## From the Pastor's Desk …

After some restful time away, I hope to see many of you on Wednesday night (Sept. 5) at the Pastor’s Potluck behind the pre-school. This has been a good use of time for me – a vacation with Carl in Alaska, discovering a wonderful cousin and her partner in Vancouver, lots of reading and reflection at our cabin in Big Bear, and a few excursions to places I might not have visited otherwise.

Sundays are clearly taken for me, so I don’t get the chance to visit other churches to see what they do. Last year, I visited UCC and mainline Protestant churches. This year, I decided to attend some of the conservative mega-churches that we hear so much about, and it was an eye-opening experience for me. I will share some of that with you soon, and the experience has made me more than ready to be back in our community-centered congregation. I have missed you! Being blessed with a committed and hard-working staff, I also know that you were in good hands while I was away.

I look forward to seeing you on Sunday, September 9, as our wonderful choir

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### The Newsletter For September!

**Important:**

If you, or someone you know, wishes to receive this *News & Notes* but cannot access the Internet, please do either of the following: [a] let the church office know at (949) 733-0220, and we can mail a printed copy; or [b] just pick up a printed copy in the narthex on a Sunday morning.

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http://www.iucc.org
returns and we begin a new church season together. The following Sunday (September 16) is our big picnic in Mason Park—always a good time.

I do hope you are considering being a part of a Comma Group this year. The theme we will be working with is, “Tough Questions” and the conversation will start in worship services at the beginning of every month. For example, our first topic will be Prayer and the theme of our Communion Sunday on October 7 will focus on this spiritual discipline. The conversation will move from there into our Comma Groups.

[See also Rev. Wyant’s article below, page 9 – ed.]

**Comma Groups**, in case you are new to IUCC, are small groups that meet for a meal and discussion, usually in members’ homes. They are a great way to establish a small, caring community of friends while discovering more about yourself and your faith journey in conversation with others who are also finding their way.

This year, our small groups will be integrated more into the themes that we will be discussing as a church. Of course, you don’t have to join one…our worship and our distinct programs for kids, youth and adults will continue to provide a welcome to everyone as they always have. But, experience has taught us that being connected in small groups helps to deepen our relationship to our faith and to our church community as we practice that faith together in our mission.

I hope this will be an invigorating change for us all—I know that as far as I am concerned, it will give me topics that move me to look beyond the weekly lectionary at least once a month and focus more on some of the “tough questions” we ask about our faith as Progressive Christians.

I look forward to reconnecting with each one of you and learning about what is new in your life. It has been wonderful to be away…but even better to come back looking forward to a new season together.

As you read on in this issue, you will see how many things are going on in our various programs and ministries. It is a great time to be a part of IUCC!

See you in church—

Yours,

Pastor Paul
From the Associate Pastor

I refuse to buy into this recently oft-repeated notion that summer is over.

So what if Labor Day has passed?
So what if kids are going back to school?
These things mean nothing!

I contend defiantly that summer is an astronomically-determined season—and that means it lasts until the autumnal equinox, which this year occurs on September 22. So, let us continue on in our summertime festivities! And the church is offered plenty of opportunities this month to do exactly that.

This Wednesday, September 5, will be our final Pastors’ Potluck for the year. We will welcome back Pastor Paul with a backyard barbeque at 6pm. Then Women’s Fellowship is sponsoring a dessert bar at 7pm followed by a presentation from Nadia Hassan of the Villa Park Peace Coalition at 7:30pm. Ms. Hassan will be speaking on her efforts towards creating greater interfaith understanding and tolerance in the wake of anti-Muslim bigotry in her community. I believe this gathering will serve as the perfect conclusion to our unit of interfaith learning in the Sunday School, wherein the students spent one week each studying Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism.

Sunday, September 9, will be our annual Sunday School Kick-Off and Registration Fair. Parents will receive info packets and are asked to complete registration forms. And for the kids, there will be fun activities and games to play. And we just need ONE MORE TEACHER to work with our 4th-6th graders in Sunday School to complete our teams for this quarter. The lucky volunteer will receive curriculum and training and work with a team to create her/his own schedule of teaching once per month. It’s also a lot of fun!

