IUCC’s Winter Solstice Concert a Joyful Occasion!

On December 8, IUCC’s Chancel Choir, directed by Dr. John St. Marie and accompanied by Dr. David Clemenson and a string quartet, presented their Winter Solstice Concert. The evening represented a lot of hard work and dedication, and we thank all who helped make it such a success! Proceeds went to IUCC’s General Fund.
Carl Whidden a Smash Hit in “A Christmas Carol”

On Dec. 15, IUCC was thrilled by the virtuoso performance of our own Carl Whidden in the role of all 30 characters from his one-man show of “A Christmas Carol.” Brought to vivid life were such diverse characters as penny-pinching Ebenezer Scrooge, clerk Bob Cratchit, Tiny Tim, the Christmas Spirits, and all the rest of the beloved Dickens characters. Carl’s seamless performance captured the unique qualities of each one in a riveting tour de force. Facebook comments about the show included:

Carl you were fabulous!! And we enjoyed every minute!! I hope you are getting a much deserved rest this week!! Thanks so very much for doing this to support IUCC!! (Janet Emery)

We were astounded, Carl, at your performance. What a bucketful to memorize! The way you switched so smoothly from characters to narrator and back again was remarkable. You gave us a lovely Christmas gift. Thanks! (Vivian Johnson)

This performance was truly one of a kind and exceptional, in my opinion in every way. Carl performed without scenery or sets or props, and yet was able to transport me to the images he was creating. And how he memorized all of that dialogue is absolutely incredible! WELL DONE!! Standing O!! (David Karsten)

Carl, you were absolutely fabulous in every facet of the production. (Don Bjorklund)

A superb performance - mesmerizing and unique. So glad I got to see it! (Tricia Aynes)

It was AMAZING! Carl is the man!!! (Joni Baker)

I am entirely awestruck. (Jen Mirmak)

Carl Whidden, you were absolutely brilliant in the play last night. To hold the attention of an audience for almost two hours single-handedly, is an achievement in itself. And to have memorized and internalized an entire play is remarkable. Then the sheer physical stamina of embodying the various roles - and acting them all out believably... wow... You really managed to create an entire cast, and an entire set by just your voice, your presence, your involvement, your facial expressions and your laser focus. Superlatives are raining down from the Trout Family today - young and older.... Bravo!! (Marie Trout)

Bravo Dearest...you were just so amazing! (Robinmarie McClement)

Absolutely fantastic! Bravo, and encore!! (Felicity Figueroa)

I am just so proud of Carl ... “Blown away” was the phrase I heard most often, and I include myself in using that term. I don’t know HOW he memorized it to begin with, but his performance exceeded all expectations. I am SO proud of him--he had us all in rapt attention the whole time--he is just that good! (Paul Tellstrom)

Yes, he is good!!! (Peggy Goetz)

It was courageous, generous, and gracious of Carl to do this special performance, which raised $2000 for IUCC’s general fund. We are so grateful for his big-hearted offer to benefit our programs!

Special thanks also go to event producer Lesley Wheland; reception coordinators Janet Emery and Susie Lang; ushers Jean Stewart, Patty McCarthy, and Howard Emery; sound and lights specialist Don Mineo; and the IUCC staff. You all did a wonderful job!
From the Pastor’s Desk
the Rev. Dr. Paul Tellstrom

December was a busy holiday season—following the Thanksgiving service at the synagogue, we moved fast through an activity-filled Advent Workshop, a beautiful and stirring Winter Solstice Concert sung by our choir and led by John, which was followed by a tour-de-force one-man Christmas Carol performed by this really talented actor guy I have known for quite a few years now. (I was deeply proud of Carl!)

It didn’t stop—in the midst of everything, we found ourselves moving in step with a new building project, enjoying our best Stewardship season, and feeling a strong forward momentum that led up to Christmas Eve and all the planning that goes into making these two different services the best they can be.

