The Vote was Unanimous!

On March 24, we had a Special Congregational Meeting and voted unanimously to enter into a three-way covenant between Pastor Sarah Averette-Phillips, IUCC, and the Southern Association of the Southern California Nevada Conference of the UCC to call and ordain her as Part-Time Assistant Pastor at IUCC.

From Sarah’s Facebook post:
“I am so grateful to Irvine United Congregational Church for voting to call & ordain me as their Assistant Pastor yesterday. I am humbled and grateful for the trust they have put in me to serve God and each of them. I look forward to always deepening my call, asking the hard questions, and connecting through the Spirit of Life and Love.”

SAVE THE DATE!
Pastor Sarah’s ordination ceremony will be from 3-6 p.m. on April 14 at IUCC.
IUCC held its fourth Faith & Works Conference on March 30-31 with featured speakers the Rev. Traci Blackmon and the Rev. James Lawson

Kudos to the Rev. Steve Swope for organizing this terrific event!

(See recap of the Rev. Blackmon's remarks on Page 12)

Photos courtesy of Felicity Figueroa, Tricia Aynes, and Sarah Averette-Phillips
I confess that I do not know what the future holds for me at this point, except that I can look back with great fondness on this period of 13 years during which so many things happened.

Remarkable people of note in their fields came and spoke here. I was reminded again of this when I saw the Rev. Traci Blackmon and Dr. James Lawson being presented with our “Still Speaking” plaque where their names were added this past weekend. I was stirred by each of them—Dr. Lawson for continuing to be an articulate voice for justice while being a living legacy of the civil rights movement, and Traci Blackmon for representing the future of the United Church of Christ’s “A Just World for All” movement.

At right is a photo of when we met at General Synod in 2017 in Baltimore. I loved her immediately.

I will always remember those special weekends with people like Bishop Spong, Borg and Crossan, Sister Helen Prejean, and so many others who brought us illumination and a word of hope. This kind of programming is one of IUCC’s strengths, and you are known for it. Keep it going.

I love how we were able to grow our ministries until we needed to build a bigger “house” for them. The church has such high-caliber leaders that we weren’t afraid of the challenges we faced, such as building this magnificent new piece of architecture that presents a bolder statement to the community around us while nesting community groups who share our vision.

I especially loved being in worship with you all, wrapped in lovely music and vulnerable together to the Spirit’s movement in and around us. My desk drawer is filled with scripts for weddings, memorials and baptisms, such as the two baptisms we had for new members Alex and Dale just last Sunday, surrounded by Mary, Craig, Jon, and Bill—new members who share a love for this faith community.

Of course, it is the people I love most. I cannot imagine not being with you, and of course that reality is what is coming so quickly.

But, while I start to make my exit, a new, young and strong voice is being raised up. It was important for me to be a part of Sarah’s ordination. It is the culmination of a long path to ministry, and it is well-deserved. I hope to see you at IUCC on Palm Sunday at 3:00 for this celebration of Sarah’s call to ministry. She is destined to make a mark on the church.

I began this article by saying, “I confess that I do not know what the future holds for me,” but I’m not sure that’s entirely true. I originally thought I was going to step back completely and find myself doing something very different. But, if that’s so, why did I register for General Synod in Milwaukee this June? And, it is only natural that I would go to Annual Gathering* at Chapman this year. I guess you can take me out of the church, but you can’t take the church out of me. I will be looking for ways in which to serve the wider church, and the specifics of that will present themselves to me when the time is right. IUCC is an amazing church, and it has something to do with being a part of the United Church of Christ, which encourages us, as Dr. George Johnson would say, to have the “Courage to think differently.” I want to help carry that vision into the future of my church.

I hope to see you in church as you are able over the next six weeks. I will be looking for you in this short time left that I have the privilege of being your pastor.

With Love and Affection,

Pastor Paul

* IUCC needs to send at least two delegates this year, plus clergy. Please speak to me or Steve Swope about being a delegate on June 7-8. https://www.scncucc.org/voices/2019/03/ucc-conference-activities-and-events/save-the-date-annual-gathering-2019/
Look at the pictures on the front page! This was the scene on March 24 when almost 100 members voted to call and ordain Sarah Averette-Phillips to be our Assistant Pastor. At the current time, Sarah IS our Assistant Pastor. She will continue with the same responsibilities but will (on April 14) become the Reverend Sarah Averette-Phillips. Join us on April 14 at 3:00 p.m. for a service of ordination and a reception to follow in Plumer Hall. It will be a joyous event as we celebrate this milestone in Sarah’s life.

