

IUCC's Winter Congregational Meeting includes historic vote on Capital Campaign

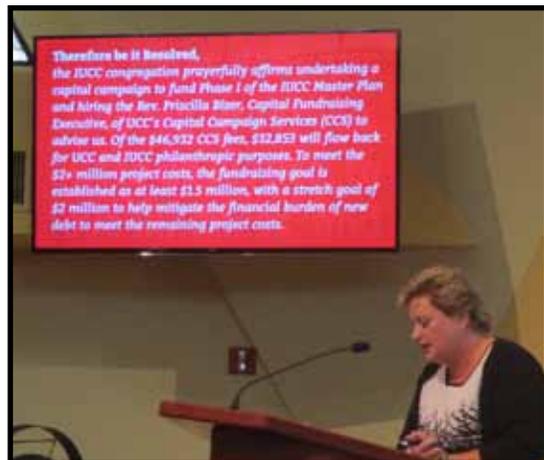


On January 31, the congregation voted overwhelmingly in favor of launching a Capital Campaign to fund Phase I of the building project!

Photos by Jim Aynes



Clockwise from upper left: Renae Boyum calls the meeting to order; Pastor Paul lends support; we vote on the budget; Anne Rosse presents the motion; Keith Boyum speaks about legacy; and the Capital Campaign vote is taken by secret ballot.



From the Pastor's Desk

the Rev. Dr. Paul Tellström

My head is in the clouds right now after our Winter meeting today, and that is actually a true statement as the Southwest Flight Tracker I'm consulting puts me somewhere a little north of Los Angeles enroute to San Francisco. I'm on my way to the West Coast UCC Senior Pastors' Retreat, and I know I'm going to have a lot of positive energy to share with the group together tomorrow.

At a time when there is a general sense of decline and a giving in to mourning over the impending death knell of the church as we know it, there are pockets of healthy, vibrant congregations that have managed to build on a sense of joy and retain their hope for a better future no matter what is happening in the world around them. You put your hope in our future together into a pretty joyful statement about how you feel about IUCC on Sunday.

The special music began at 9:30. The turnout was high and the creative energy in the chancel was even higher, and moved through the service as more and more people joined us. Some even came at 11:00 just for the meeting. Since I have been here, I've never seen such a level of participation accompanied by so much positive anticipation.

Your vote was about as positive a mandate as I think we could ever have expected. It means that we recognize that we want to become more of a presence in our community here in Irvine, and we recognize that we have outgrown our own space as it suits our needs as well.

We will move shortly to the creation of a Capital Campaign Committee, which will be led by Anne Rosse. Our enthusiasm today must be followed through with tangible offerings of our belief in our future and the legacy we want to leave to future IUCC members so that our mission and vision can continue to be lived out fully. Carl and I are looking forward to being a part of this process, and we were further moved by Keith and Renae Boyum's words about legacy and paving a way for the next generation.

As I said, my head is a little in the clouds, and it isn't just the San Jose sunset that is streaming into the cabin as we make our final descent. I have been feeling so fortunate to be a part of this community where there is such a sense of joy and commitment to being the church we are called to be. This project is going to be transformative for us, and I thank you for seeing the possibilities that wait for us ahead.

Yours, *Pastor Paul*

Coming Soon: New Adult Sunday School Lenten Series!



At the invitation of Pastor Paul and the IUCC Adult Education Ministry, Pastor Steve Swope has graciously agreed to lead Adult Sunday School in a Lenten series starting February 14 (Ken Wyant will teach both classes on February 7).

Steve Swope was IUCC's interim minister from 2004-2006, prior to Pastor Paul's arrival. He's a graduate of Harvard Divinity School and has been an ordained UCC minister for over thirty years, serving in Ohio, Kentucky, California - and in Columbia, Missouri, from 2010-2015. He and Mary live in Rancho Santa Margarita.

THE CLASS

E. B. White wrote that he often awoke in the morning "torn between the desire to enjoy the world and the desire to improve the world. This makes it hard to plan the day"

Lent can invite Christians into alternate ways of spending our time and resources, as we "fast" not for deprivation but as an opportunity to re-establish priorities that respond to God's call and Jesus' example.

Steve wants to explore modern experiences of "Sabbath" in response to the demands of contemporary society. Walter Brueggemann's 2014 book, *Sabbath As Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*, will offer a starting point for discussion, with a dual focus on enjoying the world as well as changing it, so we can plan our days faithfully.

