There was lots of great energy at our Ministries Fair on Feb. 19!

Photos courtesy of Keith Boyum & Tricia Aynes
“Forty” is a number we see throughout the Bible. I asked our resident scholar, Ken Wyant, about the origin of the number a few years ago, and he simply said, “It’s a magical number.” In other words, we don’t know. But what is clear is that in the Bible the number forty represents a significant period. It occurs time and time again: Noah assembled his family and the animals on the ark where they floated in safety as the world they knew ended, until a dove brought him a branch of green; Moses spent forty days and forty nights on Mount Sinai, where in God’s presence, he received the tablets of the law; Elijah took a forty day journey to a cave in the same mountain where he heard the still, small voice of God. The Israelites spent forty years wandering the wilderness en route to the Promised Land, and as we have already heard, forty days and nights was the length of Jesus’ own sojourn in the wilderness.

Forty days represents a time—or perhaps better, a journey—of struggle, growth and self-discovery. A journey “back to basics” in which we become aware of our limitations, our mortality and our dependence on each other and the force of Creation. A journey that shapes who we are and what we’re about.

There is a custom of forty days of prayer for the dead as well, and whatever the origin of it, those forty days are a time of raw emotions and heartfelt questions, a time for learning and receiving the love and hugs and tears of friends and for discovering what it means to lean on one’s spirituality.

Our Ash Wednesday service was very touching for me as I placed ashes on every person’s forehead with the words, “Remember it is from dust you came, and to dust you shall return.” As person after person I knew and cared for came forward, there was an atmosphere of great vulnerability as I became focused on the fact that we are such creatures of love, hope and longing - here for a while to do our best and then gone.

This year I am reading a daily devotional during Lent largely because it was written by one of our theological giants of today, Walter Brueggemann. It is called, A Way other than Our Own: Devotions for Lent. Steve Swope and I were talking about the author, and it reminded me to check for this little gem. It will be my first reading each day on my Kindle app. I look forward to these forty days with you as we reflect together on what this walk means for us today.
A big Thank-You to everyone who attended last month’s Faith & Works Conference with Dr. Jennifer McBride! I’m especially grateful to Pat Sauter for arranging the reception and light breakfast, and to Jim & Tricia Ayne and Ashley & Lynette Herndon for welcoming attendees. Dr. McBride’s books, and copies of her lectures, are available in the church library.

Adult Sunday School classes will have a special treat this month! Rev. Jerry Stinson, pastor emeritus at First Congregational UCC in Long Beach, will introduce several options for progressive faith without a personified deity. Make time to attend these challenging conversations on “Christianity without God: Alternatives to Theism for Followers of the Jesus Way”! (8:45 and 10:00 a.m. each Sunday in Plumer Hall)

Our Midweek Salon speaker will be Dr. Marie Trout. Marie has lived half of her life in Denmark, the other half in California. After spending twenty-five years in artist management of (and marriage to) an international blues rock artist, Marie completed an academic study of modern blues fans for her doctorate. She’ll share why a whole generation has the “Baby Boomer Blues.” (Wednesday, March 8, at 7:00 p.m. in Plumer Hall)

Ken Wyant writes: “Tuesday, February 28, the Bible Study group began the study of Ephesians during our regular session from 4 to 5:30 p.m. Afterward we adjourned to Square One Pizza for more fun. Everyone is welcome, and this is an ideal time to sample our way of reflecting on the Bible. We are following Marcus Borg’s book, “The New Testament in the Order the Books Were Written.” Bibles are provided, but everyone is responsible for bringing their own ideas, opinions and ways to apply the text to a greater understanding of our own beliefs.” (4:00 p.m. each Tuesday in Plumer Hall)

As we begin the season of Lent this month, one suggestion for incorporating earth-care practices into our lives is a Carbon Fast, modeled after the traditional Lenten practice of fasting. The Carbon Fast was initiated by the UCC and has been endorsed by other denominations and faith groups; thousands of people from all fifty states and at least twelve other countries have experienced this opportunity to become more conscious and conscientious in their daily lives.

Carbon Fast activities can range from the very simple (e.g. eliminating “vampire” electrical use) to the moderately challenging (e.g. taking “military” showers) to more long term (e.g. buying local produce). Think of each activity as a form of spiritual practice, a concrete way of participating in the stewardship of God’s creation, with do-able actions that can make a difference.