Then the following Sunday, September 16, we will continue to celebrate summer with our annual Church Picnic in Mason Park after Second Service. Barbequed delights, delicious potluck dishes, and fun and games in the beautiful sunshine with your church family await all participants...

And while it may seem that I mentioned it disparagingly (in relation to its supposed signaling of the end of summer), of course I do not in any way intend to malign Labor Day. We have the Labor Movement to thank not only for this weekend, but for every weekend, as well as for overtime pay, an eight-hour workday, the minimum wage, paid vacation, sick days, safety standards, child labor laws, health benefits, retirement security, and unemployment compensation. The great social reformer and leading abolitionist Frederick Douglass said, “Power concedes nothing without a demand. If never did, and it never will.” All of these facets of the modern American workplace that some of us
take for granted were hard earned through great struggle and perseverance by workers of every stripe.

May God hasten the day when we all truly take to heart the instructions given in Deuteronomy 24:14, Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns. For those with further interest in the connection between faith and workers’ rights, Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ, [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org)) is an amazing organization working at that intersection and offering all kinds of great resources. And Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) is one of IWJ’s local partners, which takes action on behalf of low-wage workers right here in our own OC community.

And as far as jokingly writing off the practice of kids beginning another school year, of course that’s just bluster as well, intended only to shift focus to the continuance of summery fun. In fact, this year I notice I’m approaching this annual ritual with a keener sense of attention. Perhaps this is because I’m imagining just a few short years from now when my own child may begin school. Yes, that means I’m announcing that I’m pregnant! Seth and I are joyfully expecting a child to arrive in mid-March. As I complete my first trimester feeling good and healthy, I also count amongst my many blessings the ongoing support of this congregation.

Thank you for all you do. I look forward to seeing each of you soon as we continue to celebrate the season as well as our community together at IUCC.

In God’s peace, love, and justice,
Pastor Elizabeth
I feel like I am really starting to settle into my role as youth coordinator at IUCC. I have had a great time getting to know many of the awesome youth we have at our church and am excited for what September holds for all of us!

In August, there were many opportunities for our youth to serve in our community and learn about other faiths. Some of the highlights were volunteering at the OC Pride Festival and the Catholic Worker House in East Los Angeles, attending Shabbat, and learning stories and faith practices from our guest Sunday school teachers.

Looking to September, the youth will have the opportunity to meet a Global Missions intern, serve alongside the Global Missions committee at the GM Luncheon, attend the Irvine Global Village Festival, and spend some time at the beach. My primary focus for our youth group this month is to create a stronger sense of community in which all are able to ask questions, find support, and of course, have fun!

**Important Youth Dates:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept 9th</td>
<td>Sunday school kick-off and youth group lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 16th</td>
<td>Church Picnic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 23rd</td>
<td>Global Missions Luncheon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 29th</td>
<td>Irvine Global Village Festival followed by beach bonfire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 6th</td>
<td>Game Night and youth overnight</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 12-14th</td>
<td>Family Camp</td>
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<td>Oct 21</td>
<td>Youth Sunday</td>
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I wish you all peace as you transition from summer to a new school year,

Erika
Greetings!

I am excited to report that our youth have been very involved in IUCC’s investigation of becoming a Global Missions church. In the past year, our youth have been engaged in mission both internationally, on trips to Guatemala and Mexico, and more locally. Some of the local mission opportunities that have resonated most strongly with our youth have been projects with the Catholic Workers’ Movement in both Santa Ana and East Los Angeles. Looking to the month ahead, there are many opportunities to support the work of Global Missions and our wonderful youth.

Make sure to mark your calendars for the Global Missions luncheon on September 23rd. Enjoy good food, served by the wonderful IUCC youth group, good company, and the opportunity to learn more about how IUCC can be involved in the important work Global Missions is doing.