Moderator's Column

by Renae Boyum



I taught history in Garden Grove for over 30 years. One of the lessons I tried to teach my students was about the meaning of history - how does one identify that an event is historical and is it possible to know that history is happening at the time of the event or do we have to wait for the passage of time to know that we were present when history was being made?? Good questions, but at least for me, I

know that history was made on January 31, 2016 at IUCC!

It all started with a discussion with our leaders and Pastor Paul about the idea of having one service on the day of our winter congregational meeting. We knew that there would be a vote on a possible capital campaign and we wanted to make sure the meeting would be well-attended and full of joy and spirit-filled. Pastor Paul mentioned this idea at a staff meeting. As I understand it (not being present) John St. Marie suggested that maybe we could begin the morning with thirty minutes of special music that would precede the actual worship service. The idea was discussed at our Board meetings and the idea of an all-church potluck after the meeting was also agreed upon. We discussed how important it was to let everyone know about the schedule for the day: ONE special musical beginning, ONE church service, ONE congregational meeting, and ONE potluck.

Beginning around Christmas and continuing throughout January you heard that message - via the weekly message from Michael, via the church bulletin, via e-mails, via Facebook. And then January 31 arrived and it was raining -- I have to admit that I was a bit worried that the rain would deter people from attending - but you came! By 8:45 the church campus was alive with people setting up for the potluck, the Deacons setting up for the day's events, people arriving with food for the potluck, the choir arriving for practice, members signing in for the meeting and receiving their voting cards - energy galore!

ONE special musical beginning. I have to admit I was not in the sanctuary for this, but in my spot in the narthex I could hear the love and joy of the choir shining forth. Thank you to John and the choir for their gifts on this day.

ONE church service. As always, the choir led us with hearts and voices raised to fill our souls with joy and peace. The Children's time, led by Pastor Sarah, filled us with hope for the future and happiness at seeing the exuberance of our children. Pastor Paul's sermon once again challenged both our minds and hearts to see the great possibilities in front

of us and reminded us all of what a special place IUCC truly is! Thank you for the gift of coming together in worship and prayer and music.

ONE meeting. We were ready for the meeting to begin, and what a meeting it was! We changed the name of our Outreach Ministry to the Communications Ministry, we passed a 2016 budget, we adopted a resolution declaring 2016 a year of celebration for our Open and Affirming designation, and we voted overwhelmingly to move forward with a capital campaign (89% of you said yes!). We were reminded of the importance of this vote by Keith Boyum's comments prior to the vote, "Now it our turn to exercise foresight, to offer legacy, and to take

a worthwhile risk - that actually seems smaller than the one taken three or so decades ago. We can now choose to touch the future, with our gifts and support. And three or more decades from now, it may come to pass that those who gather here will pause, and reflect with appreciation, on what we did then, in 2016." Thank you for the gift of your participation and affirmation in this important decision.

Finally, ONE potluck. What a great way to end an historic day with food and fellowship! It was a chance for our community of faith to gather together and reflect as we "broke bread" together on what we had just done. Thank you for the gift of being a faith community that embraces the past, takes on the challenges of the present, and boldly marches into the future!

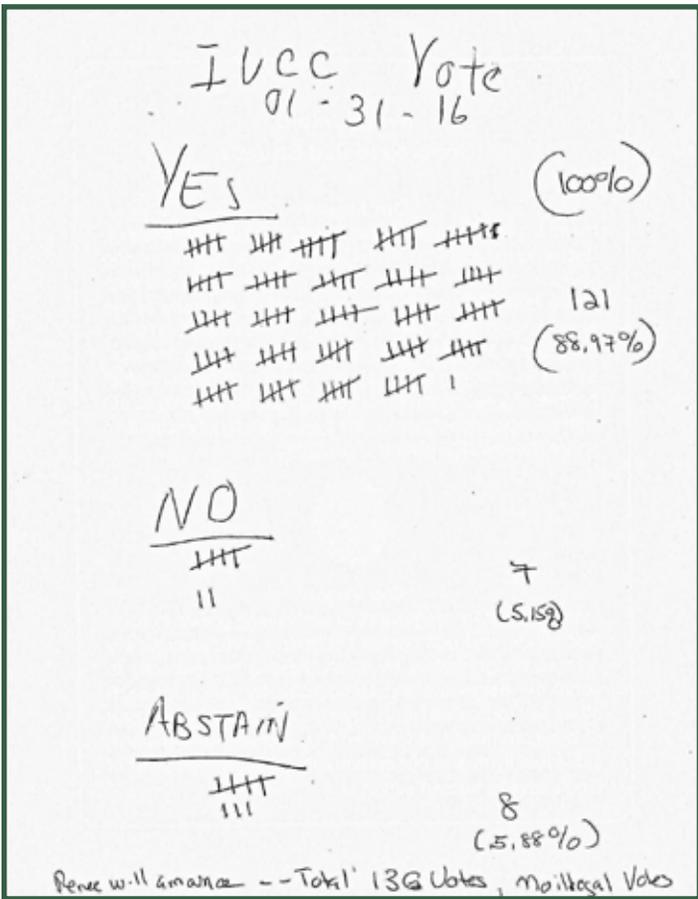
"Now it our turn to exercise foresight, to offer legacy, and to take a worthwhile risk - that actually seems smaller than the one taken three or so decades ago. We can now choose to touch the future, with our gifts and support. And three or more decades from now, it may come to pass that those who gather here will pause, and reflect with appreciation, on what we did then, in 2016."