So with this special event in the life of IUCC upcoming, I want to update you on the status of our search for an Interim Pastor. Both the Administration Board and Ministries Board approved the appointment of the following to serve as the Interim Pastor Search Committee: Renae Boyum, Cindy O’Dell, Anne Rosse, Diane Rust, and Dave Schofield. All of the members are current or past moderators and have many years of experience and commitment to IUCC.

The group began its work on February 2 with a video conference with Reverend Felix Villanueva, our Conference Minister. He shared with the group information about how the conference will assist us in identifying our Interim Minister. Key to this process was the writing of a posting for the position and then the posting being made public on the UCC website. After that process was completed, the Committee began receiving profiles from interested candidates. We were told to expect somewhere from 3 to 5 profiles. Thus far, the number of submitted profiles has exceeded that number.

The Committee has been meeting weekly for discussion and discernment. The Committee has looked carefully at the profiles, sent out questionnaires to candidates, examined those questionnaires, and identified several candidates to follow up with reference checks and video conference. In short, the Committee has been busy and working hard to ensure that we get the possible Interim Pastor for IUCC.

As the Committee goes through the process, it is working closely with the Administration Board. According to the bylaws, the Committee will recommend a candidate to the Administration Board and the Administration Board will make the decision to hire the Interim Pastor. The goal is still to have the Interim Pastor in place in June.

Another important search process will begin on June 2. On that date, the Congregation will have its Spring Congregational Meeting and will elect members for the Permanent Pastor Search Committee. IUCC members interested in serving on that committee were asked to submit their names. The Nominating Committee (myself, Daniel Blackburn - Administration Board Chair, Felicity Figueroa - Ministries Board Chair, Tommie Kozlov and Randy Romine - Chairs of New Member Development) looked at the submitted names to ensure that the list of candidates is diverse and representative of the Congregation. They will finalize that process by May 1.

Information about all of the proposed candidates will be published prior to the June 2 meeting. At that meeting, the congregation will vote to select the members of the Permanent Pastor Search Committee. The exact number of members elected is yet to be determined but will be no more than 7. Once elected, the search committee will follow the guidelines of the UCC Search and Call process. The time frame for the process of finding a new permanent Pastor ranges from 12 to 18 months.

With all of this happening, a reminder to mark May 19 on your calendar to celebrate and wish a fond farewell to our beloved Pastor Paul. We will join together in one service on this special day with a reception to follow. We have much to be grateful for and much to look forward to. As always, we will do that in faith and community!

Renae Boyum, Moderator
The big event last month was Faith & Works, with UCC national officer Rev. Traci Blackmon and our special luncheon speaker Rev. Dr. James Lawson. You can check out the photos below and on page 2. Many thanks to all who attended and supported this important witness to our community!

And special thanks to Sandy Exelby and her lunch crew, along with those who helped greet and check-in attendees! Don’t forget that we’ve already got speakers planned for October – John Dominic Crossan is returning – and next March, outspoken blogger and author John Pavlovitz.

In adult Sunday school we’re previewing Dom Crossan’s latest book *Resurrecting Easter*, on visual representations of the Resurrection and the ideas they communicate. No classes on Easter morning, of course.

After that, someone suggested we might explore the lives and thoughts of various theologians, investigating whether the events of their lives affected their thinking. Bil Aulenbach is already lined up to share his perspective on John Shelby Spong and Gene Robinson, both former Episcopal bishops. Who would YOU like to lead conversation about?

Ken Wyant is traveling with Glenda this month, so I’ll be picking up the Bible Study duties, as we continue through the New Testament book of Acts. Join us – at 4 p.m. in the new meeting rooms, and afterwards at Square One, where the real discussion begins!

This is the final month for Comma Group meetings until fall. Thanks to all our leaders this year: Tricia Aynes, Janet Johnson, Terry LePage, Jim Martin, Anne Rosse, Anita Schwab, and those team-oriented Casta Commas! We’ll have a wrap-up meeting in late June, when the calendar clears up….

Don’t forget that we’ve got other adult programs scattered here and there throughout the month – Yoga with Kelly Garrity on the 4th Sunday at 1:30, and TED Talks with Al Gumb on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays at 10:00.