The youth will also be hosting Servant Days in the near future. If you have house work, yard work, or special projects that need to be done, please consider enlisting the help of members of the IUCC youth group! Donations from this event will go toward a Global Missions scholarship fund, which helps cover the cost of youth mission trips. Stay tuned for updates on this event!

Peace,

Erika

SAVE THE DATE: Sunday, September 23, 2012
KICKOFF GLOBAL MISSION LUNCH, 12:30pm in Plumer Hall.

All sorts of wonderful things are going to happen that day starting with our Youth serving a delicious lunch.

See below for details.
For more information call Bil Aulenbach (949) 240-2933
The IUCC Mission & Service Ministry Invites You, Family and Friends to the
GLOBAL MISSION KICKOFF LUNCHEON

Sunday, September 23, 2012 12:30 pm Plumer Hall

• A delicious lunch served by our Youth. Cost: $00.00 BUT...there will be a FREE WILL offering. All proceeds to IUCC Youth Mission Programs. (Checks to: IUCC...Youth Mission)

• After lunch: Special Program for the children in Child Care Center.

Program:
Welcome  Pastor Paul
2012-13 Goals  Bil Aulenbach, Chair, Global Mission at IUCC
Guatemala  Teri Olson
Advocates (Co-Sponsors)  Dave Smith
Family Promise  Susan Allen
Study Programs for 2012-13  The Rev. George Johnson
Youth Mexico Mission Trip  Alaina Haynes
Stephen Ministry  Dave Schofield
AIDS Walk  Felicity Figueroa

• SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

“Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord”

See you there: Karl Schiller, Chair, Mission & Service

RESERVATIONS---------------------------------------------------------------
Name-----------------------------------------------------------------------
How many adults?___Children?___ Phone Number:___________________
Please: Give to Karl, Bil A., put in offering plate, drop off at “SIGN UP’ table (patio) or church office.
Members and friends of IUCC who attended either service on Sunday August 26th heard an important update on building plans for the congregation. At each service, Moderator Cindy O’Dell and Administrative Board Chair Martha Selby announced the discontinuation of a ten (or so) –week dialogue with another Irvine congregation relative to sharing their space on a 50 / 50 basis.

After a substantial good-faith effort involving defined subcommittees from each congregation, the Administrative Board voted without dissent at its August 20 meeting to end the discussions relative to sharing space.

Moderator O’Dell and Board Chair Selby said that they would be in continuing strong communication with members and friends of IUCC about what will happen next. They, the Administrative Board, and the Building Task Force are clear that the IUCC facilities status quo cannot support well our current staff and suite of programs, and is simply inadequate to support plans for congregational growth. So, ways forward will not include an option of doing nothing. The apparent alternatives in front of us are (a) to proceed with the emplacement / and replacement of first-quality modular buildings on our current campus – something the congregation authorized at our May 2012 annual meeting—or (b) to make plans to sell our current campus and move to another Irvine location which would offer efficient support for our programs, staff, and long range plans.

Watch for updates as our process of discernment continues! And feel free to seek information or offer opinions as the days and weeks unroll. We are a congregational church, and your thoughts matter.
Comma Groups: IUCC’s Distinctive Small Groups Program

Best experience I’ve had in Church!
Great bonding.
Nice people, good group, good experience.

As of September first, more than 75 people had already signed up for Comma Groups, IUCC’s distinctive small group program. Training for leaders begins early this month, and the initial meetings will begin in October, about a month from now. Comma Groups consist of 6-8 people who meet monthly in an informal setting to form deeper relationships / friendships with each other while discussing topics of mutual interest. This year, we will ask the groups to take up challenging issues of faith – along with the personal stories and “latest news” that friends also share when they gather. Most groups will meet in member homes. At least one group will meet during the day. Another group will have child care available so families can take part.

October’s theme is: Prayer.
How do you feel about prayer?
When do you pray?
How do you pray?
Do you remember your first prayer?