The MYP team, led by Sarah, brought us a new kind of pageant at the 5:30 service—a play that showed our youth and kids bringing us their own perspective on the Christmas story, surrounded by wonderful music of the season. At 9:00, the candlelight service was about the best I can remember—right down to that, “pinch yourself to know that it is real” moment when the light starts getting passed around to the singing of “Silent Night.”

I usually take the next week off, when I find myself thinking a lot about this congregation, the many talents that exist within it, our place in the community, and of course, the deep love that the people of IUCC have for their church.

Reflecting on conversations with some of our talented leaders both present and past, I am hearing a renewed desire on the part of our congregation to share what is unique, healthy and loving about our practice of Christian faith with more people in our community. I did not have the experience that many of you had with churches. I grew up in a moderately progressive UCC congregation, and I am constantly reminded through the stories of our newcomers that there are churches everywhere that (intentionally or not) have inflicted a world of pain on people who do not “fit” within their faith community’s doctrinal walls. We need to continue to get the message out that, “Yes, We Are That Church” (as my coffee mug states) that provides a home for freethinkers and those who could not find an extravagant welcome elsewhere.

I agree with Anne Rosse in her Moderator’s column (next page) when she says that we play an important role in Orange County as an “oasis of Progressive Christianity” and that we need to be intentional about sharing who we are with our community by inviting them in.

Having time to think in front of our fireplace this past week allowed me to clarify where I will be placing my focus in 2014, and I am asking for your help.

- We have a great team in place for kids, youth, young adults and families. IUCC has never had a staff team like this, and they are completely devoted to the Ministry for Young People. Support Sarah, Annie, Tricia, Honnah and Matthew (Chris, too!) in the best way possible—invite a family to church, or bring one of your own children’s friends to attend Sunday school with them. Let people know that we have a full program in place for kids. Growing this ministry with Sarah and her team is one of my first priorities this year—the desire to provide a home for a new generation of Progressive Christians in Orange County is at the top of the list, and I would dearly like to share in that work with you.
- Help me to assess what works and what might be changed or added as we look at the ways in which we do worship. In particular, if there were more music and programs for kids at first service, would you help that service grow by visiting or even shifting to the earlier time? How about the employment of technology as a worship aid as we look to the use of screens in the sanctuary to fill certain needs such as announcements, short clips, etc.? What about an expanded “teaching moment” that occupied its own time, either in a shorter service, or just before first service?
- Adult Education is and always will be an important piece of what we do. As the Rev. Dr. Jack Cahill settles into his new position, it is true that he needs a team to help make sure that our Comma Groups thrive, our classes are given and that special speakers are found. But, as Woody Allen once said, “90% of life is showing up.” The best support that you can show Jack is to drop in on a Bible study or come to Adult Ed on Sunday mornings. You won’t be sorry.
- IUCC has never been a part of a pastoral intern program, which is truly odd—since we have had so many members move into ordained ministry! Matthew Redman is IUCC’s first intern, and my fifth. Catch some of the enthusiasm in helping a young talent move into pastoral ministry. Many of you have already discovered that the gifts that come in such mentoring are reflected back many times over, as you can see in the new website that Matthew and Chris put together for us. Matthew will be preaching his first sermon this month. Your support on this day, as well as through the end of his internship, will be most appreciated.

Finally, just…thank you. Thank you for being the open, loving people that you are. Thank you for embracing Carl and me and bringing us into this family so fully. From time to time I need to be reminded to tell you that I love serving this congregation, and that you are all special to me. You challenge and delight at the same time—and in such a way that it is always a joy to be with you. It was about eight years ago that I was in conversation with your search committee, and it was always clear that this would be a call that would be a privilege to accept. It continues to be so.
While I know that the calendar has flipped to 2014, it seems almost impossible that a new year is already upon us! May your 2014 be filled with joy, good health, peace and the gifts of constantly learning and growing.

I don’t know about you, but I am a big fan of making resolutions, of establishing goals and working toward them. So, of course, I have my list of 2014 resolutions posted on my computer desktop, readily visible as a constant reminder. And, right next to the resolutions list is my gratitude list – my daily reminder of the many, many reasons to feel grateful each and every day. I’m adding a third list this year, namely goals and priorities for our beloved church. What’s on that list, you might ask?