~ Keith Boyum

January 31, 2016 - a day to remember - a historic day in the life of Irvine United Congregational Church!
In faith and community,

Renaë

P.S. As a history teacher, I always liked to share with my students a "primary source" document. Here's the tally sheet for the historic vote we took on January 31st:



ECC investigating animals in March!

Animals from desert, rainforest, ocean, and farm are the classroom theme for the curriculum Prop Boxes for IUCC's Early Childhood Center in March. Do you have items you can donate or lend to the ECC to supplement their classroom materials? Scour your drawers, bookcases, cabinets, and garages for any of the following:

- Animal posters
- Small plastic toy animals (tortoise, toucan, snake, whale, pig, horse)
- Books about animals (pigs, whales, dolphins, or butterflies)
- Plastic butterflies
- Stuffed snake, monkey, or sea turtle
- Small toy tractors

Pick up a list at the table at coffee hour, and return materials on Sunday, February 28. Questions? Contact Laura Long laura.a.long@cox.net. Thanks for your support of IUCC's Early Childhood Center!



Music Ministry

by Joni Baker



Here we grow again! It is my pleasure to introduce our two newest IUCC Chancel Choir members, David Cherry and David Kopfer. They joined the choir a few weeks ago after visited the church and finding it to be a place where they feel comfortable and welcome.

They were very quickly approached to join the choir, and we are so thrilled that they accepted the invitation.

David Kopfer grew up in Missouri, moving around the state a few times in his youth, until his mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and died within three months, when David was only 11. He struggled, did not graduate high school and joined the Navy when he was 17. He earned his GED, and when he was later kicked out of the Navy for being gay, he went back to school and earned his BA in Business Administration and Human Resources Management at Kent State. He went to the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis to earn his Master's Degree in Human Resources and Industrial Relations. He worked for 3M for many years and was transferred to Boston where he met David Cherry in 2002. They moved to Milwaukee in 2004, and relocated to San Diego in 2008, where he worked for Job Corps until he was offered a job in Irvine last year.

David K. was raised Baptist and left the church after becoming aware of the staunch opposition to gays and lesbians. He was afraid he would never find a spiritual home where he would be welcome. He relates, "I tried some 'gay' churches, but they seemed more of a podium for the pastor to preach his own political views, rather than teaching on scripture and the grace of God." He and David visited 4-5 churches before finding IUCC, where on the first Sunday they thought this might be the one. We're grateful they found us!

David Cherry grew up in Providence, Rhode Island. He works in accounting, and said that he is very shy at first, and is pretty easy going. He enjoys bowling, reading sci-fi and

says he is a, "die-hard Trekkie." He also enjoys swimming and bike riding. He related that he has a similar religious background with David K, and "We love and live our faith which has seen us through great times, and times which were not so great." After moving to Lake Forest, they were in search of a church home. The church they attended for a while didn't feel very welcoming to David C, so he didn't attend much. He related, "...after coming to IUCC we were welcomed literally with open arms." It's great to hear feedback that we are a warm and welcoming congregation!

Both Davids expressed that they are enjoying the choir so far. They have only been with us for a few weeks, but are already part of the family. David C. said, "There seems to be a nice range to what we sing and I'm getting an education at the same time because I don't know how to read music." (So for any of you who have wanted to join the choir and think, "I can't join the choir, I don't know how to read music!" You have just been proved wrong! What are you waiting for?)