Slowly but surely, the IUCC Library is getting back into shape. I’ve got 10 of 16 shelves fully organized, and sheets posted to help you find what you’re looking for. By the end of this month I hope to have the task completed! Then it will need a good dusting, as soon as we schedule a work day.

Feel free to borrow the library’s resources! We’ve got books from many of our past guest speakers, as well as Jesus Seminar scholars and other progressive thinkers. Just leave them on the table when you return them, and I’ll get them shelved back in order. (Can you tell I’m just a bit compulsive about books?)

And just a reminder: You can usually find me in the IUCC office Monday–Thursday from 9:30-5:30 and Friday from 9:30-12:30. If I don’t answer the phone right away, please leave a message; I may be taking care of something in one of our other buildings.
Photos from All-Church Game Night on March 23
Thanks to our Youth and Youth Staff for organizing this fun event!

Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes
Have you heard about Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCD)?

By Mark Allen, IUCC Treasurer

If you are 70 ½ or older you can now make charitable gifts directly from your Individual Retirement Account (IRA) to IUCC without paying federal income tax on the withdrawal first.

How does a QCD work?

1. You must be age 70 ½ or older at the time the gift is made.

2. You must request from your IRA plan custodian a direct transfer of funds to IUCC for the gift to be tax-free. This specifically means you cannot receive the money first and then write a check to the charity.

3. Each person may give up to $100,000 per year. So a married couple could give $200,000 together.

4. Gifts can be used to satisfy your IRA required minimum distribution year.

5. Funds held in other retirement plans such as 401(k) or 403(b) plan are not eligible but may be first rolled over to a standard IRA to then be used for a tax-free rollover gift to charity.

6. If you do plan to make such a gift as outlined above please call or email the office first: 949-733-0220 or Steve@iucc.org or Heidi@iucc.org and tell them that you are planning on making the gift and the general time frame and amount. The reason we ask for this is that sometimes we get gifts of stock and cannot immediately determine who they are from due to limitations in our IUCC E-trade account. Steve and Heidi can also provide our brokerage account information where the gift is to be sent.

If you have other questions please call or email me: Mark Allen, 612-868-1939 or madallen@msn.com

“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:20-21 (ESV)

Note:

a. See also IRS Publication 590-B (2018), Distributions from Individual Retirement Arrangements (IRAs) at https://www.irs.gov/publications/p590b#en_US_2018_publink100041439 for more detailed information. You can also go to IRS.gov and then under forms do a search for 590-B.

b. IUCC and its officers do not provide legal, tax or investment advice. Individuals should consult with their own professional advisors before proceeding with this type of charitable giving plan.
From an early age, we teach our children about the ways and days of America, the significances of this remembrance and of that custom. That surely includes kids from families whose roots in America go back a few generations. Kids must be taught, after all.

But this teaching may be especially useful to families who do not have a long history in this country, but who intend to make America their home. At the IUCC Early Childhood Center, we serve such families, and embrace the children from those homes.

In this set of photos, the IUCC preschool children learn about St. Patrick’s Day. Leprechauns get mentioned; pots of gold are pursued; giggles are encouraged. And if your ancestry includes no Irish at all, well, who cares?

Easter Bunnies will be an April focus!
Community Choice Energy event March 17

It was a great turnout for our March 17 Clean Energy Workshop. About 80 people heard Irvine City Council member Melissa Fox; Matthew Langer, COO, Clean Power Alliance; and Robin Ganahl, Orange County Clean Energy Advocates talk about local energy solutions.

Robin Ganahl, Orange Co Clean Energy Advocate and Organizer, who emceed the event.

Melissa Fox, Irvine City Council member, and Matthew Langer, COO, Clean Power Alliance.

Photos courtesy of Keith Boyum
Global Ministries visit to Albergue Las Memorias in Tijuana, Mexico April 5-6

Randy Romine and Ken Matsuyama will lead a Global Ministries visit and service project to our UCC/DOC Global Ministries Partner Organization, Albergue Las Memorias. Las Memorias is a residential hospice and addiction support facility for HIV positive men, women and some children. It also has a TB treatment unit.

Participants will meet at IUCC at 10 a.m. on Friday to carpool to the border and return to IUCC on Saturday at 6 p.m. There will be a lunch, tour and orientation at Las Memorias on Friday at 1 p.m.

On Friday evening, we will be staying at the Hotel Principado near the Tijuana airport and will host a dinner/planning/information gathering session for the Las Memorias director and sub/director. On Saturday, we will return to Las Memorias at 9 a.m and join the residents for some personal service and fellowship activities followed by a special meal with the residents.

