There was a big turnout for our All-Church Picnic on September 15!
More fun and games at the All-Church Picnic!

Photos courtesy of Cindy O’Dell
A Note from Pastor Dave

Out and Proud!

October 11 is National Coming Out Day and, on October 13, IUCC will remember and celebrate in worship on Sunday morning (9:30 & 11) and with a bowling party for LGBTQ people and allies, 2 p.m. that afternoon, at Irvine Lanes, 3415 Michelson Drive.

National Coming Out Day commemorates a turning point in the human rights movement when, on October 11, 1987, half a million people participated in the Second March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, what has come to be known as the “Great March.” Coordinated with that march was the first public display of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, thousands of panels arrayed on the Capitol Mall, remembrances of loved ones felled by a disease that had no cure and that much of America was still reluctant to name and address as a crisis.

Every year, October 11 is an occasion to remember that Silence=Death and to reaffirm that being out and proud and responsible as our authentic selves saves lives! That’s something to pray and sing about, and it merits having a party too! Why not invite friends to come and experience with you, on October 13, the strength and encouragement of an Open & Affirming community of faith.

Please join us Sunday, October 13 for worship services that remember and celebrate National Coming Out Day, and do sign up to participate in the LGBTQ & Allies bowling party at 2 p.m. that afternoon. For the bowling, there will be sign-up sheets out at the church and online, www.iucc.org/register. 1.5 hours of playing time, shoes, a ball, pizza and soda are included; and a $10 donation is suggested.

An important message from your Stewardship Campaign Co-Chairs
Susie Lang and Janet Emery

Wondering where your annual Stewardship Campaign letter is? Was it perhaps lost in your mail? Not to worry! We’re doing something DIFFERENT this year and if you are reading this newsletter, YOU are one of the first to know of the change!

Instead of the annual ‘Welcome back from summer, please make your Stewardship pledge’ drive which runs from October through mid-November with weekly notices, follow up letters and phone calls….our new focus will be on Devotion and Discipleship. We’re reframing Stewardship into a time of joyful giving, a time of Epiphany just as when the Magi brought their gifts to the Christ-child.

This new campaign will start January 5 (Epiphany Sunday!) and end on January 26th. How will this fit with planning our budget? Our leadership is ‘on board’ with the new vision and our former and new treasurer are in full support.

Stay tuned for more information and your Stewardship letter later this year. In the meantime, begin thinking about what you can bring as your gift in 2020.

With joy,
Susie and Janet
Keith and I are blessed to have three wonderful grandsons: Blake, age 12; Colin, age 9; and Gavin, age 6. We are indeed fortunate to have them and our daughter, Nicole, and her husband, Mike, so close by in Ladera Ranch. One of the traditions that Nicole has is to take a picture of her kids on the first day of school along with an answer to the question, “What do I want to be when I grow up?” Over the years, the answers have ranged from a clown, to an astronaut, from a Wetzel Pretzel worker to a marine biologist, from a professional skateboarder to a doctor. These are this year’s pictures and goals for the future:

The question of what do I want to do when I grow up was also recently posed by Pastor Dave as part of children’s time. It’s a great question and one I think well worth answering for IUCC. But let me rephrase it - what does IUCC aspire to be in the future? What are our goals and dreams for the future?

We’ve answered that question formally in our Mission and Vision Statements:

Irvine United Congregational Church, a member of the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ, is radically inclusive, declaring to neighbors and strangers alike: No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here. We celebrate the Creator’s diversity as we worship God and grow in our faith. Guided by God’s unconditional love as taught by Jesus Christ, we see ourselves as children of one God, brothers and sisters of all people. As servants of God, we take responsibility to act with compassion, to work for peace and justice, and to share the joy of Christian community.

Irvine United Congregational Church seeks growth in spirit, fellowship, and number by becoming a more culturally diverse congregation; by strengthening our capacity to serve our neighbors and community; by caring for each other as God cares for us; by inviting others to be a part of our community of faith; and by working to transform individual lives and our community through the power of God’s love in human action.

The Pastoral Search Committee (Keith Boyum, Chair, Tricia Aynes, Connie Jones, Aidan Mitchell, Eduardo Arismendi-Pardi, Craig Tyrl, and Ken Wyant) has been working very diligently over the last few months to answer almost 100 questions that are part of the Congregational Profile. This profile aims to answer the questions of who we are and what do we want to be AND it serves as our “advertisement” for those candidates wishing to be considered for the position of minister for IUCC. So, how are they going about getting the answer to the questions?