David K. related: "I think the choir has a really good leader, and he is very patient. I say patient because I know I'm making mistakes over and over, and I can see him looking in my direction, but it is with concern and positivity, and not critical or judgmental. That's

refreshing and very appreciated. The people in the choir truly want to be there, they try very hard to follow the choir director's suggestions and leadership. I hope that I can get better at understanding the music, and being a much stronger contributor to the success of the choir." Again, we are so pleased to have David and David in the choir and as part of our church family.

As always, the choir is looking for fresh faces and voices. We have several special services of which the choir is a part. I love singing for these small, intimate gatherings and enjoy the special spirit that is present.

The quickly approaching Lenten season provides a few such opportunities. Ash Wednesday on February 10th, and Maundy Thursday on March 24th. Please come join us and experience the joy of making music and adding to the spirit



GreenFaith Team Committed to Environmental Justice



Fossil Fuels

Have you read that 90 to 100% of climate change and warming is caused by fossil fuels?

In view of our dependence upon fossil fuels, that is an astounding quotation. Most people have no idea how serious this is. There is a strong voice of denial, a denial reminiscent of that heard years ago regarding the correlation of smoking with health issues such as cancer and heart and lung diseases. A well-financed campaign is (and was) involved in funding both denial campaigns. While this is discouraging, consider some of the following actions:

1. Our national UCC church was the first denomination to vote to move toward divestment from fossil fuels as a strategy to combat climate change. Read more about the resolution passed at the 2013 General Synod at UCC.org/fossilfuels. Another element of the resolution is shareholder engagement that encourages various levels of investor activism. We are urged to make socially responsible investments. It also provides information regarding the Beyond Fossil Fuels Fund. All of this is worthwhile information. Check it out.
2. Some environmentalists take issue with the following announcement due to their concern over big business thinking they have magic solutions. On the positive side, it appears that these folks are not denying climate change and the role that fossil fuels play:

“The University of California is looking to play a prominent role as Bill Gates and other billionaires from around the world form a new private fund that will invest in the development of large-scale carbon-free energy solutions. The fund ... will be staffed by scientists and financial experts and will consider a wide array of investments – including biofuels, solar and wind power, and efforts to capture carbon emissions from fossil fuels.” (*LA Times*, December 1, 2015, “Putting their green into green energy.”)

3. In 2007, Exxon (now known as ExxonMobil) publicly conceded for the first time since the early '80s that climate change is occurring and that burning fossil fuels is

a major factor. Exxon shifted its stance from the 1990s when it poured millions of dollars into a campaign that questioned climate change. “Over the next 15 years, it took out prominent ads in the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, contending that climate change science was murky. And it argued that regulations aimed at curbing global warming were ill-considered and premature.” (*LA Times*, October 25, 2015, “Exxon’s shifting stance on science of climate change.”)

4. Bill McKibben is the founder of 350.org and a nationally respected professor of environmental studies at Middlebury College. He writes in *Sojourners* magazine, February 2016: “A new UN report finds that over the last 20 years, 4.1 billion people have been injured in extreme weather events – the floods and forest fires that are proliferating as the climate warms. The report adds that the total will keep steeply climbing in the years ahead.” McKibben continues, “ExxonMobil, the world’s most profitable company, had known everything there was to know about climate change 25 years ago. And then lied about it, helping to set up the elaborate infrastructure of climate denial that has prevented serious international action on global warming.” He finds himself unable to comprehend how people – professed Christians, most of them, in that Texas hot-bed of Christianity – could act this way. Do we not care for the people of the world? He concludes by acknowledging that all of us share some blame, for we used that energy, and wasted a fair amount of it. “But,” says McKibben, “most of us were not in the position to end the faux, phony, pretend debate over climate change with a single press conference. That’s all it would have taken Exxon: one CEO saying ‘the scientists are right.’ At which point no climate denial could have taken root. At which point we would have gotten to work. We wouldn’t have solved global warming, but we’d be on the way.”

All of this behooves us to read, study and make decisions that benefit our world and its people.