Costs for the trip will be approximately $50 for the hotel plus cost of dinner and a $20 contribution for food at Las Memorias. There is a cash donation basket on the ministries/visitor information table outside the narthex on Sunday, and we will be using those donations to buy gifts cards in pesos that can be used for everyday needs at Memorias.

Please text or call Randy at (949) 387-9032 or email at Rwromine@aol.com if you plan to participate or need more information.

~ Randy Romine

GreenFaith Team

Miss Lily’s Green Tips

Dear Readers,

Spring is my favorite season. I love the fresh air and the flowers. I like the fact that the days are getting longer, too.

This Spring I thought I would plant colorful flowers. I want to plant food, too. I love tomato plants, celery, and herbs. My patio is cement, so I will try growing them in pots.

Dear Readers, I suggest you grow your vegetables. They are delicious.

With love,

Miss Lily

New Members

Please welcome our new members, who joined on March 31. L to R: Bill Bonney, Alex Ingal, Jon Ingal, Mary Repp, Craig Repp, and Dale Ramirez.

Photo courtesy of Paul Shirey
Comma Groups celebrate St. Patrick’s Day in style

The Costa (del Sol) Commas (top two photos and center row left photo) provided tasty refreshments for St. Patrick’s Day. Per Barb Carse, their most recent meeting to discuss “In the Shelter” included an Irish dinner and considerable blarney!

The Aynes Comma Group (center row right and two bottom photos) provided refreshments on March 24. They are discussing the “Eight Points of Progressive Christianity” and also did a little dress-up for St. Pat’s Day!

Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes & Barb Carse
Reclaiming Our Faith

During a congressional hearing last August when Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin repeatedly interrupted Congresswoman Maxine Waters, Waters unwittingly created a catch-phrase that went viral: “I’m reclaiming my time.”

In her first of her two talks, the Rev. Traci Blackmon suggested we tweak the phrase a little to say we’re “reclaiming our faith” – a charge we all have as believers. Nowadays our churches seem to be “more about keeping people out than welcoming them in,” Blackmon said. “When one understands truly the context of the Bible, it is a book written by and to people living under oppression. Mitzvah (justice) is to treat people equitably regardless of race or social standing. It also means giving people their rights – or their due – whether that is punishment or protection. The mitzvah of a society is how we treat people. We should be concerned about others because God is concerned about them. God is concerned about the vulnerable – defending those in need of defense.

“Anywhere in scripture where you find the word ‘righteousness’ you can just as correctly insert the word ‘justice.’ Justice means healing broken social relationships. When is a writer supposed to use the term justice, and when the term righteousness? They just take a guess. We end up with justice as an add-on when in fact one cannot have church without justice. There is no social gospel – the gospel is social. We need to create a table large enough for all humanity to have a seat. No one can reclaim it for us, BUT us. There is no righteousness outside of justice and there is no justice outside of righteousness. We, My friends, are called to be BOTH. It’s important not just in the conversations of the U.S., but across the world.”

The Call of Christ in the Midst of Chaos

In her afternoon talk, Rev. Blackmon provided a brief but fascinating history of how racism originated and grew in the U.S. “I believe there is only one race – the human race,” she said. “The only place (skin) color should matter is in a crayon box. Race is not a factual thing. But racism is real. Racism must be suffocated and it must be rooted out.”

On keeping the dialog open: “We cannot crucify those who are trying [to understand]. I make the assumption that if you show up [to hear me speak], you’re here to work. And we’re going to work through it together. People need to learn to listen and to make pain be heard. We must cultivate ways to have difficult conversations. We need to operate in a way that opens space for grace. We are after belonging – everyone being part of the circle. And the circle should be transformed by everyone who enters it.”

Why do we avoid these conversations in church? “The church needs to avoid partisanship, but not politics. The Bible is political. All of us have places within us that need to be rooted out, and all of us have places we need to explore.”

Chaos or Community?

Our luncheon speaker was the Rev. Dr. James Lawson, Jr., Pastor Emeritus of Holman United Methodist Church in L.A. He spoke of three Bible verses he found particularly compelling: “Beware that no one leads you astray; Do not be alarmed; By your endurance, you will gain your life.”

“The present chaotic moment means that it will probably become worse before it becomes better,” he said. “If it becomes better, it will be because churches and synagogues do the work we’ve been called to do in a vastly better way than has been done before.”