Comma Groups present an opportunity to share ideas about prayer in a confidential, small group setting. Someone may have a funny story about trying to lead a silent prayer. You may hear about a mystical prayer discipline that gives meaning to one person’s life. Another participant may be wondering about the point of praying at all. By the end of the session you will feel a closer fellowship with some of the remarkable people who make up IUCC, and some of them will feel that they know you well enough to seek you out on the patio after church just to stay in touch.

As usual at IUCC, different perspectives are welcomed and respected.

- Wisdom is contagious: we get it from each other.
See Ken Wyant for more information. You can also register by sending an email to ken@iucc.org. A form will be sent directly to your e-mail address.

Don’t miss out!

This small group experience promises to connect you to the congregation in fulfilling ways, like never before.

Stephen Ministry is a one-to-one ministry by trained, caring church members. These caring individuals are members of Irvine United Congregational Church who have gone through fifty hours of training to provide high quality Christian care to individuals experiencing a crisis or a challenge such as divorce, grief, loss of a job, hospitalization, relocation, or loneliness. Stephen Ministers are each assigned to a care receiver and meet with that care receiver for about an hour a week. This care relationship remains in effect for as long as the care receiver has need.

The Stephen Ministers of Irvine United Congregational Church are available to listen to you, encourage you and pray with you. This ministry provides a safe, trusting and confidential atmosphere for those in need.

The IUCC Stephen Ministry will begin training for another group of Stephen Ministers in September. If you are interested in becoming a Stephen Minister or would like more information, look for the Stephen Ministry Table on the patio after services in the month of August. Or contact the Chair of the Stephen Ministry, Dave Schofield at (949) 300-1216.
YOU ARE INVITED..........
TO JOIN THE STEPHEN MINISTRY CONTINUING EDUCATION AND ADULT EDUCATION MINISTRY'S PRESENTATION:

"HOW TO GROW YOUNGER, BY NEXT YEAR"

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2012
PLUMER HALL, 12:30 to 1:30pm
Bring your own "Brown Bag" Lunch

Presentors: Bil Aulenbach and Dr. Henry Lodge, MD (on DVD)
IUCC Adult Education Forum

WHY WE CAN’T ALLOW THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT TO RU(I)N OUR COUNTRY

Wednesday, October 17, 2012
Choose from 2 sessions: Noon-1:30pm (Bring your own lunch) or 7:30-9:00pm

PRESENTER: Stephanie Campbell, President OC Americans United

Stephanie Campbell is a naturalized U.S. citizen, born in England, and spent part of her childhood in Israel. Having lived in three countries, two with an established religion and one with freedom of religion, she is committed to the guarantees of religious freedom in our First Amendment based on personal experience and principle. Ms. Campbell is the president and a founding member of the Orange County Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. She is also a member of the National Advisory Council of Americans United. She is very active in church/state separation issues at the local level in issues of keeping religion out of the schools and city councils and on the national level where she has lobbied our California Senators on a variety of issues including Supreme Court nominations. Ms. Campbell is a certified ACLU speaker on Church and State issues and also speaks on women’s issues and gay rights issues. Ms. Campbell has a Masters Degree in Business Administration and an undergraduate degree in Political Science from the University of Washington. She is currently a Software Test Manager with TeleCommunication Systems in Aliso Viejo, CA.

Americans United operate on the principle that all Americans have the constitutional right to practice the religion of their choice, which of course includes refraining from taking part in religion, if that is your preference. We believe that to ensure that right, the government must remain neutral on all religious questions. This is the principle our parent organization was founded on and is our guiding principle today. The national organization was founded in 1947 by a coalition who came together to fight proposals in Congress to provide government funding to private religious schools. The fight was won by lobbying and educating members of Congress. With the first success they extended the campaign on the importance of maintaining church-state separation to the states. The Orange County chapter of Americans United was founded in December of 2004 following, and because of, the 2004 election. A few of us had been concerned about the role religion played in that election as well as the rising influence of Orange County’s mega-churches and we wanted to put a stake in the ground for religious liberty. Since forming we have provided a focal point within the County to address religious liberty concerns, supplied speakers to different groups and presented educational programs on a variety of topics including intelligent design, sex education, end of life issues, and gay marriage among others.