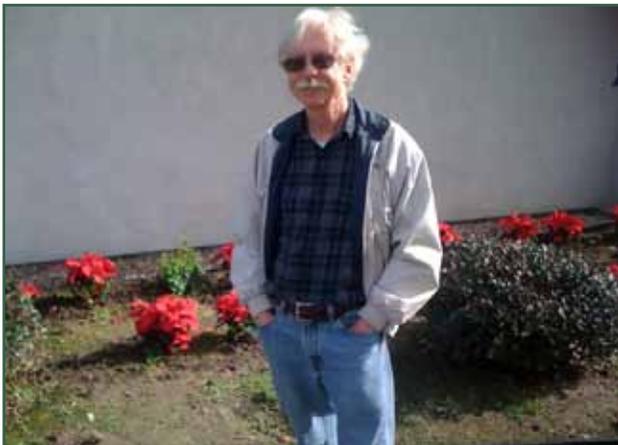
Vivian Johnson for the Green faith team (Judy Curry, Nancy Dreckman, Howard Emery, Carol Getz, and Eileen Vincent)



Poinsettias Planted

After the holidays, the leftover poinsettias were gathered by Buildings & Grounds. At Michael Spindle's splendid suggestion, they were planted in front of the stained glass window. No money was spent, and the plants now beautify the campus. Many thanks to Joan Henderson and Nancy Dreckman for planting the thirteen poinsettias.

*Pictured: Lyle Norton
Photo courtesy of Nancy Dreckman*



2/06	Russell Acosta	2/20	Douglas Mackenzie II
2/06	Jim Aynes	2/25	Brian McComb
2/16	Katie Bill	2/23	Kris Miaco
2/22	Iris Bjorklund	2/03	Lorelle Mills
2/23	Pamela Blaine	2/19	Vanessa Nace
2/21	Cooper Campbell	2/27	Jeanne Neal
2/19	Carol Cavalier	2/10	Hugh Nelson
2/28	Pam Chernoff	2/02	Donna Picard
2/28	John Emerson	2/12	Justin Poulsen
2/03	Annika Evensen	2/04	Elizabeth Rodriguez
2/25	Vernon Field	2/03	Matthew Ruiz
2/23	Wyatt Fischer	2/16	Tonya Schuster
2/03	Stephanie Fitch	2/08	Rachel Selke
2/16	Jack Henry Fulton	2/15	Peggy Stalter
2/19	Brett Garbanati	2/21	Lynn Terry
2/23	Rob Garbanati	2/11	Kathryn Thomas
2/22	Nicholas Giberson	2/09	Kaila Ubeda
2/07	Taylor Sue Giberson	2/26	Megan Lee Whitney
2/21	Jim Hamilton		

Miss Lily's Green Tips

By Miss Lily

Dearest Readers,

I have become very concerned about the El Nino effect upon our precious Earth. I know that Mother Nature always gets Her way. Yet, I believe that we humans and Big Business Corporations have created climate change. Both of us are responsible for the bad water of Flint, Michigan, the nearby methane gas leak in Porter Ranch, and the fracking of our precious soil.



These misdeeds affect our spirits. When my niece was a small child, she thought the sky was brown on the bottom and blue on the top. She was not old enough to understand the concept of smog, but she could see it, plain as day.

I am very grateful for grassroots organizations like Orange County for Climate Action and Greenfaith at IUCC. They are stewards of the Earth, blending faith with works. We must do something to deter our foolishness and thoughtlessness towards Mother Earth.

Dear Readers, I am truly grateful for the approaching Lenten season. (I just learned that the Ango-Saxon word,



Lencten, means Spring.) I adore the preparations, the spiritual works, and the extra prayers that are expected during this time of observance. So, I ask you, Dear Readers, "What will you sacrifice this Springtide to make our World a stronger place?"

Sending much love,
Miss Lily



Capital Campaign Planning Update

by Anne Rosse, Capital Campaign Chair



At Sunday's Winter Meeting, this congregation took an important step forward in faith to undertake a capital campaign to fund Phase I of the IUCC Master Plan. With this action, IUCC is one step closer to a campus that supports our commitment to nurturing tomorrow's leaders and following Christ's teachings to love and care for our neighbors, be good stewards of our environment and live in peace.

We know from surveys, forums and planning groups that IUCC wants to have more significance in the community and more significance in the lives of our members. Yesterday's affirmative vote was such an endorsement of our commitment to become the church we are meant to be. One that honors our legacy by providing for our successors as IUCC's early founders did for us. What a powerful affirmation from this faith community!