Citing the book Why Civil Resistance is Effective, he noted, “A small group of only 3.4% of people can make a difference if they are well organized, well disciplined, and living in community. They can effectively push society in the right direction.”

“God must be ashamed of what we’ve allowed to happen,” he added. “While we have some of the most liberal people in our midst, millions still live in abject poverty and must wrestle with putting food on the table. We must become the headlights – the people who help our communities recognize that the task is not nearly over. We must begin to unwrap our doctrine of sin from based on personal error to examine how human behavioral institutions sin. I represent the unconventional notion that comes out of many world religions - that the way forward for the human family is to stop our fear of one another, a fear that permits the production of bombs over bread.”

His exhortation to us: “We in our churches so represent the creative energy of God that there is sufficient energy to move from a thing value to a people value. We can be instruments of the Kingdom of Heaven.”
Time to Order Easter Lilies!
Before you know it, Easter will be here! Help decorate our worship space to celebrate the joy of Easter - and welcome "Alleluia" back into our worship - by ordering an Easter Lily. They're just $10 each, they can be dedicated to a loved one, and you can take them with you after the 11:00 service! See Natasha Dahline on the patio during coffee hour each Sunday.

HOLY WEEK SERVICES

Palm Sunday
9:30 and 11 a.m.
April 14

Maundy Thursday
7 p.m. on April 18

Easter Sunday
9:30 and 11 a.m.
on April 21

News & Events

Women’s Fellowship
Wednesday, April 3, 6:30 p.m.
Join us for fun and fellowship! Sign-up on the patio on Sunday or contact Pat Sauter.

Yoga of 12-Step Recovery
4th Sunday each month at 1:30 p.m.
Kelly will be continuing her Yoga of 12-Step Recovery sessions on a revised once-a-month schedule. The new schedule is the 4th Sunday of each month at 1:30 p.m. in Plumer Hall.

Isaiah House
Wednesday, April 10, 4 p.m.
Volunteers serve a meal to homeless women at Isaiah House on the 2nd Wednesday of each month. Call (949) 436-1946 for more info.

The Seeker's Women’s Group
Tuesday, April 16, 9:30 a.m.
The Seekers meet on the third Tuesday of each month for theological and spiritual discussion. Newcomers are welcome! Call Reefa for details - (949) 859-7091.

Coffee Hour Hosts Needed
In March, the Comma Groups starred as Coffee Hour hosts! Thanks to Tricia Aynes’ Group (twice!), the Costa Comma Group, and Terry LePage's Group. We are now signing up hosts for the end of April through June. To serve as host for an upcoming Sunday, use this link: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/70a0f45acab2ca5f49-iucc to sign up online, or sign up on the sheet on the Coffee Hour table any Sunday. And let us know if you intend to make use of the donated funds we have in reserve. Thanks! ~ Sandy Exelby & Jan Wilson
The terms discipline, punishment, and consequence are often used in discussion, and consequently in practice, as if they were the same. They are not. These terms are also frequently used incorrectly, to rationalize our interventions. In other words, I’ll call it “discipline,” even if it was actually “punishment,” and thus feel like a good parent, teacher, coach, babysitter, etc. However, an important ingredient for either professionals (child care workers, teachers, coaches, etc.) or parents is to be clear about the distinctions between these concepts, and then to administer each according to deliberate plan and thoughtful intent.

The literal meaning of the term “to discipline” is “to teach”! True “disciples” are learners. If we intervene with behavior with any intent other than to teach, we are not administering true discipline!

According to Webster’s dictionary, “to punish” means to penalize, to cause pain, loss, or suffering for a wrongdoing; to treat in a harsh manner. Think of “punitive” damages. Many of us grew up being punished without thinking much about it, being told it was what we “deserved” because of our unacceptable behavior. In some parenting books the literal meaning has often been lost or blurred, and phrases such as “positive punishment” (an oxymoron) have been invented.

Punishment usually involves either taking things away from children that they want, or having them do something they don’t want to do. Again, looking at the dictionary it is clear that intent is often the key to whether we are doing one (discipline) or the other (punishment). If the intent is to cause suffering or physical or emotional pain, then we are punishing. If the intent is to provide the opportunity to explore other ways to do things, even if some discomfort is experienced, then it is discipline.