Two speakers will present this month on Tolerance & Violence in the Mind of God, at California State University, Dominguez Hills. On Thursday, March 2, Dr. Michael Jerryson will speak at 2:30 on “Justifying Violence in a Buddhist World.” And on Thursday, March 16, Dr. Larycia A. Hawkins will present “God Has Had Enough…of Mere Religious Tolerance.” For more information, and to register for these free events, go online to www.csudh.edu/mindofgod.
February 2009

Notes from the liturgical artist, the Rev. Brenda J. Grauer

Each of the art pieces is a visual reflection upon one of the Hebrew Bible texts from the three-year lectionary cycle for Lent. I have noted the text used as the basis for each piece with the notes below.

Banner 1 (photo #1 above): Exodus 17:1-7
Distance, barrenness, hopelessness, fear…and thirst. And water comes out of a rock!

Table Frontal (photo #2 above): Ezekiel 37:1-14
As I pondered the words in verse 1, “the spirit of the Lord set me down in the middle of a valley…” I realized that in order for a valley to be formed, there has to be higher land surrounding it. And then I recalled the words of Psalm 121, “I lift up my eyes to the hills, from where my help comes.” With this connection of texts, I could feel and smell the fresh, cool, restorative breeze of being in the hills. Could that breeze be the source of the breath…. “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these…”?

Banner 2 (photo #3 above): Isaiah 55:1-9, and Isaiah 43:16-21
These texts are both comforting and energizing. They speak of the nature of God – present in the wilderness and in all places and times. Just as God has been present in past history, God is still speaking, active in creative, excitingly life-giving ways, that often present themselves in surprise: “Water in the wilderness and rivers in the desert; a pathway through the wilderness,” signs of life and care, promise and love. How beautifully and rich the wilderness is transformed by the life-giving presence of God. But the texts don’t just set forth a picture of God’s nature. They also issue forth invitation to us: “Come and listen, so that you may live.” They invite us into this picture of transformed wilderness.

Pulpit Hanging (photo #4 above): Isaiah 50:4-9
This Isaiah text is the only text that is repeated each year in the Lenten lectionary. It is a difficult text upon which to “look.” It speaks of the call to the prophet Isaiah (and to us) to teach those who are “weary,” to “listen” to those who are taught, by speaking the “word” of God. And then the text suggests that two things that will happen. Those who are weak, weary, poor, and ill will be lifted up by God’s word spoken. But there will also be those persons and powerful institutions that will condemn the word spoken. They will lash out, confront, strike, insult, and spit upon the prophet. The word of God, meant to heal the weary in the world, is not an easy word to teach. Though beautiful, it is under attack.

About the Artist
The Rev. Brenda Grauer is the founder of In Stitches and is ordained by the United Church of Christ as a Minister of the Arts. Commencing her professional ministry at In Stitches in 1992, Brenda has created thousands of liturgical fabric art pieces for clergy and churches across this country.
The Building Task Force (BTF), working with our talented architects, domusstudio architecture, continues to make good progress on Phase 1a preconstruction planning.

On February 22, we submitted our permit application to the City of Irvine. Over the next month, they will review our application and then provide back comments and any requests for clarifications/additional information. Our goal is to have their approval by mid-May.

Following Administration Board approval, Wieland Corporation has joined our preconstruction planning team. By partnering with a contractor early in the project, we gain valuable input on our plans and better control over project costs.

The BTF interviewed two firms, both well-respected in the field with prior experience working on construction projects with our architects. Wieland was our top choice and we are glad to have them join our team. Later this month, we’ll have a budget meeting with them to see how we are doing regarding project costs.

We have begun reaching out to key neighbors to update them. We’ve reviewed plans with Woodbridge Village Association and Journey Christian Church. Both were glad to hear about our progress and supportive of the Alton frontage plans. Next, Pastor Paul will be reaching out to St. Paul's Greek Orthodox Church.

In Phase 1a, we will add a single-story structure to our current Sanctuary, bringing much-needed new space to our aging campus. We’ll offer an exuberant welcome to the community with a beautiful frontage along Alton Parkway, featuring our voice and mission through Micah 6:8 represented in multiple world languages. A widened driveway entrance, accessible walkway and new low-water-use landscaping will be inviting to visitors and neighbors alike.