Now what? We will immediately launch a campaign to fund Phase I by raising at least \$1.5 million and come as close to \$2 million as possible (in order to mitigate the burden of financing). Designed with green practices in mind, the IUCC Master Plan reflects our values in three flexible phases.

Phase I

- An administrative building will be built immediately adjacent and connected to the current Sanctuary, including: a lobby, staff offices, volunteer work space, private pastoral counseling accommodations, and four configurable meeting rooms (with a total capacity of 100 people)
- An expanded Narthex with a new "coffee corner" and new Sanctuary entrance
- An enhanced patio for fellowship
- A widened driveway with a dedicated right turn lane entry
- A welcoming new church frontage

Our focus is currently on Phase I only. After we complete it, it would be up to this congregation to decide when we

are ready to undertake fundraising for the next phases, described below.

Phase II

- A modern preschool/education center would be built to meet the needs of our thriving preschool and Sunday School/youth programs. It would include a state-of-the-art playground to promote creative and collaborative play and learning. During this phase, we would use the meeting rooms in the new administrative building for fellowship (since Plumer Hall would be torn down during this phase). Our preschool, the Early Childhood Center, could continue to function during construction of the new facility.

Phase III

- A multi-use and highly configurable fellowship hall would be built, with inviting indoor/outdoor spaces suitable for a wide variety of events, industrial kitchen with serving area, and dedicated youth meeting and recreational space.
- Additional handicapped parking and driveway access to loading/unloading areas (behind the current church office/preschool).

The anticipated timeline for Phase I is:

Feb-June	15-17 week Capital Campaign
May 2016	If Capital Campaign is successful, vote on proceeding at the Spring Meeting
June-Dec	Construction planning/bidding/permitting
Early 2017	Shovels in the ground (best case scenario)
2018	Occupancy

Our goal, therefore, is to have made significant progress toward our campaign target by mid-May. To do so, we will spend the first half of our campaign timeframe, "the quiet phase," concentrating on: planning, filling volunteer roles,

"Capital Campaign Planning Update"
continued on page 9

logo/slogan development, renderings and chatting with folks about making leadership gifts. As much as 60-90% of the campaign goal will be generated from 10-15% of IUCC's giving units – our campaign gift leaders. At the approximate midpoint, the campaign will become more public as we introduce the campaign logo/theme and distribute campaign materials. We will ask for everyone's commitments in anticipation of our May 15 Spring Meeting. Folks would have up to 3 years to pay their pledges. Something important to remember – congregants typically meet their stewardship commitments from annual income; campaign gifts are often met through accumulated assets. We want to be successful with this campaign but we'll also need stewardship to hold steady to fund our dedicated staff, outstanding music program and important ministry work.

We will launch the quiet phase of our campaign on February 14 with a visit by our consultant, the Rev. Priscilla Bizer, Capital Fundraising Executive, United Church of Christ Capital Campaign Services. On that day, we will introduce and bless our campaign leadership team. I am tremendously honored to serve my beloved church by chairing this leadership team. Please call, email or find me on the patio with your questions, concerns, suggestions and reflections on this important endeavor that IUCC is undertaking. And, please prayerfully consider volunteering to help out with the campaign – your participation would be joyfully welcomed.

In closing, all of the progress we've made to date – developing and getting approved the IUCC Master Plan and now stepping forth in faith to fundraise for Phase I -- would not have been possible without the commitment and investment that this church is making in IUCC's future and legacy. So, thank you, IUCC! And, thank you for all you do to make IUCC an active and vibrant faith community, concerned and committed to improving the human condition both locally and throughout the world.

Anne

Mark Your Calendar



WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

WED. * FEB. 3 * 6:30 p.m.

Join us for soup and salad and to hear the most recent updates on the status of the Irvine fair wage ordinance. For more info, contact Pat Sauter.



ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE

WED. * FEB. 10 * 7:00 p.m.

Join us to celebrate the beginning of the Lenten season.



ISAIAH HOUSE SHELTER

WED. * FEB. 10 *

Contact Steve Goetz for details and to RSVP: sgoetz53@gmail.com.



SEEKERS

TUES. * FEB. 16 * 9:30 a.m.

This women's group meets to nurture friendships and enhance our understanding of the teachings of Jesus. Contact Reefa Hanenberg for info.



ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL LENTEN SERIES BEGINS FEB. 14

Join Pastor Steve Swope for a fascinating study on the dual focus of enjoying the world as well as changing it, so we can plan our days faithfully (see details on page 2)



DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO NEEDS A CAREGIVER?

