan to get a web site up and running soon. If any of you have ideas on marketing the book please let me know.

What’s next for you? After this book, will there be more? Or articles, perhaps? Would your next work and compilations be on these or similar themes, or different ones?

Not sure what my next step will be. If my health holds up and I have the energy I will continue to read, write, speak and advocate for the poor and those who have no voice. I have appreciated so much the opportunities that Irvine United Congregational Church has given to me. My passion is social justice and the Gospel. That will continue. I am also interested in experiential learning so I will likely push for more face to face encounters with people who are hurting and oppressed.
Anything else? What would you like to say as we close this interview and discussion about your book?

I wonder if people in South Orange County know how fortunate they are to have a church like IUCC. Vivian and I have been Lutherans all our lives and are so glad we found this church. I think Luther, Calvin and Zwingli would have been delighted to discover this church….maybe even Dwight L. Moody and Billy Graham.

Who cares? We found it and we say thank you to everyone. That includes you Keith.

Editor’s Note: George Johnson is an ordained minister of The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Read a review of Courage to Think Differently HERE authored by the Rev. Dr. Jennifer Phillips, vicar of St. Augustine’s Episcopal Church in Kingston, Rhode Island.
Happy Holidays Everyone! There will be opportunities for youth to celebrate together this holiday season at both the advent workshop on December 9th and at the all youth Christmas party on December 16th. If you missed Youth Sunday in October, you have another opportunity to see and hear from our wonderful youth! On December 16, they will help lead the 11 o’clock service. After all the excitement of December, youth activities will quiet down some for the month of January. I will be traveling around India (and visiting Sarah Fiske-Phillips!) for several weeks from late December through late January, but I am hoping that there will be opportunities for youth fellowship while I am gone. In the next few weeks, be on the look-out for updates about youth programming for the month of January.

Some important youth dates for December:

December 2nd: We had a youth group lunch!

December 9th: Youth are invited to join the congregation at the advent workshop and chili cook-off from 4-7pm.

December 16th: The youth group will help lead the 11 o’clock service.

• 4 - 6th graders are invited to join the youth group after church for an all youth Christmas Party.

→ Save the date for FEB CAMP: Feb. 15-17!

Peace,

Erika
In October, 2012 my wife, Anne and I spent 3 glorious weeks seeing much of Peru. We loved the culture, the people, the history and all of the diversified places we visited. We started in Lima, then the Amazon jungle, up to Cusco, down to the Sacred Valley, further down to Machu Picchu where I spent my 80th birthday climbing the unbelievable ruins. We then journeyed up to 14,500 feet, the Puno area and Lake Titicaca (a favorite word for boys and old men) living in the homes of locals. Then back to Lima for one of the highlights of our trip…a visit to ALAS.

As the chair person for Global Mission at the Irvine United Congregational Church, before we left, I called the headquarters for the UCC Global Mission and asked if there were any projects in Peru. The Rev. Elizabeth Carrasquillo (Latin American and Caribbean GM Office) said that there was one in Lima called, Asociacion de Ayuda Legal Y Accion Social. She explained that they provide legal services and support services for individuals, regardless of their personal ideology or action, who are currently or were formerly incarcerated for political crimes during Peru’s civil war. Some 22,000 had been detained and accused of political crimes from that war which lasted from 1980 until 2000. Elizabeth also shared that ALAS has a taxi service as well as a restaurant run by the former prisoners to help the men start life anew.

This project sounded most interesting to us because we volunteer as tutors in the County jail working with inmates on a weekly basis to help them pass their high
school equivalency exam. We get to know these men and women fairly well (our secondary task is being a "social worker") and are able to hear about the frustrations of being incarcerated, then being released from the jail, often with the "felon" label but with no money, no job, no strong (if any) support system, minimal education and a very small chance of making it. So many want to leave their past life behind and move on to a brighter future but there seem to be so many obstacles. Too often, with all these challenges, they end up back into the system, sort of like a revolving door. There has to be a better way. Could the "ALAS" approach be part of an answer?

For years, our good neighbors down the street in Dana Point, were Larry and Sandy Hutchins. We were so delighted in 2008 when Sandy decided to run for "Sheriff" and even more delighted when, against some very difficult odds, she was appointed, then elected, Sheriff of Orange County. She has done an excellent job of turning around a badly tarnished Sheriff's Department. A few months ago, we saw her at a fund raiser, told her about our forthcoming trip and promised to share our findings about ALAS. She was most interested because she knows very well that meaningful incarceration includes meaningful rehabilitation. Thus, this report will be shared with her.