REGISTRATION:
Name:______________________ Ph:____________ email:_______________________
Which session? 12-1:30pm___ or 7:30-9pm_____
Bon Vivant dinners are not small groups that persist for several weeks or several months (as Comma Groups do). Instead, Bon Vivant dinners are “one off” occasions, for people to come together, break bread, enjoy each others’ company, and get to know each other a little better. There is no “curriculum” for these social occasions.

We gather in small groups of 6 to 10 at someone’s house, usually. Everyone brings something to contribute to a shared meal. The host decides the theme and gives assignments, and the host does not even have to cook! After all, the host has the responsibility of having a clean house and taking care of the dishes.

Foods do not need to be fancy. Hamburgers on the grill are perfectly acceptable.

zheimer’s. We’d love to welcome families, including families with small children.

The sign-up sheet should be out on the patio starting the first Sunday of the month. You can also let me know directly that you would like to participate: LMLindy@cox.net

Join in! Get to know some people in the congregation!
Hoping to see you on the last Saturday of the month, September 29!

Lindy Garber
Fellowship Chair
September Birthdays!

Susan Allen  
Cristina Arce-Jones  
Dale Cole  
Lavinia Cooper  
Alyssa Cornett  
Judy Curry  
Kevin Dow  
Michelle Dow  
Ruby Fulton  
Peggy Goetz  
George Johnson  
Vivian Johnson  
David Karsten  
Susie Lang  
Laura Long  
JoAnne Mansell  
Iris Mecartney  
Aiden Mitchell

Van Muse  
Jeff Oleson  
Sofia Portillo  
Suellen Rowe  
Stephanie Sanders  
Karl Schiller  
Patricia Stalcup  
Shawna Swanson  
Paul Thornton
Ireland Trip Report

By Janet Emery

On August 5th, fourteen IUCC members and friends met in Dublin, Ireland for an "Irish Experience" tour arranged by Dale Vaughan, who has been the chair of the unofficial "ministry of travel" for the past several years. (Just ask Pastor Paul!)

The group toured around Ireland including such popular and interesting sites as Dublin and the fascinating "Book of Kells"; Belfast including the newly opened Titanic Museum; the Giant's Causeway; Londonderry with a guide who has first-hand experience of "the Troubles" in Northern Ireland during the 1960-70's. Then on to Ballina and the Belleek Factory; quaint villages such as Westport and Adair where we watched a local home being "re-thatched" which has to be done every 10-15 years. To Galway, Limerick and then the famous Ring of Kerry and thankful for an expert bus driver on narrow one-lane roads! Many of our group braved the narrow steep steps up the castle to kiss the Blarney Stone and the men tagged along later to the Waterford Crystal tour.

On to Kilkenny and the famous National Stud Farm where expensive race horses are bred. All along the way we were treated to history, stories and songs along with visits to a local pub. I think we would unanimously agree it was a trip of a lifetime enjoying each other while exploring the "Irish Experience"! And as several of the others on our tour remarked on several occasions "Your church sounds like an amazing place!!" And to that I say "Amen!"

P.S. They served Bushmill's whiskey with the porridge each morning. Really!
BOOTH VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR IRVINE GLOBAL VILLAGE FESTIVAL

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

AT BARBER PARK, 4 CIVIC CENTER PLAZA, IRVINE

Save the date for this *annual Irvine festival* and join our community in celebrating our diversity! This is a multicultural event featuring an international marketplace, cultural and religious exhibits, food from all over the world, and a kids’ village.

- We are looking for proud IUCC members and friends who would like to staff our IUCC booth and share the great news of peace, justice, and diversity that our wonderful church brings to Irvine. Booth shifts are 10-12, 12-2, 2-4, 4-6, 6-8, and 8-10. We would like to have at least two people per shift.