Soo Baghbani, a member of IUCC, is interested in offering her caregiving services at very reasonable fees. In Iran she worked as a midwife so she knows the medical field. Soo also does cooking, driving, shopping, taking people to appointments and being a companion to your loved one. If you might be interested or need more information, please call Anne or Bil Aulenbach at (949) 240-2933.

Powerful Parenting

Dr. Lorraine Fox

IT'S GOOD TO FEEL GOOD

We return to our theme of the various aspects of the “self,” in which parents play the most powerful role as far as how children grow into ideas and feelings about themselves. As we’ve discussed, there is an intimate relationship between self-concept and self-esteem. Self-esteem is the worth, or value placed on the self-concept by the individual. It is a personal assessment of one’s worthiness. This feeling, or personal assessment, indicates the extent to which each of us believes ourself to be capable, significant, worthy. It is our basic sense of worth and goodness related to who we think we are.

How we act, how we learn, how we relate to others, how we approach work and play, are all determined by our beliefs (ideas) and attitudes (feelings) about ourselves. Children (and adults) with low self-esteem generally feel isolated, unloved, and defenseless. Very often children with poor self-esteem withdraw from interactions with others, or become passive and accept poor treatment from others, believing they deserve it, or because the bad feelings of others toward them “matches” how they feel about themselves. Or, they may become aggressive in their behavior toward others to compensate for their feelings. We can often tell how children feel about themselves, as well as what they think is true about themselves, by the friends they choose, or with whom they interact. Children with good self-esteem believe they are worthy of friends and do not tolerate harsh behavior from peers, believing they deserve better. Children with poor self-esteem often feel they are “lucky” to have anyone pay attention to them, even if the attention is harsh and unhealthy. It is very important for parents to find out who their kids hang out with in school, and to watch who they play with and how they play. As teenagers, ideas about oneself are becoming fairly entrenched and it becomes evident by who they hang out with, who they date, and what kinds of treatment they accept from others. You’ve probably heard that by adulthood, “we accept the love we think we deserve” (Stephen Chbosky). I’m assuming you love children if you’re reading this, so we want to accept our responsibility to create feelings of great worth in those we love, so that they accept friendship and love from kind and respectful others.

The good news is that all people want to feel good about themselves. Watch any baby laugh and nuzzle when they are treated with loving kindness. Watch the delight of any toddler when they run toward their loving parent. Children believe in their worth when they are fed, kept warm, and given a comfortable place to sleep. (A baby can be just as happy in a well-padded dresser drawer as in an FAO crib.)

Children believe in their worth when they are protected and kept safe. When children are relieved of anxiety by having predictable routines, by having others watch over them to be sure they don’t get hurt, by having adults around who protect them from fear rather than producing fear, they grow to feel they are worthy of our attention to their needs for protection while they are vulnerable. Children believe in their worth when they are part of a loving family, however family is defined. All children need to “belong” and when they are accepted by people in their house, by friends, by neighbors, by teachers, they come to feel that they bring joy to others just by being around. When children begin to learn what love is, and when they believe they are loved, and when they know that others want their love, they develop strong feelings of attractiveness and self-confidence. When children are encouraged to learn, to take risks, to develop their talents, they feel good about their abilities, regardless of the “level” of ability. Special needs children can still have very good self-esteem when they are cherished and encouraged. Ability is not a necessary ingredient in self-esteem. Watch the Special Olympics and see the pride, wide smiles and joy, and obvious feelings of accomplishment – no different than those competing in the regular Olympics. When children are encouraged to be their very best selves, in all areas, and to reach as high as they can in any area, they come to cherish themselves as well as accepting being cherished by others.

We have strong Biblical support for working diligently on helping children and teens to value themselves. We are told that we are to love our neighbors “as we love ourselves.” When we don’t love ourselves, we don’t have any love to give to others. Working to develop positive self-esteem in our children is not only a gift to them, but to anyone else they will encounter for the rest of their lives.

There is a difference between “bragging” about yourself and having a comfortable sense of who you are and what you do well. For homework, after dinner one night have a session of “here are some ways that I am hot stuff.” Everyone participates, adults and children. Let everyone around the table brag a little, not putting anyone down (“I’m better than you”), but just saying some true things about individual talents and accomplishments. If any of your children have trouble with the assignment, or if you do, your task is clear: It’s time for some work on the self-concept so that we can feel good about who we are, at any stage in life.