We are currently planning to represent Micah 6:8 in approximately 28 languages. These languages were chosen based on: (1) most commonly spoken in Irvine/Orange County/California/the United States and throughout the world; (2) associated with world religions; and (3) spoken at UCC Global Mission sites. We’ll be meeting with a designer as soon as possible to help make sure this signature piece is readable, functional, welcoming and beautiful - to help us bring a conceptual vision to a stunning final product.

Along with administrative space and staff offices, we'll add three configurable meeting rooms, each with a capacity of 25 people. Moveable sound-proof partitions will allow us to combine two meeting rooms for larger groups or all three meeting rooms into one large space for approximately 80 people. The new coffee corner, outdoor seating and back patio will offer gathering places for conversation and fellowship. Once the new building is completed, the current church office will be remodeled into a new classroom for use by our preschool and Sunday School.

These new indoor and outdoor spaces will reflect our commitment to green faith as well as seamlessly integrate with our current building, with complementary colors and finishes. A “samples board” is currently on display in the Narthex – please stop by and see our proposed color palette and materials.

Once we have permits and bids in hand, we will present this project for congregational review and approval. We anticipate that this will take place at the Spring Meeting in mid-May. At that time, we – as a congregation – will decide if we are ready to break ground on this exciting project.

BTF members represent the congregation and are your eyes/ears/voices for this project. These hardworking members are: Mark Allen, Keith Boyum, Cindy O’Dell, Jim Raver, Anne Rosse (chair), Pat Sauter, Michael Spindle and Pastor Paul. For more information, please contact any BTF member or email btfchair@iucc.org.
Please keep up your generous giving to our “Embracing the Future” capital campaign - every pledge payment brings us closer to being able to break ground on this exciting project!

At the Spring Meeting (in mid-May), with bids and permits in hand, we anticipate presenting this construction project for congregational review, asking for your approval to move forward with ground breaking. Between now and then, here’s what you can do:

- Continue to make your pledge payments as generously as you can. The more construction funds on hand, the better options we will have.
- If you haven’t joined your church family in supporting this project, we invite you to do so. We welcome new pledges at any time. We are still actively fundraising and would love to have your support!
- If you’ve completed your pledge and find yourself able to give us just a little more, we would be so grateful.

In the next month or two, we are hoping to announce room namings in the new building. We also want to honor and thank everyone who pledged to the campaign. We’ll be listing names and dedications (for those who included a dedication with their pledge) but absolutely no giving levels will be listed. We will only publish your name(s) if you have given us permission to do so. Please watch the bulletin for more information, including the option of adding a dedication to your campaign pledge.

Campaign pledges are payable over three years (through July 31, 2019). For those who can, we would deeply appreciate pledge completion as quickly as possible. Being able to collect most campaign pledges by the time construction of the new building is done (projected to be in Summer 2018) will help IUCC stay financially strong.

When submitting a paper or electronic check, please note “building” on the memo line. When submitting a check that includes both your annual offering (“stewardship”) and campaign pledge (“building”), please also indicate the split on the memo line. These actions will make sure we are applying your gift correctly. For pledge payments that involve the transfer of stocks or securities, or if you are doing an IRA distribution, please contact the Church Office.

For questions, assistance with your pledge or to learn more about this exciting project, please contact capitalcampaign@iucc.org. Because of your generous investment in our future, IUCC is another step closer to a campus that supports our commitment to nurture tomorrow’s leaders and follow Christ’s teachings to love and care for our neighbors, be good stewards of our environment and live in peace. Thank you!
Like many of you, I have some favorite books that have resonated with me. One of my favorites is *Where the Wild Things Are*, which contains a section where “wild things” join a “rumpus.” Picture Keith reading to our kids – and all of them breaking into a wild rumpus with arms waving and feet stomping. Like me, I think many of you have a similar grin-provoking memory.

Another book that I remember fondly is *The Little Prince*. In the story, the fox befriends a little prince and teaches him some important lessons about life and relationships. The fox says, “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.” In particular, the fox stresses the importance of “wasting time” with those you care about - it is the time you have spent with someone seemingly doing nothing important that makes the relationship grow, prosper and become vital in our lives. I’m sure that we’ve all had moments in our adult lives that may seem like “wasting” time. In reality, those moments give us the opportunity to get to know people better, to let acquaintance move toward friendship.

