Easter was a Joyous Occasion at IUCC!

Above photo of choir by Jim Aynes

Easter photos courtesy of Sarah Fiske-Phillips
Photos from IUCC Women’s Retreat at Pilgrim Pines

Our Women’s Retreat from May 3-4 was a time of rest, renewal, and sharing. Our theme was “Wisdom of the Wolves and the Women Who Run With Them,” facilitated by the Rev. Penelope Mann. High-lights included guided meditation, yoga, bird watching, a PJ costume contest, and charades. It was a wonderful opportunity to get to know each other better in a lovely setting filled with fabulous women!

Many thanks to our hard-working Retreat Committee (l to r: Janet Emery, Lorraine Fox, Laura Long, Chairwoman Barb Carse, & JoAnne Mansell), whose careful planning made the retreat such a success!

Photos by Tricia Aynes
I have just returned from a busy weekend at church. On Saturday, the memorial service for Bruce McDonald was a stirring experience, and nearly every seat was taken. His children, Connor and Melanie, did him proud with their rendition of that old favorite Leonard Cohen song, “Hallelujah.” Larry Gates performed Claire de Lune as well as I have ever heard it played. Bruce, through a close friend in a very touching moment, “spoke” to his family, while at the same time volunteers, some of whom had never even met Bruce, were setting up a luncheon for his family in Plumer Hall.

Next, it was off to Lake Forest, where John Carson was hosting his 89th birthday in a boisterous Mexican restaurant, and it was fun seeing his family again as well as some church friends.

Sunday morning brought us the Rev. Barry Lynn, Executive Director of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, and members of our local AU chapter. Barry is such a good fellow and a terrific speaker, and it was clear that he was a “hit” with our congregation and quite a few guests. On the same program, it was a nice change to hear a strong “men’s choir,” as some forty or more of our women were away at Pilgrim Pines at their annual retreat, and the word from some early arrivals back at IUCC was that it was another superb event.

This is such a special congregation—I’ve had more that a few “pinch me to see if this is real” moments in the eight years I have been here. Where else could Carl and I announce our upcoming wedding plans knowing that there would be nothing but love and support?

Shortly after I arrived here, we did some long-range planning together, and that planning brings us to where we are this month. On May 18, you are invited to come to forums that will be held after both services, in order to see some pretty amazing plans for our future, to ask questions, and hopefully, to catch some of the excitement those of us on the Building Task Force have been experiencing after working with our accomplished architects.

Domusstudios is a firm whose work I know from an addition that was made to First Congregational Church in Long Beach. The (now retired) Rev. Jerry Stinson has given them nothing but praise, and when we were interviewing architects, Domusstudios immediately rose to the top. Our task force shares in the excitement I feel about this project, and having an architect in our congregation (Jim Raver) has been very helpful to us all in deciphering “architect-ese.”

So. We’re here at this moment now, with some real thinking to do about our future. Again, I’m thinking about my experience this past weekend at IUCC, and I want to share our church with the greater community. The plans I am seeing coming together indicate that we might just make that happen through some bold new decisions.

Those decisions call for continued growth. This past year, I concentrated on being properly staffed, and I am seeing some positive results—I hope you are noticing them as well. Our Adult Ed program just brought us Barry Lynn and a new issue-themed Bible study at a new time that is gaining traction. Our MYP team was able to handle close to 50 kids and youth on Easter Sunday, with constant programs happening for young people (today I had to fend off three or four Styrofoam light saber attacks in a Star Wars event happening in Plumer Hall after church).

After eight years of maintaining our worship services in much the same way, I made them identical during Lent. It was a sacrifice on the part of our choir and music staff, but they brought us a real gift. Suddenly, there was a crossover between services, and for the first sustained period of time, there was a real “critical mass” at our First Service. Our Teaching Moment got moved to Plumer Hall before church, where additional participants gave it fresh life as we planned our topics intentionally.

The worship surveys are out. If you did not fill one out, please do—we want to make sure everyone’s opinions are heard. We have hard copies for those of you who are not on the internet. Surveys will be available through May 11.

Conventional Wisdom says that when a room hits between 70-80% capacity, further growth ceases to happen. We did that at our Second Service some years ago, and when we bought over 40 new chairs, our attendance went up accord-
ingly. While we have room to expand some more at Second Service, some modest but strong growth at First Service will enable us to take the bold steps we have been dreaming about.

While it is not really fair to reveal partial results of a survey (125 responses so far) Chris Goodrich, who created the survey, gave me a few small snapshots to share with you.