On with the story.

Before we left California we tried to make contact with ALAS but to no avail. However, as soon as we arrived in Lima we did make contact with Anibal Sanchez, their project director and attorney.

He said he would pick us up at our hotel in Lima, in one of his group's taxis and take us to the project's restaurant in downtown Lima. Gabriel, the taxi owner/driver and Anibal arrived at noon and we drove to their restaurant, "El Ultimo Refugio: Especialidad, Pescado, Mariscos y Comida Criolla."

Here we were met by "Jaime", the administrator of the restaurant, a very friendly man who was as much a social worker as the boss. Jaime explained what happened: once Anibal had helped a prisoner be released, that person could go to "Refugio", have a place to stay, be given clothes, money and could find a job either as a taxi driver, cook or server. All the men we met there had been in prison for political reasons, some for as long as 20 + years. Anibal had served 12 years. When he came out he completed law school and then started ALAS. Gabriel had been in prison for 17 years and when he was released ALAS helped him buy his taxi which he shares with another former inmate, each doing 12 hours shifts daily.
Once we had finished our delicious lunch, we drove Anibal to his office and then Gabrielle took us to the Musee Nacion, a beautiful new facility where we hired a guide to lead us through the many floors of the cultural history of Peru. Once that was finished, we ended up on the top floor where we viewed an exhibition of photographs depicting the terrorism that prevailed in Peru in the 1980s and 90s. We saw the atrocities of a group known as “Shining Path” and the equally oppressive regime of President Fujimori. This was quite accidental but we witnessed through photography the very conditions that had put our friends from ALAS into prison. Rather ironical! We heard the men’s stories at lunch and then saw why they ended up in prison 3 hours later. That era in Peru’s history was not nice!

Anne and I were really impressed and still are with ALAS. Let me share the words of one former prisoner being helped by them: “I was imprisoned for 15 years. I survived prison with the support of my colleagues who were with me and together we have overcome the most difficult moments. After a year of freedom I thank ALAS because, thanks to their help, I found it easier to rebuild my life and face the adversities of the world again. Today, I have a business that I manage with my partner. Definitely, if we had not counted on that first support, we would still be ‘kicking cans’ as we say here in Peru.”

We are home, back to the comforts of living in Irvine, but we intend to support ALAS with prayers, praise and finances. Want to help? There are a series of things you can do:

- Make Global Mission a part of your daily life by delving into the internet and reading about the myriads of projects they support.
- For Christmas, sponsor a child through Global Mission. It’s the gift that keeps on giving! See me for an application.
- Give generously to the many projects sponsored by IUCC which support “the least of these my brothers and sisters.”
- Attend the many opportunities IUCC is offering to meet missionaries and hear their stories of supporting “the least of these...”.
- Join Anne and me is sending a monthly check to ALAS to support their great work.
• Before you go on a trip, contact Global Mission and find out what projects they might be sponsoring in the area where you are traveling. Then go visit that project during your travels. It could change your life.

• Ask Anne or me about our quiet ministry to those incarcerated locally. It’s a wonderful opportunity to give ourselves away and receive more in return that we ever thought possible. They always need new tutors, if you are willing to go through the process of becoming “certified.”

• Never stop counting your blessings.

• Help keep IUCC on the cutting edge of responding to social issues by being involved.

• In May of 2013, vote for IUCC to become a full pledged caring, sharing, giving Global Mission congregation.

Peace Love Joy
Bil Aulenbach
Chair, IUCC Global Mission

GLOBAL MISSION OPPORTUNITY: Challenge & Hope in the Holy Land Jan. 2-12, 2013 sponsored by Global Mission Partners to provide an opportunity to see Israel-Palestine and to gain an understanding of the challenges to “Just Peace” in the Holy Land, as well as to visit a number of Holy sites. IUCC’s Don and Connie Weir have been: “It will change your life.” More information? Talk to Pastor Paul, Bil Aulenbach or Don & Connie.
Preschool celebrates season in song and dance

The children of IUCC’s Early Childhood Center are working hard to polish their annual Christmas program to be presented to family and friends at 5 p.m. Friday, December 14, in the church sanctuary. All three classrooms will sing familiar tunes of the season, and the preschool’s dance class will entertain with their rhythmic movements that are sure to delight. Anyone in the IUCC family is welcome to attend. A hearty thanks goes to Larry Gates for providing the piano accompaniment for the singers.