Here are two examples. Your child begs you for a puppy. You know your child and don’t think this is a good idea. But s/he continues with great drama promising they will walk, feed, clean up, and take responsibility for the puppy. You give in and get the puppy. Your child, to no one’s surprise, begins to start whining and complaining every time it’s time for the walk, or supper time. You put your foot down and have your child stop what they’re doing (something they enjoy) and start doing what they promised to do (which now that it’s a reality, they don’t enjoy). Do they appear to be “suffering” as they stomp out the door? Perhaps. Should they continue, despite their unhappiness? Of course. There are many lessons here to teach about honoring agreements, giving one’s word and following up, etc. The point is that you are not screaming at them to take out a dog they didn’t want but rather to accept responsibility. This is discipline. The same would be true for the child who begs for music lessons and after you pay for the instrument, and the lessons, constantly balks at practicing? Should they be “made” to practice? Naturally. For the same reason another child is walking the dog.

Sometimes I’ve encountered either parents or professionals who seem to convey that everything pleasant is a “privilege” to be earned! To me, this is a twisted form of thinking to justify punishment by denying some activities that children/teens should not have to earn, like playing, having friends, enjoying some unstructured time, etc. Adults don’t have to “earn” their leisure activities.

A close, or even cursory view of our penal systems, designed to “teach people a lesson” boasts an average 85% recidivism. People do not “learn” in prisons or juvenile detention; they merely wait. It’s the equivalent of sending children “to their rooms” hoping that something magical will happen while they sit there alone and that they will “learn” to act differently. If we use “penalties” (the root of the word “penal”) as our model, we persist in “punishing” our children, and even rationalizing such responses as “appropriate”, and then become frustrated and angry when they show us that they have not “learned.” Punishment, if we are to be literal, is designed to hurt, not to teach. What young people learn from being punished is how to hurt, and that they deserve to hurt, even when it’s because they don’t know how to do something the way we want them to.

We learn by having a teacher. Sitting alone anywhere doesn’t teach children anything. If we are willing to commit to providing discipline for our children and teens, then we are committing to being willing to take the time and trouble to teach them. The “teaching tool” of discipline is providing “consequences.”

Considering consequences next month.
The old man inches his way to the pulpit. It’s a long journey, but with the congregation’s collective breath-holding, he makes it. All eyes focus on him as he begins, “Reading from the Prophet Isaiah . . . ” This old man, reading from a script enlarged for his dim eyes, was, himself, once an intense, riveting-eyed prophet. His voice, once a cannon in the pulpit, now echoes that voice but with shaky edges. As he concludes the reading, his weakened voice and body step aside.

A young family enters the pulpit. The bright-eyed toddler boy, held in his mother’s arms, adds his thin, high voice to his mother’s voice as she speaks into the microphone. His big sister, in her disheveled angel costume, hops around her parents’ legs. Are they two prophets in the making? Their energy is a sharp contrast to that of the aging prophet. The old. The young. The bookends of life.

With assistance, the old man returns to his seat. I look at him through eyes blurred by rivers, and whisper in his ear, “Good job, honey.” It was reminiscent of my comments to our children after a performance. As we leave the church this beautiful day, many people approach him, repeating my words, “Good job.” Others say, “It was good to see you in the pulpit again.” Yes, it was. He had prepared for this responsibility by rehearsing numerous times at home, as well as in the car on the way to church that morning. In rehearsal, his Alzheimer’s speech was garbled at times, but not in the pulpit!

In our usual final inquiry at the end of the day, I ask him, “How was your day today?” The tired, but pleased, old prophet responds, “I was in the pulpit today. It was a good day.” For me, the prophet’s wife, it was a day when the sorrow of Alzheimer’s was touched by joy!

***

We load the “very dear friends” into a laundry cart and a suitcase, both with wheels, because the prophet has an idea about a potential new home for them. The physical and emotional fatigue take a toll; the prophet needs a nap. As he sits on the edge of the bed, he looks at me, his eyes weary, and says once again, “I had to say goodbye to some very dear friends today.”

The prophet’s idea for a new home for the books is carried out the next day. George has invited a few younger clergy and lay leaders to gather for conversation in a lounge located in the facility where we live. They come from San Diego to the south, from Thousand Oaks to the north, from Redlands to the east, and parts in-between. We sit in a circle as George facilitates our conversation beginning with: What book are you reading? Next, he moves into the topic “Silence is not the answer,” which is uppermost on his mind as he’s in the process of compiling a book of articles from various authors around this very topic.