- **Church growth.** We play an important role in Orange County as “that church,” an oasis of progressive Christianity with a profound commitment to Social Justice. Let’s be intentional about inviting folks to be part of the IUCC family – new members bring such a wealth of talents and gifts, enriching our church immeasurably.

- **Technological innovation.** We just introduced a new website, which is a fabulous outreach and communication tool. The sensible introduction of other technology will help serve our current members and reach out to potential new folks. For more information, please see the “Screens in the Sanctuary?” article on next page.

- **Building Project/Master Plan.** I continue to be tremendously excited about this project, and the congregation’s enthusiastic support for it. For more information, please see the “Building Project Update” article on next page.

- And, of course, we will keep doing what we already do so well – including offering meaningful worship services joyfully punctuated by choral voices raised in praise; thought-provoking educational programming that speaks to our intellectual, emotional and spiritual lives; abundant and radical hospitality; and the sharing of loving progressive Christian values with a generation coming of age in often divisive times.

As I reflect on where IUCC is at the beginning of 2014, I feel excited and encouraged – and have listed just a few of our recent highlights below.

- There is such a positive energy around our youth programs, from a stellar Advent video to a thoughtful Youth Sunday to the Christmas pageant to youth being a visible presence at our first annual “Wear Your Jeans to Church Work Day.” Huge thanks to our amazing MYP team, all of our youth and their families, and our dedicated Sunday School volunteers.

- IUCC unanimously approved the development of a Master Plan for the church campus and rallied to fund this first phase so it can be debt-free. Thank you for your thoughtful review of and generous support for this project.

- IUCC hired a number of wonderful new staff members who are bringing energy, excitement and commitment to augment the amazing team we already had in place. And, we continue to be blessed by fabulous pastoral leadership.

- We elected a strong slate of lay leaders. It is my honor and privilege to work with them, learning daily from the wisdom and expertise these folks so generously share with this church.

- Our congregation is involved, committed and participatory – whether serving dinner for Family Promise, hosting coffee hour, washing windows at the All-Church Work Day, or being a walker at AIDS Walk or Crop Walk. We are blessed by all you do for this church!

- We enjoyed our most successful Stewardship Season ever. Thank you for stepping up to provide IUCC with the resources it needs!

I hope you share my excitement about what is happening at IUCC!

Please mark your calendars and plan to join us on Sunday, January 19, 2014 for our Congregational Meeting. We’ll be reviewing the 2014 budget and some proposed bylaw changes, along with hearing an update on the Building Project. All voting members are requested to attend.

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
by Anne Rosse, Moderator

In November, the congregation approved the development of a Master Plan for the IUCC campus. While the holidays slowed progress on the Building Project, several important steps were accomplished as outlined below.

- The contract with domusstudios was executed.
- Surveyors were on campus in early December.
- A Title Report was ordered and provided to the survey company.
- The funds that were generously pledged to support Phase I (so it can be debt-free) are being collected and donors have been thanked.
- A bank account is being set up for building funds – to provide robust cost accounting, tracking and reporting.
- A conference call has been scheduled in early January to seek input from Priscilla Bizer, UCC’s expert on capital campaigns.
- In January, the Building Task Force will meet with domusstudios (http://domusstudio.com/).

A progress report will be presented at the January 19th Congregational Meeting. For more information, please contact members of the Building Task Force: Martha Selby (chair), Mark Allen, Keith Boyum, Lindy Garber, Laura Long, Cindy O’Dell, Anne Rosse, Michael Spindle and Paul Tellström.

Screens in the Sanctuary?
by Anne Rosse, Moderator

When you hear about installing screens in the IUCC Sanctuary, do you shudder in fear as you imagine flashing laser lights and a praise band? Don’t worry, you’re not alone.