- 50% of the congregation attended a different service during Lent.
- The choir is a major driver for which service people wish to attend.
- Some interesting insights developed with the two worship time scenarios we proposed: Moving our service times closer together, when the services were identical with the choir, we see an even split as to which service people will attend. When the service times are at 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. with only a small ensemble at the 9 a.m. service, more than six out of ten respondents (so far) chose the 11 a.m. service with the full choir.
- All of the worship elements were very important to people. Meditative time, reflective singing, hymns, prayers of the people and the sermon time all fared well.
- The teaching moment at First Service is a source of contention. You love it…or not, and feelings are strong on this.

I want to share IUCC with more of our community, and the long-range plans we made say that this is what you wanted, too. This is why our Lenten worship experiment was created—so that we could gauge how we might think about creating the sustained kind of growth that will enable us to move with confidence into the next stage of our development. I know I say this a lot, but my personal mantra for this is, “A church that knows who it is and why it exists will find the means to be the church God is calling it to be.”

I look forward to hearing from you, both through the survey and the building forums on May 18.

See You in Church!

Pastor Paul

Barry Lynn was guest speaker on May 4

We were honored to welcome Barry Lynn, Executive Director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, as our guest speaker at both services on May 4. His name was engraved on a plaque we maintain to record our distinguished guest speakers over the years. Pastor Paul, Jack Cahill, and Barry Lynn display the plaque in photos below.

Photos by Paul Shirey and Jim Aynes
Like me, you probably have a lot of different causes and organizations clamoring for your attention. Recently, I was feeling pretty overwhelmed by this, especially as I contemplated my overflowing inbox, with its endless requests for not only my time and contributions but for major commitments. Sometimes I feel like I’m being asked which child do I love better as various organizations compete for my heart and passion.

At IUCC, it can feel like that, too. There are so many worthy, worthy activities and causes – the result of us trying to live out our beliefs. But it can lead to feeling like we aren’t making much of a difference in anything. With these thoughts percolating around in my brain, I clicked open the April 30th e-newsletter from Progressive Christians Uniting. In it, Executive Director Timothy Murphy writes:

Sometimes it seems that Christians who care about social justice are often more interested in feeling like they are doing something, anything to challenge the injustices they see in their world. Is someone excluded? Let’s have a rally! Is someone being exploited? Let’s boycott something! At times, there seems to be a lack of clarity in our strategy. . . Being a witness against forces of domination, even when there is no obvious solution, is a critical calling for followers of Jesus. But often, there are particular areas we can target that can have a relatively greater effect for less effort. These small wins can something turn into something huge. . . by aiming carefully and persisting, we can win surprising victories for the flourishing of oppressed peoples and the planet.

I love how the universe gives me what I need to hear sometimes! What a lovely reminder that we are called to be witnesses, not just now and then, but every single day. He also reminds us about the strategic value of focus.

I remember so clearly the pride and passion I felt as IUCC took a stand against Prop 8 and in favor of marriage equality. We stood then as we stand now -- for love. And, we opened up our doors and our hearts to welcome like-minded folks who no longer felt comfortable in their own churches because of exclusionary beliefs. They have enriched our church immeasurably and we are so blessed to share this journey with them.

So, what should IUCC’s next major stance be? Of course we’ll keep pursuing the many causes so close to our hearts and minds – but, what should be our next public stand on an issue? Income inequality? Immigration? Equality issues? Global warming? Education? Death penalty? Prison reform? Voter restrictions? What would you add to this list? Let’s shine a light on a specific issue, reminding folks that God is still speaking, and throw open our doors to invite new neighbors to join us in this joy of “surprising victories for the flourishing of oppressed peoples and the planet.”

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.

Building Project Update

With the Spring Congregational Meeting approaching, the Building Task Force has been working hard with domusstudio architecture (http://domusstudio.com/) to finalize the proposed Master Plan for the IUCC campus. The Task Force is excited to share the plan, which has been developed to ensure maximum flexibility – giving us options for phased build-outs, depending on church priorities, needs and growth, along with our financial capabilities.

In late November 2013, the congregation approved the development of a Master Plan for the church campus. If approved at the Spring Meeting, 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.

Please make your plans now to attend one of the two forums scheduled for May 18 to review the proposed Master Plan and get your questions answered. The plan will be presented at the June 1 Spring Congregational Meeting for an approval vote. 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.
It’ll be a Halloween trick or treat! Or a camping trip in the mountains! Or an Easter bunny with festive eggs! Or a day at the beach! It’ll be whatever you – the table host – want it to be. Themes can range from a favorite holiday to a great hobby (how about fly fishing?) and anything in between.