The group identifies people they perceive as prophets today. They discuss how the establishment tries to silence contemporary prophets. They ask if the Church is complicit with the government? They identify topics of justice that we must lift up, support, and around which we must courageously break our silence.

There is a wonderful camaraderie, a respectful atmosphere, an encouraging of one another, a stimulating conversation that leaves the group with ideas and courage to become the prophets they feel called to be. As we concluded with lunch, it was obvious that no one was eager to leave.

The books? While spread out over tables, the piano, and a credenza, the group perused and chose what they wanted. I think they delighted in that George underlined and made notes in them; a used book as a keepsake from him. For George, it was easier to say goodbye knowing his beloved “tools of trade” were moving into good homes.

The next day, George wrote an email to the attendees. It said, in part:

What can I say? Words seem inadequate to express how happy and blessed I feel after yesterday. Each of you participated so well. Time went by so fast. I still lay in bed thinking of all the good comments and questions that were so provocative . . . It would be great if more progressive thinkers could feel the energy felt in that room yesterday.

We received numerous emails of gratitude for the day. For me, I was left with an overflowing heart for the affirmations expressed to George for his prophetic ministry, both in the past and even now. I learned once again that old age can be difficult, but also, it can be beautiful.
This month, George Cukor. George Dewey Cukor was born in Manhattan on July 7, 1899. At the age of seven, he performed in an amateur show alongside another starstruck boy named David O. Selznick. Their friendship would blossom in later years. By the early 30s, Mr. Cukor was working at Paramount Studios. His first major job there was taking over directing duties for Ernst Lubitsch’s pre-code musical *One Hour With You*. Cukor’s work on that film resulted in a legal tangle over billing. After that lawsuit, Mr. Cukor left Paramount for RKO.

George Cukor was a journeyman; he was able to direct just about any story you gave him. Still, he was most at ease with musicals and drawing room comedies. Some of his musicals are still held amidst the finest ever committed to celluloid.

Also, Mr. Cukor was a closeted gay man at a time when being gay was something to be hidden. He died on January 24, 1983, and was buried at Forest Lawn in Glendale, alongside a whole host of golden age movie stars.

1) *One Hour with You* (1932) - This pre-code gem featured one of the sexiest couples in early movie musicals: Jeannette MacDonald and Maurice Chevalier. Yeah, you heard right.

2) *Dinner at Eight* (1936) – Based on a George Kaufman and Edna Ferber play, *Dinner at Eight* is both drawing room comedy and sexual intrigue in equal measures.

3) *Camille* (1936) – This one starred Great Garbo (it wasn’t the "I vant to alone" movie; that’s *Grand Hotel*). It also starred Robert Taylor and Lionel Barrymore.

4) *The Women* (1939) – Starring Norma Shearer late in her life. It also featured Joan Crawford and Rosalind Russell early in their careers. In the 50s, it was made into a vehicle for June Allyson called *The Opposite Sex*.

5) *Gone With the Wind* (1939) – Don’t believe me, huh? Well, look it up. Selznick originally hired Cukor to direct. But he didn’t like what Cukor was doing, so within two weeks, he fired Cukor and replaced him with Victor Fleming, fresh off *The Wizard of Oz*.

6) *The Philadelphia Story* (1940) – This was the first film directed by Cukor, and Cukor alone, to be nominated for the Academy Award.

7) *Gaslight* (1944) – A noir masterpiece starring Ingrid Bergman and Charles Boyer. The film was so effective that its title became a new term in our political life.

8) *Adam’s Rib* (1949) – As far as I’m concerned, this is Tracy & Hepburn at their funniest. And don’t you ever forget: I love black licorice.

9) *A Star is Born* (1954) – Bradley Cooper and Lady Gaga were okay, but this one is still the finest rendition of the story that I’ve seen. It features a sparkling score by Harold Arlen and Ira Gershwin. It also spotlights Judy Garland near the end of her Hollywood career.

10) *My Fair Lady* (1964) – George Cukor turned this Lerner & Loewe masterpiece into one of the finest movie musicals of the 1960s. He also had the good sense to hire Audrey Hepburn as Eliza Doolittle. Be still my beating heart.
Family Promise of Orange County is a local non-profit that helps to rebuild the lives of families experiencing homelessness by providing emergency shelter, case management, tutoring, rental assistance and other support. IUCC has supported Family Promise for several years with a special offering and by helping the Church of the Foothills as it hosted the families three weeks each year.