Funding the installation of screens has been included in the 2014 budget. Some folks in our congregation worry that putting screens in the Sanctuary will radically change our worship services. That is not the intended purpose. Rather, we are increasingly using multimedia, whether it is PowerPoint™ or Keynote™ presentations at a congregational meeting, an amazing youth Advent video, or a thoughtful memorial tribute at a funeral.

Our current equipment is outdated, challenging to set up, and doesn’t offer good sound quality or picture resolution. The Technology Task Force will be recommending the installation of three screens in an aesthetically pleasing manner, along with a dedicated computer. Two screens would be placed for maximum visibility by the congregation and one would be at the back of the Sanctuary for the choir.

We are a house of worship and fellowship, where people must be able to gather in both celebration and mourning. I believe the introduction of screens can be done in an appropriate fashion and, with them, will come new ways for us to serve our congregation and expand our capabilities. For instance, it may make sense to run announcements on the screens while folks are settling in at the beginning of service, thereby shortening the sometimes tedious verbal announcements.

More information about this project will be shared in the coming months. In the meantime, if you have questions, comments or concerns, please contact the Church Office or me.

January Birthdays

Jillian Allen
Joni Baker
Adele Bloom
Julia Brozek
Emily Cordes
Paul Duncan
Felicity Figueroa
Madeline Mains
Joan McDonald
Ava Mitchell
Kieran Mitchell
Joan Mortenson
Eugene Price
Barbara Ruris
Bonnie Shaffstall
Tricia Aynes
Bill Sheak
Coquelicot Shirey

Marilyn KeslerWest
Advent was a busy season for the Ministry for Young People. Here are some highlights and upcoming events:

**Youth**
The Youth Group filmed an advent pageant, which they presented on December 15th to both services. The advent pageant was a modern look at how Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and the Magi would be informed of Jesus’ coming birth. They filled it with humor and learned how to approach bible stories in a whole new way. You can count on this being a new annual tradition. In the coming months the Youth Group will be planning their summer trip(s).

**Young Adults**
The young adult group has still been meeting every Tuesday. However, beginning in January we will shift to meeting three times a month: the first Tuesday of every month for a lecture and/or discussion and the second and fourth Sunday of every month for a social lunch gathering. The group came to this decision together and are hoping to be more accessible to people in their 20s and 30s.

**Children and Young Families**
The children presented their Christmas pageant on Christmas Eve this year. They did a great job and really appreciated the older youth’s help on the project. We look forward to having more children join us next year!

Thank you for making Advent a meaningful and important season for our young people. I look forward to 2014, and all that we can do together.

If you missed it, you missed something amazing. Pat Sauter started her collection of New England houses 22 years ago for her son, who missed the Northeast. The collection grew and grew until it covered many tables. Pat was gracious enough to share it with us this December in Plumer Hall, where it charmed and delighted everyone who saw it.

Her Department 56 collection features old-fashioned, hand-crafted lighted buildings and accessories that form a warm and wintery village decorated for the holidays. Thanks for being an amazing hostess for so many of our IUCC parties, Pat, and thanks for sharing your collection with us!
Mark your calendar now for our Coming Events!

WEDNESDAY FELLOWSHIP
WEDNESDAY * JAN. 8 *

Wednesday Fellowship for January has been changed to the SECOND Wednesday in January. We will be going to dinner and a movie. For dinner we will meet at Gina’s Pizza in the Albertson Shopping Center at Campus & California at 5:15 p.m. If you can't make dinner, please join us for the movie, “Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom” in the University Town Center on Campus & Stanford (across from UCI) at 6:30. Please let Judy Bateman know if you will be coming so she can set the dinner reservation for the correct number of people. You can find her on the patio after 2nd service.

2014 BUDGET FORUM
SUNDAY * JANUARY 12 * 12:30 P.M.

A discussion of the 2014 budget prior to the Congregational Meeting.

WINTER CONGREGATIONAL MTG.
SUNDAY * JANUARY 19 *
12:30 P.M.