I was thinking about that idea during the Ministry Fair on Sunday, February 19. Plumer Hall was packed with people-all “wasting time” together. The energy and vibrancy in the room was palpable. Members and friends of IUCC were learning about the remarkable array of opportunities to get involved in the IUCC faith community. People gathered around tables and interacted with each other and with our marvelous Ministry and Committee chairs. Folks asked questions, received information, and perhaps, signed up for a particular event, activity or to become part of a ministry. What seemed like a way to spend a few moments before going home or going to church, became an investment in the life of IUCC!

If you were not able to attend the Ministries Fair or did not have a chance to sign up for a ministry or committee while you were there, the next column provides a brief description and people to contact for each. Please look them over, contact the appropriate chair and become an active part of IUCC! I look forward to “wasting time” with you soon.

In faith and community, Renae

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**Ministries of IUCC**

**Adult Programs** Develops, plans and implements educational programs for adults. Works with the Director of Adult Programs. *(Jim Aynes)*

**Advocates for Peace &Justice** Promotes causes associated with our identification as an Open and Affirming, Just Peace, and Global Mission Church. *(Dave Smith)*

**Congregational Care** Provides support to the church community in times of need by praying, sending cards, visiting, and providing prayer shawls, meals, and rides. *(Barb Carse and Lorraine Fox)*

**Communication** Educates the community about IUCC’s vision and invites them to join us in fulfilling that vision. *(Nancy Dreckman and Ashley Herndon)*

**Deacons** Prepares the church facilities for worship services including set-up, oversight and clean-up. *(Craig Tyrl)*

**Fellowship** Arranges activities and programs which help friends and members develop a closer sense of community within the church. *(August Lobato)*

**Hospitality** Provides coffee service and refreshments concurrent with worship services and at the request of other ministries or staff. *(Pat Sauter)*

**Mission and Service** Identifies and informs members of opportunities to promote the values of love, justice, and peace. *(Felicity Figueroa)*

**Music** Supports the Music program and events of IUCC. *(Suellen Rowe)*

**New Member Development** Welcomes and provides information about IUCC to prospective members and educates them about ways to be involved in the life of the church. *(Tommie Kozlov and Randy Romine)*

**Stephen Ministry** Provides care to individuals experiencing crisis or challenge. *(Brian Pearcy-Schofield)*

**Worship** Assists the Pastoral leadership in planning the order of worship, preparing the sacraments and maintaining the atmosphere of the worship service. *(Michelle Lin)*

**Young People** Plans and implements educational and social programs for children, youth, young adults and young families. *(Jessie Billings)*

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**Committees of IUCC**

**Childcare** Provides strategic overall direction and oversight to the Child Care Center to ensure that it provides a quality program compatible with the overall mission of IUCC and acts as the liaison to the Administrative Board and the Congregation. *(Laura Long)*

**Building and Grounds** Maintains the facilities of the church with assistance from staff and volunteers. *(Wayne Banwell)*

**Fund Development** Organizes and implements the stewardship campaign and oversees other fundraising opportunities. *(Bill Lawrence)*

**Technology** Provides support regarding technology to staff and ministries. *(Eric Burley)*
There are two subjects I want to address today:

First, we can be proud of our church body, the UCC, as we have a mandate from them to "address the severe nature of the global warming crisis as one of the most urgent threats to humankind and, indeed, all of God's precious planet earth." (The 26th General Synod of the UCC)

Our church body is taking a stand in the midst of a diversity of beliefs regarding climate change. Some deny that climate change is a reality and they work to discredit and hide the truth, even lining the pockets of fossil fuel providers. Others are unaware, disinterested, and apathetic to the crisis. Thank you UCC for the strong commitment.

Brooks Berndt, UCC Minister for Environmental Justice, writes of the necessity of leadership among faith communities. “While we are still building a database of environmentally active congregations, it would currently appear that less than 100 of our roughly 5,000 churches have been recognized or certified as ‘green’ by any organization. For the purposes of comparison, there are currently 1,366 Open and Affirming Congregations in the UCC.” Thank you IUCC for being among the congregations that are working towards this designation.