YOU choose the table theme and YOU choose the colors – the more imaginative the better. For those who volunteer to be table hosts, the sky’s the limit. It’ll be easy and breezy, with creativity and spontaneity in abundance. You won’t want to miss all the excitement and festivities as IUCC celebrates … well, everything under the sun!

Sign up on the patio to host a themed table for our first All-Church Bon Vivant dinner. Those who host a table will be in charge of the table theme and place settings. The main meal will be a buffet for all with Fellowship providing the main course, wine, rolls, and the guests bringing appetizers, salads, side vegies and desserts. The event will be held in Plumer Hall at 6 p.m. on Saturday, May 31, and will follow the general format of our usual Bon Vivants (except on a grander scale, of course!).

There will be an amazing Silent Auction, with items to match the various themes. Check out the photo of the magical mini treehouse at right (donated by Marilyn Smith), which will be one of the items up for bid – what child could resist it?! Child care will be available!
Topical Discussion - New time and format!

* PLEASE NOTE THAT BIBLE STUDY HAS BEEN MOVED TO 4 P.M. ON TUESDAYS AND HAS A NEW FORMAT! *

There are so many interesting issues to engage us, and we want to have an informed opinion. Come to the new class on Tuesdays at 4 p.m. to gain valuable insight into what the Bible has to say about the many issues that affect our lives.

Our Bible Study class has changed to a topical format. In coming weeks we will be discussing important topics like: the environment, war, authority, boundaries (personal and societal), demon possession vs. mental illness, and the nature of God.

Now is a great time to join us for an insightful and stimulating discussion - and bring your Bible!

May Birthdays

Carol Ballesty
Johannah Bullington
John Carson
Jeffrey Gaskill
Kameron Johnson
Connie Jones
Terry LePage
Bob McClean
Cindy O’Dell
Ricardo Ramirez-Torres
Mark Rychnovsky
Scott Rychnovsky
Elizabeth Schiller
Ron Steiner

Calendar at a Glance

BUILDING PROJECT UPDATE FORUM
SUNDAY * MAY 18 *
10:00 a.m. & 12:15 p.m.
Join us to learn more about the proposed Master Plan for the IUCC campus. At each forum, the Building Task Force will present the plan and answer questions.

ALL CHURCH BON VIVANT
SATURDAY * MAY 31 * 6 p.m.
Join us for our first All-Church Bon Vivant dinner. Those who host a table will be in charge of the table theme and place settings.

SEEKERS
TUESDAY * MAY 20 * 9:30 a.m. *
PLUMER HALL
We meet on the 3rd Tuesday of each month to share ideas about the church’s meaning and role in society. Discussion is sparked by a video of prominent theologians’ conversations. Our meeting starts with refreshments.

SPRING CONGREGATIONAL MTG.
SUNDAY * JUNE 1 * 12:15 p.m. *
SANCTUARY
The date of the Spring Congregational Meeting has been moved from May 18 to June 1 to accommodate forums on the proposed Master Plan for the IUCC campus.

CHOIR CONCERT
SUNDAY * JUNE 8 * 7 p.m. *
SANCTUARY
Join the IUCC Chancel Choir for an evening sure to ground you in a journey of shared humanity. It will be a mystical evening as we navigate the choral literature and breathe life into poetry.
Mankind has long been fascinated by the properties of Fire, Air, Water, and Earth. Before the Christian Era, the great philosopher and scientist, Plato, developed the theory of the solids which put forth the idea that all the constituents of the natural world consisted of mixtures of a small number of “elements,” particularly the four elements of fire, air, water, and earth in varying proportions, but that these four elements were inviolable and could never be changed.

If, as Plato hypothesized, all things are essentially made of the same elements in different proportion, what does this say about how, one to another, we are connected?

Consider the poetry of Gaïa Willis-Owen who tells us that we are bound together – in threads of joy, of grief, of soul – your tears fall from my eyes, my joy rings in your laughter – I know your heart’s journey, it is my own.

Join the IUCC Chancel Choir on June 8th at 7pm for an evening sure to ground you in a journey of shared humanity. You won’t want to miss this mystical evening as we navigate the choral literature and breathe life into profound poetry; an evening sure to set your imagination on fire!
NEW PHOTO SESSIONS ADDED!

Due to high demand, more photo sessions have been added:

Friday, May 16: 12 noon - 3 p.m.
Saturday, May 17: 10 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Don’t miss out! Schedule online at www.iucc.org today! Committee Members are: Jean Stewart, Chair; Tricia Aynes; Janet Emery; Sandy Cahill; 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.