Highlights will include: presentation of the 2014 budget, an update on the Building Project, proposed bylaw changes, and the ratification of new leaders appointed to serve within the last six months. All members please attend!

SAVE THE DATE!
2014 WINTER PARTY
SATURDAY * FEBRUARY 1 *

Come have a wonderful evening of music, dancing, dinner, and fun with the IUCC community at our annual Winter Party produced by our fellowship committee. The theme is “Motown Magic,” and the location is the Woodbridge Village Community Center. Hours are 6 - 10 p.m., with dinner at 7 p.m. Dress is formal, with awards for best Motown-themed attire. Estimated ticket price will be about $30 per person (more info to follow).

Photos by Jeff Oleson
Our Comma Group topic for January is “Good News.” As progressive Christians - in the mainline tradition - what is the “good news” or “gospel” for us? We tend to be activist and programmatic in our approach to being the Church, and it is fair to say that we are more formal in our approach to worship as well. Do we witness in the same or similar manner as conservatives do? If not, what is different? How would we like our hearers/observers to respond to our message/activity? Is getting them to join our church part of our purpose? Come to your next Comma Group meeting and join in the discussion!
Stephen Ministers are congregation members who are recruited, selected, trained, and commissioned to provide one-to-one lay caring ministry to persons in crisis or with other needs for care. They participate in Supervision Group once a month. They initially commit to serve for two years including training and may renew their commitment.

What Stephen Ministers Do

Pray - A defined cluster of activities make up a Stephen Minister’s job description. Stephen Ministers pray for their Stephen Partners (care receivers) and strive to worship God always in word and deed. They reveal the love of God to those who most need to see it.

Care for the Stephen Partner (Care Receiver) - Stephen Ministers are assigned to Stephen Partners - people in crisis who need caring support. Stephen Ministers care for those in moderate difficulties. The Stephen Minister’s care helps the Stephen Partner resolve the difficulty and achieve growth. Most Stephen Ministers meet once a week with their Stephen Partners for about an hour at a time. They may also check in with the Stephen Partner by telephone, particularly when the Stephen Partner is going through a difficult time. Stephen Ministers use special skills to care for their Stephen Partners. Among the most important are the following:

1. **Listen.** Most Stephen Partners need someone simply to listen - really listen - as they talk through their difficulties.
2. **Deal with feelings.** Stephen Ministers reflect the Stephen Minister’s content, feelings, and ideas and ask open-ended questions to help the Stephen Partner recognize, express, and accept his or her feelings.
3. **Share distinctively Christian caring resources.** Stephen Ministers may share a prayer, a Bible verse or story, or other caring gestures that the Stephen Partner would welcome.
4. **Remain process-oriented.** Stephen Ministers do not try to fix the Stephen Partner or his or her problems; they focus on the process of caregiving and rely on God to achieve results.
5. **Relate assertively.** Stephen Ministers respect both the needs of the Stephen Partner and their own needs as well.
6. **Maintain boundaries.** Stephen Ministers set appropriate boundaries in the caring relationship, helping the Stephen Partner remain as independent as possible while being there for the Stephen Partner as needed.
7. **Recommend professional care when necessary.** Stephen Ministers are not trained to care for those who are suicidal, severely depressed, abusive, or homicidal, or who are abusing drugs or alcohol. If Stephen Ministers recognize that their Stephen Partner’s needs exceed the care they are able to provide, they see that the Stephen Partner receives professional care.
8. **Maintain Confidentiality.** Stephen Ministers understand that confidentiality is crucial in any caring relationship. The Stephen Partner needs to know that what he or she says to the Stephen Minister will remain in confidence. Stephen Ministers maintain confidentiality and encourage other Stephen Ministers to do the same.
9. **Help Identify People in Need of Stephen Ministry.** Stephen Ministers act as ministers of referral, helping to find people who would benefit from the care of a Stephen Minister.
10. **Participate in Monthly Supervision and Continuing Education Sessions.** Stephen Ministers participate faithfully in Small Group Peer Supervision and continuing education, coming prepared to every supervision session unless illness or emergency makes attendance impossible. Supervision provides Stephen Ministers with support, guidance, and accountability for their caring relationships. There are no unsupervised Stephen Ministers.
11. **Help the Congregation Understand and Appreciate Stephen Ministry.** Through their service, Stephen Ministers help the congregation appreciate Stephen Ministry and encourage members to become ministers of referral who help those in crisis receive the care they need.