Our GREENfaith team is working on the four areas of requirement for a Creation Justice designation. Team members Howard Emery and Tony Dover are developing an Energy Management Plan. This is in response to the approved resolution of the 29th General Synod of the UCC, where it is stated that our church buildings are significant contributors to climate change and congregations are encouraged to take steps towards carbon neutrality by adopting the following targets:

- All churches are encouraged to conduct an energy audit.
- Buildings undergoing new construction and/or major renovations strive to be carbon neutral (operate with a net-zero use of fossil fuel, greenhouse gas emitting energy) by
  - Reducing electricity and natural gas usage
  - Generating on-site renewable power, and/or
  - Purchasing renewable energy (suggested 20% maximum of total energy usage, in alignment with the standards of the 2030 Challenge. The U.S. Conference of Mayors adopted a challenge for City Buildings to reduce carbon emissions by 2030).
- Existing church buildings not undergoing major renovation at this time are encouraged to take steps to meet a fossil fuel, greenhouse gas emitting, energy consumption performance standard of at least 60% below the regional average for houses of worship or that building type.
- Congregations are requested to encourage their members to meet these standards in their own homes.

The above may be more information than you wanted to hear! I hope it helps you to understand why we are developing an Energy Management Plan.

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Now to the second subject. I’ll be brief. World Water Day, March 22, as designated by the United Nations, is a reminder to pay attention to our use (and abuse) of water. Archbishop Desmond M. Tutu says it well:

How differently we would regard water if we had to carry every drop we used ourselves.

May these words ring in our ears each day as we use this most precious resource. If you need some suggestions, the GREENfaith team can be of assistance. Are you remembering that you should not pour grease or medicine down the drain into the water supply? Also, it is recommended that we put scraps in the trash rather than running the water for the garbage disposal. These are two I’m trying to implement.

One final word. YouTube has many good films. Check out “Overpopulation. The Future of Planet Earth.” Our team member, Eileen Vincent, gives this an A rating and says, “Funny, great, has charts and graphs.”

Every day is Earth Day,

Vivian Johnson

Team members: Judy Curry, Tony Dover, Nancy Dreckman, Howard Emery, Carol Getz, and Eileen Vincent
Miss Lily’s Green Tips

Dear Readers,

I love a rainy day. The raindrops plip plop and make music like piano keys. I love the smell of the fresh air and watching the hillsides turn from brown to green.

My niece, Iris, is a conservationist. When it rains, she puts out a rainbucket to capture the drops. She recycles the raindrops for her indoor plants and for housecleaning. Iris also takes short showers and turns the water off when she brushes her teeth; and, she will be celebrating World Water Day in March.

So, please, dear Readers, be wise with water. Love it, cherish it, and conserve it.

Love,
Miss Lily

IUCC got into the spirit of Go Green Sunday

On Feb. 26, our GREENfaith Team encouraged the congregation to walk, bike, and ride-share to church. Those who drove a hybrid or electric car had a specially designated spot to park. As you can see, they had a lot of customers!

Photos by Tricia Aynes & Sarah Fiske-Phillips
Midweek Salon
Wednesday, March 8, 7 p.m.
Speaker: Dr. Marie Trout

This month’s Midweek Salon guest is Dr. Marie Trout, who will be speaking about why a whole generation has the “Baby Boomer Blues.” *Marie is the author of the recently published book, “The Blues-why it still hurts so good.”*

IUCC Annual Women’s Retreat
at Pilgrim Pines
Friday afternoon May 5 - Sunday morning May 7, 2017

Women on the Way
Walking with the Women of Jesus’ Journey

Our facilitator, the Rev. Mary Scifres, will incorporate music, art, drama and conversation to encourage a creative journey into the stories of Jesus and the women scripture places in the Jesus story. We will explore the women who traveled with Jesus (Mary the listener, Martha the worker, Mary the disciple, Mary the mother, unnamed mothers-in-law, unnamed sister and other disciples) and use them to give us bread for the journey, food for the soul, and strength for the body. If you want to request a specific woman’s story to be included let Mary know at maryscifres@gmail.com, and she will integrate that story into the retreat plan.

We will share time in a variety of ways: eating together, participating in both large group structured activities under Mary’s leadership, and small group interest activities such as hiking, yoga, guided meditation, bird/nature walking, journaling, open, structured small group conversation, puzzles, knitting and needlework, labyrinth walking.

As always, reasonably priced massages will be available throughout the weekend. Register online (IUCC.org/register), or on the patio. $140 flat fee.

A request from the organizers: If you are planning to attend the retreat and would feel comfortable and confident doing so, we are in need of a volunteer to lead one or two sessions of simple yoga. If you can help, please contact Lorraine at (949) 916-0176.

A New Approach to Coffee Hour

Groups of volunteers may still sign up for doing it all (as done up until now) dividing food, set up and clean up among the group.