• They have looked at the previously adopted Long Range Plan and other documents.
• They posed this and other questions to the chairs of committees and ministries and members of the Administration Board at the Leadership Retreat in July.
• They have met with members who are ordained UCC ministers.
• They received input from congregation members at a forum in September.
• They met for many hours to discuss all of the input to make sure the profile is an accurate picture of IUCC.

All of these efforts have resulted in a document that attempts to answer the vital questions of who do we say we are and what do we aspire to be. Congregation members will be able to read this document on our website towards the end of October. A congregational forum for all those interested in learning more about the profile and offering comments will be held on November 3 after second service. Please take the time to read the profile AND come to the forum.

After the forum and the Search Committee meeting to consider any changes in the profile, it will be sent to the UCC Southern California Nevada Conference office and then be ready for dissemination to possible candidates.

This is an exciting time in the life of IUCC - I hope you will participate in the next few steps of our journey towards a new settled pastor. As always, we will do that in faith and community.

Renae
I really appreciate all the help I’ve received this past year, as people have stepped up to lead Sunday Adult Education or Comma Groups or assist with events. Many, many thanks!

**Sunday Adult Education** in October will be led by newer member Craig Repp. He will take his thoughts and conversation-starters from the book *Overshoot* by William Catton, recommended by Rev. Michael Dowd in the climate-crisis video series we discussed during July and August. Dowd considers it one of the most important books he’s ever read! You can find it in paperback and e-reader versions on Amazon— and if you use Amazon Smile, IUCC will benefit, too!

**Tuesday Bible Study** is nearing the end of its review of the books of the New Testament—but since we spent a year on the Gospel of John alone, we’ll probably be a while. Right now, we’re in the short letter of 1 Peter, and there will be four short letters after that. Join me on Tuesdays at 4:00, until Ken gets back from vacation in late October!

**Comma Groups** are up and running—we’ve got eight this year. Some will be studying the UCC’s *White Privilege* curriculum in support of our increased focus on diversity, some will explore George Johnson’s new book *Silence is Not the Answer*, and a couple will be looking at Amy-Jill Levine’s book on Jesus’ parables. Thanks to all who are participating!

We’ve got two guest speakers to encounter and learn from this month. **John Dominic Crossan** will be here on October 26 & 27, of course—you have heard me mention that a time or two, I think! You can still register for the Saturday morning lectures, and for the Saturday evening limited-seating dinner at Irvine’s Two Left Forks restaurant. Just go to iucc.org/register!

And even before Dom Crossan gets here, we’ll welcome **Ron Buford**—UCC pastor and leader, originator of the God Is Still Speaking campaign, and founder of Racists Anonymous (rainternational.org). Ron will visit IUCC on Wednesday, Oct. 9 at 7:00 p.m., and his topic will be **Racism: Ignore It…and it won’t go away!** You won’t want to miss this! See press release on page 6 for more details.

Don’t forget about Al Gumb’s **TED Talks** discussions on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays at 4:00 p.m., or Kelly Garrity’s early **Sunday Yoga** at 7:30 a.m. on alternate weeks (Oct. 6 & 20, Nov. 3 & 17).

Do you know what an “illuminated Bible” is? Not one with a built-in reading lamp, but think of those medieval monks copying scripture and adding illustrations and decorative lettering. And Chapman University has one, it’s brand-new, and it’s absolutely beautiful! See ad on page 7 for more details.

Terry LePage is hoping to arrange a group tour of the Saint John Bible at Chapman in January, but you can meet one of the artists this month. Suzanne Moore, one of only two Americans to work on this amazing project, will speak on Tuesday, Oct. 15 at 7:00 p.m. in the All Faiths Chapel at Chapman. Her topic is **Dynamic Collaboration: One Painter’s Perspective on Illuminating the Saint John Bible**. Admission is free.

A note about our building usage: Thanks to our expanded facilities, we hosted 1 daily group (AA), 2 weekly groups (the Mosque and a Buddhist study group), 2 monthly groups (Amnesty International and Scout District committee), and 6 other outside groups or events in September for a total of 36 outside/community contacts!
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ending Racism Is Possible – one person at a time, one day at a time. Ron Buford, founder of “Racists Anonymous,” advocates a new approach to overcoming racism, Wednesday, October 9, 7 p.m.