Please contact Outreach Chair Tricia Aynes to volunteer: e-mail tricia_aynes@yahoo.com or call/text (714) 651-6285.
# IUCC FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

**Seven Months Ended July 31, 2012**

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Actual</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Variance Pos. (Neg.)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net Income (Loss):</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Fund</td>
<td>$1,091</td>
<td>($507)</td>
<td>$1,598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Center</td>
<td>9,688</td>
<td>830</td>
<td>8,858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Combined net Income (Loss)</strong></td>
<td>$10,779</td>
<td>$323</td>
<td>$10,456</td>
</tr>
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</table>

We are still doing well at July 31st.

Pledged contributions received and total income for the first seven months are doing better than last year at this same time.

The Early Childhood Center continues to make a significant contribution to the overall results.

Respectfully submitted,

Greg Guth  
Treasurer

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**Significant Contributor ...**

To IUCC financial results .... But more importantly:

To the lives of children in our community!
The Administrative Board has decided to provide IUCC members and friends with an opportunity to engage in a discussion about estate planning. The initial information session will be on September 30th, following second service.

At the 12:30 p.m. activity, interested persons will be able to hear from Chadwick Bunch, Esq. (a partner with the Irvine-based law firm of Palmieri, Tyler, Weiner, Wilhelm & Waldron). In addition to practicing law in the areas of estate planning and administration, Mr. Bunch is a licensed CPA with an expertise in tax matters. He’ll make a presentation for an hour or so, and will be available afterward for any personal consultations.

- There is no charge for attendance.
- Pre-registration is encouraged – just to make sensible planning possible. Watch for opportunities on the patio after services and in other modes.
- Nobody is required, nor particularly encouraged, to become a client of Mr. Bunch, though of course, people may make such a choice, at their complete discretion. Many other lawyers (and financial planners, etc.) offer services such as these.
- **IMPORTANT NOTE:** if any IUCC members or friends would like their own estate planning, investment, or similar services or products to be made “passively available” to seminar attendees, we will make that possible. We’ll have an information table for business cards, brochures, flyers, contact information – but please do not expect to actively engage people in a sales or client acquisition approach. The “passive” part is that this will be distribution of information only.
  - Michael Spindle in the church office will coordinate this information distribution. If interested, contact him: michael@iucc.org
  - Deadline for this: Sunday, September 9th.

What is the Board’s motivation?

Well, for one thing, the UCC Capital Campaign consultant (Rev. Priscilla Bizer) reported to the Administrative Board that IUCC was missing an opportunity to forward its mission through being named as a beneficiary in its members’ wills and trusts. (As near as we can tell, only one or two members of the congregation have named IUCC as a beneficiary in their trust or will.) So there will be an opportunity to discuss the mechanics of how to include either Irvine United Congregational Church, or the United Church of
Christ denomination, in a will or trust. Nobody will be pressured to do that – but the information will be available. As the congregation matures, we (or our children) can look forward to some help from people who have ensured through a bequest that their progressive and Christian values will be supported across many years ahead.

For another thing – polls and surveys consistently find that Americans agree that they should make plans for the future – their own; their families’; their communities’. At the same time, the same polls and surveys report that Americans have – in large numbers – done little or nothing to actually develop and ensure those plans.

In a poll undertaken about a year ago for ABC News, findings to support those propositions were reported. Americans who were surveyed said that they:

- Are planning and preparing for life as they get older: 72%
- Have “done a great deal” of such planning: 35%
- Have planned and prepared for retirement, and/or for a possible loss of job: 52%
- Parents who have prepared for college expenses: 45%
- Have life insurance: 74%
- Have a will: 50%
- Have a living will or health care proxy: 42%

If you are one of the roughly half of Americans who have done little or nothing to prepare for life’s inevitable outcome, or if you are one of the roughly two-thirds of Americans who need to do more, then this free seminar is for you.
BULLYING Part 8: Prevention Strategies

We continue with our series on bullying which takes on new urgency now that school is about to begin and students will be facing new situations and new peers. We want to face the new school year with optimism knowing that there are concrete strategies we can use to help our children and teens stand up to bullying behavior and refuse to be victims.