Now, for those who can't do it all, the choice can be made between “doing it” or donating. The donations can be in the form of $$$ (dollars) or “doughnuts.” There will be appropriate sign up lists, so people can choose the Sundays for which they are volunteering and we can know if enough refreshments will be donated or need to be purchased.

Sign up sheets are on the patio for the next quarter, including Palm Sunday, April 9, and Easter, April 16.

We need everyone’s help to make this important part of our Sundays happen.

OGHS Special offering will be Sunday, March 26, 2017.
Watch for materials and giving envelope in your home mailbox during the week of March 20th.

“One Great Hour of sharing enables the United Church of Christ to reach people and communities affected by disaster, displacement or poverty.”

OGHS Special offering will be Sunday, March 26, 2017.
Watch for materials and giving envelope in your home mailbox during the week of March 20th.
32nd Annual Great American Write-In  
Saturday, March 18, from 9:30 - 1:30  
Delhi Community Center  
505 E. Central Ave., Santa Ana

Women For: Orange County, a non-partisan women's group, is pleased to present the 32nd Annual Great American Write-In. This free event is offered to the public every year to provide attendees with the means to influence policy decisions by writing letters to their legislators. It's also a great opportunity for participants to experience first-hand what informed citizen involvement in government is all about.

More than 60 different organizations and advocacy groups (including IUCC’s Advocates for Peace and Justice!) will be represented with information regarding some of today’s most vital issues, including education, health care, human and civil rights and the environment. Attendees are invited to visit the various tables and voice their opinions by writing letters to government and corporate decision-makers in the hopes of bringing about constructive change.

There is no cost for this event; Women For: Orange County will supply the post cards, stationery, postage, refreshments and parking. Last year, nearly 300 attendees generated over 2,200 letters and postcards.

February was a busy month for the Music Ministry. We held our Spring choir retreat to prepare for the upcoming June 11th concert. Mark your calendars, you will not want to miss this concert of all music written by female composers.

February also saw significant progress in our search for a new accompanist to fill the vacancy created when Chris Luthi resigned last year. An ad was placed in January, which gave us a pool of approximately twenty applicants. This past week the Music Ministry and a few choir members auditioned nine applicants gleaned from this list. We feel fortunate that we had so much interest in the position, and heard some wonderful players. The process covered all the skills needed in our accompanist, as well as an interview to determine if the person is a good candidate in other important ways. We have selected the top candidates who will be playing in services this month, then a final selection will be made. We hope to have the new accompanist hired in April.

We want to thank Connie Jones for the tremendous job she has done in the interim position. When Chris Luthi left, we envisioned having to hire multiple subs to fill the Thursday night rehearsals and Sunday services. With Connie stepping in, she made a potentially difficult time flow seamlessly. She has been such an asset and blessing to the choir and congregation. We cannot thank you enough, Connie!

The United Church of Christ will celebrate Women's Week this year during the first week of March, March 5-11, 2017. This coincides with other denominational and secular observances of Women's Week including International Women's Day on March 8. (from www.ucc.org)
On February 17, we were privileged to welcome Dr. Jennifer McBride as our keynote speaker at IUCC’s annual Faith & Works Conference. Her message was powerful, timeless, and thought-provoking as she challenged us to become true disciples of Jesus by taking concrete actions – actions that reduce the distance between those who are privileged and those who are oppressed. She suggested we ask ourselves these questions: What are we being called to as a church? What can we do as a church community together that we can’t do alone? Her answer was simple: we can create a space where others can come. McBride posited that “In order to be faithful to the gospel, Christians must become disciples of, not simply believers in, Jesus.” Discipleship means taking real steps to narrow the space between the housed and the homeless and between the free and those in prison. “Worship without justice is empty,” she said. “Jesus calls us to acts of solidarity with the poor and outcast. Jesus calls us to a place where building of a beloved community is possible.”

“Progressive churches say they don’t take the Bible literally, but some parts of the Bible are meant to be taken literally,” she stressed. “Church is the building of a beloved community. If you are doing the deep work and see inside, then you can invite others in. Look at what you are doing as a church and ask yourselves: is this what we as a church are being called to do? It doesn’t take a whole lot of people – it just takes committed people. It takes single-mindedness.”

To be true disciples, she believes we must reduce the distance between ourselves and those on the other side of the social order. By following Jesus through the liturgical seasons, we can become disciples who discover what the good news is. By living within the biblical story’s seasons, the Bible becomes exciting in a whole new way.