Now that our new building has been completed, the Mission & Service Ministry wanted to try a pilot hosting of the program for one week starting August 11. In early January, the Administration Board approved the M & S plan to pilot a hosting week with Family Promise participants. We will evaluate the experience and decide if we as a congregation would like to host on a regular basis three weeks each year.

As a host church, we will be responsible for sheltering up to four families (14 adults and children) each evening and providing dinner and breakfast. The families will arrive at Plumer Hall at 5:30 p.m. each evening and depart at 6:30 a.m. the next morning after breakfast. We want to make the experience as warm and inviting as possible.

The room dividers in the room will be located to provide some privacy for each family. Family Promise will provide blowup mattresses, sheets, pillows and blankets. Before the adults and children leave each morning, their mattresses and supplies will be stored behind the dividers so that the room can be utilized as always for church and community meetings.

Volunteers will be needed to help in the overall planning, to stay overnight in the church with the participants, to provide evening meals, to shop for breakfast items, to help the children with homework on one or two nights, and to plan a movie night on the weekend. Please watch for sign up opportunities after Sunday services this spring.

This is your opportunity to directly help these struggling families. Love and kindness always make a difference.

The stories of two families below are examples of the good work that is being done by Family Promise and the churches that provide shelter and volunteers.

Carina, a hardworking and devoted mother of four, called Family Promise of Orange County seeking shelter as she and her children were sleeping in their car on a “dark scary street,” having fled a situation involving domestic violence. Carina and her children were extremely grateful to be in our Emergency Shelter Program and they thank all the staff and volunteers who welcomed them to their congregations.

Although homeless, Carina managed to successfully maintain full time employment while driving an unreliable, old vehicle, and raising loving and respectful children. Wendy, who met Carina and the children at St. Mark Presbyterian Church, one of our host congregations, decided Carina needed her old Corolla, known as “Ruby,” far more than she did. So, Wendy donated her car to Family Promise for Carina, which was a tremendous help for the family. On August 1st, the family moved into their own apartment.

Elijah’s parents, LaShona and Elijah Sr., became homeless this year when LaShona’s mom passed away suddenly. At the time, LaShona was only 18 years old, pregnant and heartbroken. This family was in the depths of despair and thought there was no hope. Fortunately, Elijah Sr. and LaShona were led to Family Promise and in the 50 days they were in our Emergency Shelter Program, the faithful volunteers and the Family Promise team restored their hope. LaShona texted to express her gratitude, saying: “I love you, so happy you came into my life. You brought back the love that I thought I had lost.”

Please volunteer and get involved!!

Contact Sharon Lynn (571-236-9517) or Colleen McNamara (949-558-8029)
The Eight Points of Progressive Christianity:

By calling ourselves Progressive Christians, we mean we are Christians who...

1. Believe that following the path and the teachings of Jesus can lead to an awareness and experience of the Sacred and the Oneness and Unity of all life;
2. Affirm that the teachings of Jesus provide but one of the many ways to experience the Sacredness and Oneness of life, and that we can draw from diverse sources of wisdom in our spiritual journey;
3. Seek community that is inclusive of ALL people, including but not limited to: * Conventional Christians and questioning skeptics, * Believers and agnostics, * Women and men, * Those of all sexual orientations and gender identities, * Those of all classes and abilities;
4. Know that the way we behave towards one another is the fullest expression of what we believe;
5. Find grace in the search for understanding and believe there is more value in questioning than in absolutes;
6. Strive for peace and justice among all people;
7. Strive to protect and restore the integrity of our Earth;
8. Commit to a path of life-long learning, compassion and selfless love.

IT’S TIME TO PLAN FOR THE IUCC WOMEN’S RETREAT
MAY 3-5, 2019

Facilitator: Rev. Jennifer Strickland (Claremont UCC)

Theme: “Stories Untold: Women of the Bible”

Location: Pilgrim Pines

Cost: $160
Saturday/Sunday only option: $125

We will look at different women in the Bible, including obscure women, read their stories and ask questions: How are these women subverting the system? How might this text and woman’s story guide us today?

Rev. Jen will incorporate a personal reflection aspect to the retreat during which she will lead participants in journaling, making art, writing prayers, and sharing their own personal stories of triumph, heartache, challenges, and future hopes. The goal will be to use the narratives of the women found in Scripture as a framework for us to tell our own stories with honesty and openness.

For more info, contact Lorraine at 949-916-0176.