2014 AIDS Walk OC is May 17!

Please Support Team IUCC Walk the Walkers - we’re heading to the Orange County Great Park on May 17 ... and we still need YOUR HELP!

It’s that time of year again! The 2014 AIDS Walk is just around the corner, and Team IUCC Walk the Walkers is ready to go! This year, in addition to the Walk itself, there will be a Red Ribbon 5K Fun Run, a Human Red Ribbon Project, a Survivors Club, food, entertainment, carnival games and lots of wonderful friends to share the fun. Everyone is invited!

AIDS continues to be an extremely serious problem in Orange County. Twenty-eight years ago, AIDS Walk Orange County was created to raise funds for people living with HIV/AIDS. It continues today because more than 6,500 men, women and children in this community have HIV disease and need food, transportation, housing, emergency financial assistance, mental health programs, and counseling support groups. Money raised from the AIDS Walk is given to local nonprofits that are struggling to provide essential care and support for people suffering from the disease and prevention programs to build awareness about HIV/AIDS. Because there is no cure for HIV, education and prevention services are essential and remain our only way of stopping the virus. Simply put, help is needed now as much as ever.

Please consider supporting the efforts of Team IUCC Walk the Walkers to help the men, women and children in Orange County infected by HIV/AIDS and their families. You can help alleviate the pain and anguish the disease has caused by joining us on the Walk or contributing to the Team. Donations of any size really do matter!

We will have two speakers from the AIDS Services Foundation (ASF) come to IUCC and present at both services on May 11, a week before the Walk itself. They will be explaining a bit more about the state of HIV/AIDS in Orange County and the ongoing importance of the Walk, in hopes of motivating both walkers and potential donors!

Thank you for your time and compassion...and, if you’re available on May 17, come walk with us!

In peace,
Felicity Figueroa
IUCC Team Captain

Stephen Ministry

Stephen Ministers served snacks after second service on April 27th
In our previous columns we identified how being “transgender” refers to an internal experience of feeling like the sex other than what nature has “assigned.” This is different than being “transvestite,” which means enjoying dressing like the other sex, but not believing oneself to be the other sex. This group is sometimes referred to as “cross-dressing.” Cross dressers may be of any sexual orientation.

Another group of people on the “diversity spectrum” are referred to as “gender non-conforming,” which is not so much an internal experience as a clash with social expectations. Non-conforming people do not comply with social standards, attitudes, or practices of their immediate cultural group. In reality, this is not really a sexual difference, but a social difference. We are talking about it in this series because of the fact that many assumptions are made about one’s sexuality based on appearance and mannerisms, and people then get treated as they appear to be, rather than as they are.

Research has found that gender non-conforming youth are at high risk of being targeted for harassment and bullying, with proven lasting negative effects. Because of this problem, those concerned with gender differences and gender roles are shifting focus to the wide varieties within, not just between, genders. This new focus has coined the terms “femininities” and “masculinities” to address this diversity within genders.

Terms you may have heard for gender non-conforming people are “effeminate” (woman-like) for males and “butch” for females. These terms are applied based on: dress that goes against expected appearance for one’s sex – pink clothing or a lot of jewelry for males, trousers instead of slacks for females; appearance – short, close-cropped hairstyles for females; or for gestures normally associated with the opposite sex – ways of walking or running, voice register, ways of crossing legs when sitting, etc. Because children are taught how to appear like “boys” or “girls,” when someone does not comply with these expectations, it is common for others to decide that their appearance and mannerisms “give away” their sexuality. Some of the terms used for homosexuals, such as “fairy,” “queen,” or “dyke” are applied based on being gender non-conforming and thus consigned to a group one may not belong to.

I have a good friend who was “warned” by everyone in her circle, including all of her family and friends, that she was being “blind” for not seeing that the man she was dating was obviously gay. Not only was the man very effeminate, he was a florist! Despite all the dire predictions she went ahead and married him – 35 years ago! They are a very happy, well-adjusted couple with a grown son and a grandchild, who have one of the best marriages I know of. Life was not easy for them when they started, however, based solely on the tendency to make assumptions about sexuality from appearance and gestures.

Society, for whatever reasons (we could discuss them but you can probably figure them out), is easier on gender non-conforming girls than boys. “Hitting or running like a girl” or being called a “sissy” usually has more of a cruel edge to it than being called a “tomboy.”

When relating to gender non-conforming boys and girls we want to begin teaching them about issues of “prejudice” and “stereotyping” which lead to the cruel treatment of boys and girls who do not look or act like their peers and as they are expected to look and act. These issues (prejudice) require more time than we can give them this month, so we’ll pick up this discussion next month, after spending some time talking about those young people referred to as “questioning.”