Her theology has been shaped by her studies and her seven years of work with women in prison and with Open Door, an intentionally inclusive community in Georgia that is engaged in works of mercy and justice focusing on homelessness and incarceration.

“Dr. McBride is Associate Dean of Doctor of Ministry Programs and Continuing Education and Assistant Professor of Theology & Ethics, McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago. She is the author of two books: The Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness (Oxford University Press, 2011) and Radical Discipleship (Fortress Press, 2017). She is co-editor of Bonhoeffer and King: Their Legacies and Import for Christian Social Thought (Fortress Press, 2010).”

The renewing Spirit of Pentecost calls for a new ecclesial form for privileged churches in the U.S. to become new social spaces that make beloved community concrete, however fragile their expressions may be,” McBride writes in her book Radical Discipleship. She suggests that “houses of hospitality be integrated within existing congregations across the U.S., rooting the congregation in works of mercy and justice that inaugurate beloved community and make visible God’s redemptive reign.” To illustrate her point, she lifts up three examples of such hospitality houses:

1. **Manna House in Memphis** is a non-residential facility conceived as a “living room” – a place of hospitality for the homeless. Open three mornings a week, it provides them with coffee, showers, bathrooms, and clothing. It seeks to know them as persons while implementing the practices of hospitality, justice, and peace-making.
2. **SAME Café in Denver, Colorado** provides healthy meals at a “pay what you can” restaurant. Its philosophy is that everyone deserves a chance to eat healthy meals at an affordable price while being treated with dignity.
3. **Magdalene House in Nashville, Tennessee** is a two year residential program offering housing, recreation, and job training to women who have survived human trafficking, forced prostitution, and addiction.

All these places combine works of mercy with struggles for justice. Works of mercy drive the search for justice through friendship with real human beings.
“D & D”= Dogma and Doctrine, which reminds me of the riddle: “Why don’t cats go to church?” ... Too much dogma!” (Shame on me!)

Watch what happens to most of the D & D when the theistic god of “yesterday” is promoted to oversee the entire universe. One can no longer think about God as a small Master Puppeteer, but more in terms of a “force” which some call “Creation” or “Ground of all Being.” This “force” has no gender, sexuality, children, color or religion. It’s simply there, everywhere, creating. I have given up trying to define this force which, for me, is indescribable.

St. Paul, Matthew, Luke and John all lived in the four-tier world (Underworld, Earth, Firmament, and Heaven) that was highly influenced by the Greek culture, which seemed to have gods all over the place, so it was easy for them to promote Jesus from itinerant teacher/preacher, to The Messiah, The Son of God or The Paschal Lamb who died for our sins. John, in his gospel, elevated Jesus to be God, since before the beginning (see John's Prologue, John1:1-18). All this happened in an 80-year period. But today, we find folks suggesting that Jesus needs to be viewed as simply a fellow human.

Here is the fallout to our D & D by viewing Jesus as human. First, we no longer have a “Virgin Birth” (it’s an oxymoron). Jesus now must have a human father, maybe Joseph, but no one is sure who Jesus’ father was. The two birth stories now become metaphors, not history. Next goes the doctrine of an immaculate conception, the sinlessness of Mary. Mary now joins the ranks of sinners. She is no longer a virgin.

Eradicating the cult of Mariology is going to be difficult, but viewing Mary as simply a woman who had a baby should help. Next, Jesus is going to lose all his titles. He is no longer The Son of God, the Paschal Lamb, The Messiah, The Son of Man, The Lamb of God, The Propitiation for our sins and on and on. He is simply one of us…with a lot of charisma. It’s this human Jesus with whom I identify, despite all his “warts.”

Next to go is the Trinity, my personal hair-shirt. I’ll never have to preach or teach about it again!

With the eradication of the four-tier world goes the fantasy of heaven, hell, purgatory, Pearly Gates and the gate keeper, St. Peter. Gone are “report cards” sharing every misdeed in our life, long lines of those waiting for a decision, judgment and a bunch of lousy jokes.

And at long last, all the ancient creeds will go in the trash can of history.

Since we have promoted God to be a force, we can now return the Bible (the world’s best seller, which hardly anyone reads) to its rightful authors, our fellow human beings, who had a point of view. Because it had human writers, we can now state that sections of it are boring, full of contradictions, and that some things are just plain wrong - without being stuck by lightning. BUT it is also full of great truths, and some sections never fail to inspire.