- The preschool will be closed for Christmas from December 24 through January 1, reopening on January 2. Spaces are available beginning in January. Call Director Irma Rosales at 949-733-0228 for details.

GROWING A PROGRESSIVE THINKER: These contentious political times may have parents wondering if their children will grow up to reflect mom and dad’s politics or quite different views. Does parenting style have anything to do with political thinking in adulthood? Researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign studied 708 children and their parents to try to find out. They discovered that kids “with authoritarian parents were more likely to have conservative attitudes at age 18,” and those with more egalitarian parents “were more likely to hold liberal attitudes as young adults,” according to press reports. Interestingly, a child’s temperament also seemed to play a role. Children who were more fearful as preschoolers were more likely to be conservative as young adults, while those with “higher levels of activity or restlessness and higher levels of attentional focusing” were more likely to have liberal views later in life.
From the Moderator

If you’ve ever sat through a financial budget meeting, whether for IUCC, or for some other group or business, you know how difficult the process can be. There are almost always more good ideas to fund than money to fund them and trying to choose, at least in the case of IUCC, among worthy endeavors, new ideas and traditional programs is a little like being asked which of your children you love more (possibly why I only had one child).

Cindy O’Dell  Those of us struggling with next year’s IUCC budget would love to keep everyone happy even thought we already know there are more ways to spend the money than pledges allow. That’s why we’re open to suggestions on how to improve fundraising at IUCC (or as Admin Board chair Martha Selby calls it, “Give it or get it.”)

- If you have an idea for fundraising, now is the time to speak up. If we get enough good suggestions, we may be able to conscientiously increase that line in our budget to allow for more of the things we know the congregation is eager to do. Feel free to contact me or fund-development chairs Susie Lang and Janet Emery if you have fundraising ideas.

Because IUCC’s leadership is eager to get a more complete picture of the congregation’s views about our current campus, members will be getting an email link to an online survey later this month. The questions are the result of conversations we had at forums in November and additional input from the Administrative Board. I hope everyone who gets an email asking for a response will take the time to answer the questions. A robust response will allow us to feel confident that any decisions we make about presenting plans for a formal vote are shared by most of the congregation.

Finally, it has been very interesting half-year of being IUCC’s moderator. The challenges are sometimes more than I want to face, but the verbal support I get from so many of you makes it much easier. Thank you and may your Christmas be bright and beautiful and your New Year filled with joy.

SAVE THE DATE: FEBRUARY 2, 2013: IUCC’S BLACK & WHITE PARTY!
Save the Date
December 9, 2012

Join us for an afternoon and evening of pure Christmas joy!

Advent Workshop
4:00 p.m.
The whole church family can make Christmas decorations and gifts at any or all of our many craft stations in Plumer Hall. Don’t forget our annual chili cook-off at the Workshop!

Winter Solstice Concert
7:00 p.m.
After the Workshop, “Rise Up, Shepherd, and Follow” choir members to the Sanctuary to get “A Glimpse of Snow and Evergreen” and to hear the “Joy of Belle: Din Don! Merrily on High” sung “Magnificat”-ly.
IUCC

ADVENT WORKSHOP

CHILI COOK-OFF & POTLUCK DINNER

DECEMBER 9, 2012

4 – 7 PM

Join us for this annual gathering as the whole church comes together to make ornaments from different collected and recycled materials as well as some traditional decorations. Volunteer needed to help that night or to bring some of the needed materials. Sign up to bring your favorite chili for the famous cook-off or a dish to share for dinner. Invite your family, friends and neighbors to this annual and special event to welcome in the Advent Season!

Crafts Include:

* Oranges with Cloves  * Christmas Flower Cups  * Ruby's Plates
* Advent Wreaths with Live Greens  * Gift Bags  * Ornaments

Irvine United Congregational Church

4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine, CA 92604
949-733-0220  www.iucc.org
From the Associate Pastor

This month we enter into the season of Advent. I pray that amidst the hustle and bustle of preparing for Christmas in a material way, each of you also takes the opportunity to set aside some time to prepare for Christmas in a spiritual way as well. As the days grow shorter and the nights grow longer, the tradition calls us to prepare our hearts for Jesus to be born anew into the world once again this year within us. Advent is a great time to take some quiet moments for meditation, reflection, or prayer by yourself in the mornings or evenings; to make sure you spend quality time with family and loved ones; and to get out and serve your community in one of the many volunteer opportunities available. We are called to wait and watch for the light in the darkness and to light candles of hope, peace, joy, and love within our homes and churches and within ourselves.