Irvine United Congregational Church
4915 Alton Parkway
Irvine, CA 92604
949-733-0220 • www.iucc.org
Contacts: Cindy O’Dell, odellcindy19@gmail.com, 949-294-6124
David Pattee, pastordave@iucc.org, 949-733-0220

Irvine, CA, September 25, 2019 – Could it be that we are all just a little bit racist?

Ron Buford, founder of Racists Anonymous [rainternational.org], asserts that racism is not just a blind spot in some of us, it is a blind spot in all of us that can be brought to light, yielding to a new vision. Wednesday, October 9, 7 p.m., at the Irvine United Congregational Church, Buford will describe a process and issue a call to courageous people to rise, tell the truth, and begin to break racism’s vicious cycle with an infectious movement committed to:

- Being mindful about ways we perpetuate racism or bigotry in any form
- Being committed to changing the patterns of our behavior and the structures of bigotry
- Becoming a companion on the journey with others who seek this transformation
- Engaging RA’s 12-step program for healing and changing the world, starting with ourselves.

The wider community, religious and non-religious, is welcome and encouraged to attend. Child care will be provided.

Infected the structures and assumptions of culture for hundreds of years, racism persists in this country and around the world, but almost no one ever admits to being a racist. It is broadly recognized as an evil, but we haven’t yet figured out how to get rid of it. Rather than blaming each other and trying to figure out which of us is the most racist, isn’t doing something radically new, civilized, and effective long overdue?

The first Racists Anonymous group was launched in 2015 by Buford, a United Church of Christ pastor, at the Congregational Church of Sunnyvale in Sunnyvale, California, a mostly white congregation in Silicon Valley. The ensuing movement has seeded dozens of groups in four countries.

“I wanted to invite Ron and have him present the RA approach,” says the Rev. David Pattee, interim pastor of Irvine UCC, “because this congregation is passionate about diversity, inclusion, and justice. It has a richer mix than any other church I’ve served, but the times we live in, and especially the surging use of fear and bigotry as political tools, do not allow for complacency or self-satisfaction. We are called to strengthen our witness by living more fully into our vision of the Kin-dom of God, beginning with how we conduct ourselves and organize our community.”

About Irvine United Congregational Church: IUCC is a member of the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ. More information is available at iucc.org.
IUCC successfully hosted three families in Plumer Hall from August 11 – 18. Many, many thanks go to all the volunteers and supporters who provided hospitality to our guests, making them feel safe and welcome. More than 25 people helped prepare dinners during the week. Some of those folks stayed to share dinner with the three mothers and four children. Others helped with setup Sunday afternoon and the take-down the following Sunday morning. Some volunteers shopped for breakfast & lunch items, planned activities for the kids or brought toys and games. Both Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts helped with meals and provided activities. The Pastor’s Potluck provided a relaxed meal with time to chat with church members and the children to play. One IUCC family came to the church early on Saturday morning and fixed a special big breakfast that everyone greatly enjoyed!! Seven folks stayed overnight at least once during the week. It was an amazing effort that brought comfort and safety to our families.

This first week of hosting Family Promise participants at IUCC was a learning experience for all of us. It gave us the opportunity to evaluate the pros and cons for the church.

Church members certainly came through to support the effort. The enthusiasm and compassionate care of all the volunteers was heart-warming! I sent a follow-up survey to everyone who helped in any way. (If I missed anyone, please let me know!) The 12 returned surveys indicated that each person had a good experience and would be willing to help again. The Mission & Service ministry will review all the surveys and comments at our next meeting on October 6th and will decide on our recommendation to the Ministries and Administrative Boards about committing to host families in 2020.
Introducing: Priya Madduri

A worker in IUCC’s Child Care Center since 2015, Priya Madduri is now an Assistant Teacher who works with Miss Mary. Miss Priya values her career and its engagement with young children, saying “I like to teach younger kids. I am very good at understanding them. This is the best age for them to build great learning skills.”

Miss Priya goes on to describe her own gifts that she can share with the young children: “I have so many creative skills, such as art work, decorations, etc., that make kids come to class with an excitement – every day! I want to make each of those days new for them.”

And of course, the children in their turn offer much. She says “The love and affection that I receive from the kids is priceless. This makes my career very rewarding.”

This talented young child educator came to us, as she says, from “the other side of the globe.” Born and raised in India, she is a graduate of one of the top universities in that country, Andhra University, where she was an undergraduate in Political Science, and a graduate in Literature. Living in the U.S. since 1997, she has attended college here and has earned the Early Childhood Development credits that we ask our preschool teachers to have.