If you have any questions about Stephen Ministry or becoming a Stephen Minister, please see Pastor Paul or Dave Schofield, Chair of the IUCC Stephen Ministry, at (949) 300-1216.
What an interesting way to begin our new year, tackling the issue of sexual diversity. I can promise some intriguing conversation with your children as you help them digest the information they are gleaning from television.

On the one hand we have the Duck Dynasty fiasco. Someone famous – for reasons my education and experience fail to help me understand – gets in trouble for outrageous comments about homosexuals, and then quickly gets out of trouble without amending any of his remarks. These are his “beliefs,” he says. The only good news for parents is that Papa Duck has primed the pump for you. The reason for our current considerations has been vindicated. Believing something doesn’t make it so, and it is up to adults to be sure that children and young people know what makes something true. At the same time, just in time for Christmas, the State of Utah – Utah! – declares marriage equality for its citizens.

These two news events occurring simultaneously put us clearly in the position of needing to clarify our own facts and positions so that we can help developing minds navigate the sea of conflicting information.

To review, the letters LGBTQ stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning people.

Homosexual (lesbian or gay) people
Whether one is emotionally and sexually attracted to someone of the same sex or the opposite sex is called “sexual orientation.” Sexual orientation exists along a continuum. The continuum ranges across a scale from purely heterosexual to purely homosexual. This continuum is true of affection, attraction, inclination, fantasy and behavior. The fact of a continuum, first proposed by Kinsey in the 1940's, continues to cause anxiety for people who like things simple. (What are you, gay or straight?)

The term sexual orientation is NOT to be confused with the term “sexual preference,” which is a term that was basically invented by people who want to believe that sexual attraction is a choice and can be changed. Sexual orientation is an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual or affectional attraction to another person. This cannot be changed. The only thing that can change in this regard is whether someone acts on their feelings. It is important that adults working with young people never use the term “sexual preference” because it implies an emotional choice that gay people can’t make.

Sexual orientation is NOT necessarily related to sexual behavior. Who one is is different from what one does. Sexual orientation is a matter of the heart and may be separate from behavior. Having “gay sex” does not make one gay. At the same time, abstaining from gay sex, or engaging in heterosexual relations does not make one not gay, or “straight.” One can be gay, but celibate. One can be in a heterosexual relationship but be gay. One can engage in homosexual relationships due to circumstance but be heterosexual.

- Large numbers of adolescents and college-age young people engage at some point in sexual experiences with members of the same sex that could be classified as “experimenting.” (McMillen; Kinsey)
- Homosexual thoughts and fantasies are common in both adolescents and adults.

There is no “common” age when people become aware of same-sex attraction. Some do not “come out” until late in life; others are clear at an early age. There is usually a span of years between the awareness of same sex attraction and the self-labeling as gay. This seems to be changing as society becomes more tolerant of sexual diversity.

As we discussed last month, homosexual people are in the minority, so because of general discomfort with difference there is a good chance that a young girl or boy who is “detected” as being gay will be the brunt of some cruelty or harassment. It is important, therefore, that parents be the first to notice their own children’s inclinations to be able to validate them and get them ready to function as a sexual minority with their self-esteem intact.

Jesus did not tell us who to love, or how to love, but only to love. Being a gay person is about loving others, and wanting to express that love.

There are people who are gay and promiscuous, just as there are straight people who are promiscuous. There are gay pedophiles, just as there are straight ones, although it is much more common for straight men to buy sex from teenagers. Concepts of good and evil are not related to sexuality.

The important thing to communicate to our children is that choices about how to live our lives are not related to who we choose to love.