At church this month, we have plenty of opportunities for you and your family to join in the spirit of the season.

- **For young families, in Sunday School on Dec 9, 16, and 23, we’ll be assigning parts and costumes for our annual Christmas Eve mini-pageant at the 5:30pm service.** If your child will take part, they need to attend Sunday School on at least one of those dates to get a part. Kids who show up on Christmas Eve can also participate, but only as an angel (since we have so many of those costumes!). And even if your family won’t be around Christmas Eve (please do let me know), the kids will still enjoy enacting the story in Sunday School, along with their regular lessons.

- **On Sunday, Dec 9, at 4pm we’ll hold our annual Advent Workshop (see flier – previous page).** Please come and bring friends to make crafts, participate in the chili cook-off, and enjoy the potluck. We’ll also have some Advent games and a huge floor puzzle for an afternoon full of family fun! Then stay for the Choir Concert at 7pm. But we do really need volunteers to pull this off. Please let me know if you’d like to sign up for the cook-off, the potluck, and/or to help with the crafts. Thank you!

- **Then on Dec 16, the Youth Group will help lead worship, and there will be a Christmas party for youth 4th grade and up after Second Service. And**
on Dec 30, kids are invited to stay in worship as we will take a holiday break and not hold Sunday School.

This month the church is also focusing on the theme of **evangelism**, through our **Comma Groups** (IUCC’s signature small groups program). I’d love to be a fly on the wall as the groups get together to discuss this important topic that can often prove to be so difficult for progressive Christians! To kick off the discussions, I focused my sermon on Evangelism on December 2 and thought I might reprint a humorous quiz on this theme put out by the UCC that I shared during that sermon.

The quiz is called, “Are You Ready to Talk About Your Church?” So imagine a new family moves onto your street, and you’re having a conversation. Choose from among these answers the one you think is best.

1. Your new neighbor asks, “United Church of Christ...what do they believe exactly? I had a cousin who attended the Church of Christ. Is that the same thing?” And you answer:
   A) “No way. We hate those people.”
   B) “Actually they’re two very different denominations, almost the opposite, to be honest. I should refer you to our UCC website (www.ucc.org), so when you have a chance you can learn more about who we are and what we believe. I think you’ll like what you see.”
   C) “Umm, I’m not sure. You should ask our pastor. I think we can sort of believe whatever we want. Maybe they are the same.”

2. Then your neighbor asks, “I notice you’re wearing a red ‘comma’ pin. I’ve seen those. Why are you wearing it?” So you answer:
   A) “Just some marketing campaign. My kid gave it to me for Mother’s Day.”
   B) “It’s a visual reminder of something we believe in our church, that God is still speaking and acting in the world. So we say, ‘Never place a period where God has placed a comma.’ The comma is a neat conversation starter, isn’t it?”
   C) “I’m extremely interested in punctuation.”

3. And finally, your neighbor says to you, “Well, I think I would like to visit your church sometime.” So you respond:
   A) “You’re kidding!”
   B) “Terrific. Perhaps this Sunday, you could ride with us because parking can be a little tight, and then we could take you all out for some pancakes afterwards.”
   C) “Well, good for you. Personally, I was thinking of sleeping in.”
If you answered “B” to all these questions, you are ready to incite your neighbor to church. If you answered “A” or “C,” God loves you anyway. But remember, we have to be ready to tell our story whenever the opportunity arises.

Blessings on your Evangelism and blessings on your Advent!

I’ll see you in church.

In God’s peace,
Pastor Elizabeth

Christmas Eve Services
At IUCC

Monday, December 24
Family Service – 5:30 PM
Candlelight Service – 9:00 PM
December Birthdays!

Bill Dietrich
Taelor Exelby
Andrew Figueroa
Paul Figueroa
Alaina Haynes
Anne Hoang
Sharon Holdt

Sean Larkin
Aspen McCarty
Calla McCarty
Alex McClement
Catherine Nelson
Richard Nelson
Nat Rynn

Danny Sanders
Nick Sanders
Pat Sutcliff
Bob Terry
Marie Trout
Carol Welsch
Maggi Wiita

Annual IUCC-Amnesty International Global Write-A-Thon
The Advocates for Peace and Justice of Irvine United Congregational Church will join with the Irvine Chapter of Amnesty International to present our annual Amnesty International Global Write-A-Thon on **Sunday, Dec. 9**, from 10am to 1pm. Tables will be set up on the patio with information on documented cases of unjust detentions and disappearances of individuals from various countries. You are invited to sign pre-written letters and cards to government officials around the world to help improve conditions and resolve these situations. All community members are invited to attend this event.
November Photos!