In August we talked about adults facing up to “owning” and reviewing the “operating rules” in their houses, governing how people in the house behave and how they operate in their relationships. Teachers have the same responsibility in their classrooms, and in the event that it comes to a parent’s attention that the “rules” in a classroom present a possible safety risk it is that parent’s responsibility to take care of their child by confronting the teacher. This is not always easy for people who are uncomfortable with conflict and it is not customary for teachers to be held accountable for their classroom rules by parents. However we cannot keep children safe if we stick too rigidly to who has what role with our children. It falls to all of us to be sure that every environment our children find themselves in accept the responsibility for keeping everyone safe.

This month we're going to talk about teaching our children **cognitive control** as part of personal safety. Basically, it is guiding children and teens into more mature ways of thinking about how our brains work and how not controlling one’s own brain can cause harm. How many of you have heard someone say: “I can't help it, that’s just the way I think”? I know I have and I have to cover my mouth from saying “really????? You can’t help how you think?” That kind of thinking is both immature and irresponsible and can cause endless grief internally and lots of problems in relationships.

Of course it’s perfectly okay if our pre-schoolers exhibit immature thinking, but we want to start to worry if older children, teens, or adults persist in thinking the way pre-schoolers do. Immature thinking goes like this:

1. Something happens that I don’t like (I don’t get candy when I ask for it);
2. I feel angry about not getting my way but believe that the other person is making me angry by not giving me candy;
3. I now have a “snit” (tantrum, sulk, whimper, etc) and believe it’s because I’m mad and I’m mad because my parent didn’t give me candy.
In other words: I do what I do because I feel like I feel and I feel like I feel because of YOU! This is two year old thinking that can still be observed in older children/teens and even some of the adults that you have dated in the past. People in other states have to work harder at growing up because they listen to country music and country music is written for pre-schoolers: “I'm in the bar getting drunk because you broke my heart when you left me.” In other words, I'm doing what I'm doing because you did what you did.

This is dangerous for two reasons. First, because it gets me out of having to take responsibility for my feelings and my behavior! I can blame both on someone else. Second, it removes responsibility for my behavior as well. I'm doing what I'm doing because you did what you did. This is the essence of how many bullies – all of whom are immature – think. If you didn't look like you look I wouldn't be picking on you. If you weren't so “gay” I would leave you alone. If you weren't such a......fill in the blank.....this wouldn't be happening.

Unfortunately, many reports on how adults handle bullying situation reinforce this unfortunate faulty logic. Many children report that when they tell someone about getting picked on the adult asks “what did you do to provoke him/her?” The fact is, it’s irrelevant what someone else does. A person does what they do because that is what they choose to do. We must never let our children believe that they are somehow responsible for what someone else says or does to them. We must also never let them blame others for what they say or do.

So your homework for the month should be no surprise, although I can promise you that you won’t like it and neither will anyone else in your house. Every time someone says they’re doing what they’re doing because of what someone else did we’re going to correct them, even if it’s ourselves. We’re not going to “blame” anyone for hurting us, or making us angry, or upsetting us by saying “You’re making me mad”. We’re going to take responsibility and say “I’m getting mad/hurt/upset”. We’re not going to let siblings blame their behavior on their sister or brother, as in “s/he started it”. Truth is, it doesn’t matter who started it. The only thing that matters is what we allow ourselves to feel and what we decide to do. I’m not talking to you like this because I’m angry: I’m angry, and I’m talking to you like this”.

Cognitive control is the essence of self-confidence. No one can “make you” feel anything. And your behavior does not “cause” anyone else to do something. Bullies cannot blame their mean behavior on others. Children being picked on can put the responsibility where it belongs: on the bully.
Tune in to your “self-talk” – what you say in your head that causes you to feel what you feel or blame someone for what you do. Do not tune in to Country music just now. Controlling your own thoughts and separating your behavior from your feelings is not just good for us and others; it’s safe.
News & Notes
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