Let’s look at what is called the Kingdom of God which, for many, is “pie-in-the-sky-in the great bye and bye.” Now take out the “g,” put in a hyphen, and we have the Kin-dom of Creation which is here and now, driven by the “Spirit of Agape.”

Prayer is no longer a shopping list for NoOne UpThere to do for us but becomes our “marching orders” so that we can go out and “minister to the least of these my brothers and sisters…” (Matthew 25:40)

The Second Coming isn’t a fantasy about leading an army to lala land but is a reality when the Followers of Jesus spend their time, talents and treasures to “serve the hurting world” (see Matthew 25 for specific directions). The so-called Divine Plan is simply the command to for all of us to do Agape 24/7.

Which Jesus do you like? The one laden with all the D & D or the human one?

~Fr. Bil Aulenbach, retired Episcopal priest and member of IUCC.

My fourth book will be on the market in May 2017. For a sneak preview, look at my website www.peacelovejoyhope.com My blog site is inside the website: “What Bil Is Saying.” It’s provocative!
In our discussion of helping our children (and others we care about) to increase their self-awareness by providing constructive feedback, we've talked about six “conditions” we want to meet in order to insure that our feedback is, indeed, constructive and helpful. Last month we discussed the principle of being sure that our feedback is about current behavior and not about behavior that occurred in the past that cannot be changed. This month we’ll talk about the importance of “specificity” in helping someone to examine their own behavior, if they are willing.

Even when we use self-discipline and stick to our “conditions” in a feedback conversation, we are also taking the risk of causing personal discomfort for the person we are talking to. They will usually begin to have an idea that something challenging and uncomfortable is about to come up, and they will usually begin to build up internal defenses. We will talk about defensive behavior at length as we conclude this series, but for now it is important to know that “defensive behavior” is not meant for other people but is a way for a person to protect themselves against unpleasant feelings. Giving feedback to anyone about behavior that is bothering us is almost sure to arouse unpleasant feelings, and therefore we can be sure that the person we are talking to – whether two or seventy-two - will want to give themselves some emotional “armor” to protect the hurt feelings they anticipate. For this reason, it is very important not to be “general,” or unclear, about the behavior we are asking someone to examine. If we are not clear, the emotional defenses will keep the other person from acknowledging – to us or themselves - what we are trying to talk about. So feedback, if it is going to be received, must be extremely clear and specific.

Telling a child that their behavior was “rude” is not feedback, but passing judgment on something they said or did. If we want a child to know they were “rude,” we want to either quote what they said or paint a picture of how they said it, or what they did, and then tell them how it affected us. For example: “When you said……,” or, “when you slapped me on the leg, rolled your eyes, etc…….” I felt….. (angry, hurt, disrespected, etc.). As we discussed earlier, feedback is holding up a “mirror” in which someone can examine their own behavior so that they can understand why others respond as they do.

Words like “rude,” “disrespectful,” “bragging,” “hurtful,” “dismissive,” or any other adjective you can think of, are not descriptive enough to allow the person to understand why you are unhappy with what they said or did. “You’re always late,” for example, is first of all probably not true because no one is always late, and not helpful because “late” can be dismissed. “I had to wait for you ten minutes on Monday, fifteen minutes on Tuesday, and fifteen minutes again today” is specific enough to make it difficult to dismiss. “You always interrupt people,” again, is probably not true. If we want someone to examine whether they have a tendency to interrupt others, we should give them some specific examples and then tell them we’ll point it out the next time it happens.

There are two pieces of good news about holding yourself to specific examples. One, it will keep you from exaggerating something that bothers you when you realize you can’t come up with enough specific examples. Two, it will keep the other person from avoiding your truth when you are able to provide words, quotes, examples, descriptions, etc. that will give them a chance to explore why they are having trouble getting along with you and/or others.

None of us enjoys hearing about personal behavior that has negatively affected someone we care about. However, the longer someone goes without hearing about themselves, the more alienated they become from themselves and their effect on others. This will make it much harder for them to listen to feedback later.

When we are honest with children early, they can become accustomed to knowing the tendencies they have that can bother other people, and then instead of getting defensive or obnoxious they can learn to say, “Yes, I know, and I’m sorry - I’m working on that.” This will end up being a “gift” not only to themselves but to everyone with whom they interact.