Two Comma Groups!

Laura Harrison & Peter Smith

Toiletries for Women in Prison

Youth Leading Worship Music

Father Boyle at Thanksgiving
BULLYING Part 11: The Gift of Listening.

It has been said that “paying attention is one of the greatest acts of love”. In relationships, including relationships between parents and children, that means paying attention both to what is said, and what is “communicated”, but not said in words. For certain children, that means not waiting to be “told” something, but knowing that they will be more inclined to communicate non-verbally than verbally. So parents will give their children a great gift by listening both to their words and to their behavior.

Young children are vocabulary challenged! They have the same range of feelings and experiences as adults, but they lack the proper words to express them. The fewer words children know, the more likely they are to communicate verbally. Young children know what they want to say, but don’t know how to say it. This is very different than teenagers, who both know what they want to say and can’t wait to say it! For the first few years of childhood there is a very disproportionate variance between “receptive” language and “expressive” language. Receptive language is what we can understand; expressive language is our ability to take what we understand and put it into words. Young children understand much more than they can say. If you say something to them and ask if they understand, they can tell you that they do. This is true even for toddlers. However, if you asked them to tell you what you just told them they would be unable to. It is important that we understand that they are unable to put things into words even though they understand the words.

An example of receptive vs. expressive language would be my ability to understand versus my ability to speak Spanish. I took three years of Spanish a hundred years ago in high school. When I hear people speaking in Spanish I can often get the gist of what they are talking about because I recognize some of the words. However, if you were to ask me to say what they are talking about in Spanish I would be completely unable to do so. That is why when traveling in a foreign country and trying to communicate in a language that is unfamiliar people use so many gestures. Young children do the same thing: they use gestures – behavior – to try to get across what they want to communicate. They
don’t know the word “frustrated”, so when they are frustrated with a toy that doesn’t work they throw it, or stomp on it.

When young children are being picked on, or when they are picking on other young children, they use actions, not words. It is our job as adults to “listen” carefully to what their behavior is telling us so that we can do our jobs of either protecting or correcting.

Another group of children who tend to communicate more with behavior than words are frightened children. Children with secrets tend to much less verbal than children who are not fearful. This is why many children who are being abused don’t tell anybody and why the abuse continues for a long time. Since we wish it was true that children aren’t getting mistreated we often miss the “cues” that they are. Bullies often scare the children they are bullying, or taunt them about being “tattletales” or “wimps”. So very often bullied children don’t say anything to their parents or teachers. But there are usually “cues” – seen in the playground, classrooms, play groups – if we are attentive to body language and facial expressions. Children are waiting for us to notice. That way they can say they didn’t “tell”, but we will be able to intervene in the situation.

Most people consider themselves to be good listeners but the reality is that most people are pretty poor listeners. Most of us do a much better job talking than listening. As a test, after you finish reading this column start paying attention over the next day or two to conversations you are engaged in. Notice how many sentences you can say before the person you are talking to jumps in and starts talking. I already know the results of this “test” but it will be instructive for you as you then pay attention to how long your children get to talk to you before you jump in and take over the conversation. (Those of you in intimate relationships can also take the lesson to heart as you think of your interactions with each other.)

Here are four things you can do to be an “active listener” with your children:

1. **Re-state:** Say back exactly what they said. This may sound silly but it is actually an excellent way to let someone know you “heard” them.

2. **Paraphrase:** Say back what your child said using different words. Be careful not to change the “meaning” of what they were saying.
3. **Reflect:** Watch to see if the words a child is using are “matched” by their body language. For example, many times when a child is frightened they will use “tough” language that is “mis-matched” by what their body is saying (nervous gestures, wide eyes, shaky voice, etc.)

4. **Summarize:** If you have a very “wordy” child, someone who goes on and on at great length, step in when they take a breath between their long sentences, to let them know you are getting the gist of what they’re telling you.

Of all the gifts you give your children this holiday, this may end up being their favorite. Merry Christmas.
News & Notes
Irvine United Congregational Church
4915 Alton Parkway
Irvine, CA 92604
www.iucc.org