Married to an Engineering Architect, Miss Priya is the mother of two boys, aged 18 and 10. Her extended family, including her parents, are in India.

Miss Priya finds her position in our Child Care Center to be rewarding. She says, “The best thing about the IUCC Child Care Center is that all of my co-workers are friendly and very helpful to each other. I am so excited to go to the preschool every day!”

Her goals reflect that focus and sense of fulfillment in our preschool. Commenting on her future, she says, “I would like to become a lead teacher and be proactive in developing the school further with some creative ideas.” We are lucky to have this devoted and engaged professional in our Child Care Center!

Best wishes, Miss Priya, in your future with IUCC, or wherever your talents take you.
Dear Congregation,

In updating our progress, the Pastoral Search Committee wants to say first what an honor and unique gift you’ve bestowed on us. Our work as a committee is permeated by an atmosphere of collegiality, gratitude, friendship, love, prayerfulness, and responsibility. The process allows us the joy of deepening friendships while honoring a community all of us cherish. It is a blessing to be of service, and we thank you!

The church profile is almost complete. The process was rigorous and included input from the bylaws, committee experience, Diversity and Inclusion Task Force Survey demographics, financials, institutional memory, IUCC leadership retreat, IUCC buzz groups, record-keeping, UCC resources, lay leadership, and 5-Year Strategic Plan.

After many edits, the latest version was submitted to Rev. Terry LePage for response. Incorporating her wonderful and helpful suggestions, a near final draft is complete. The committee will soon meet with Rev. David Pattee and Rev. Steve Swope to dialogue about their own experiences on both sides of the table in order to have a full and complete profile ready to present to the congregation. We will also be asking our conference minister, Dr. Felix Villanueva, to weigh in. Keep an eye out for instructions once the profile is made available. All voices will have a chance to respond.

There is always a question of timeline. We are currently ahead of where the process stood when hiring Pastor Paul. If all goes well, we will post for our next settled pastor sometime before the end of the year. By the spring of 2020, we hope to be at or near the exciting moment of identifying a candidate.

In fellowship and faith,
The Pastoral Search Committee

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Neighbors in Need

Hello. IUCC is about to launch a special offering called Neighbors in Need. Offering envelopes will be inserted in the bulletins on the first Sunday of October. What is this offering?

Neighbors in Need (NIN) is a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ that supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. One-third of NIN funds support the Council for American Indian Ministry (CAIM). Two-thirds of this offering is used by the UCC’s Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM) to support a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects through grants. Neighbors in Need grants are awarded to UCC churches and organizations doing justice work in their communities. These grants fund projects whose work ranges from direct service to community organizing and advocacy to address systemic injustice. This year, special consideration will be given to projects focusing on serving our immigrant neighbors and communities.

Please consider the justice initiatives that your donations can stimulate.

Regards from the Mission and Service Ministry

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Pastoral Search Committee Report
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.

On October 20th, the Youth Group will be leading both services in their annual Youth Sunday services. The theme this year is Breaking Down Barriers and Respecting Boundaries. We hope that everyone can come and hear our youth and support them as they lead us in worship.

October 27th is our Annual Trunk-or-Treat event! Please dress up and join in the fun whether young or young at heart! If you would like to host a trunk or have any questions about the event, please contact Aidan at aidan@iucc.org
Orange County Equality Coalition (OCEC) presents

The 2nd Annual
Our Stories OC
Alternative Book Fair for Kids of all Ages!

Date: November 2, 2019, 10am-1pm
Location: Irvine United Congregational Church
4915 Alton Pkwy, Irvine, CA 92604

Orange County is home to children of all backgrounds, abilities, identities, and dreams. Often, however, we do not get to hear their stories. Our “alternative book fair” will feature books about children and young people of all kinds and topics that are central to who we are as a community yet not always addressed. The book fair will feature book readings and signings by local authors, a varied collection of books for sale, and a resource fair.

Call for AUTHORS who write about diverse topics and/or feature diverse characters. We welcome books in all languages. This is a free, non-profit event, so you would take home any profits you make from selling books at the event but must supply your own copies. You could do any of the following: 1) offer a reading and signing (only 3 slots available); 2) display your books for sale. We ask that you donate one (1) book to the local public library.

Call for TABLING by local organizations that welcome, serve, and are targeted to ALL children.

This is an all-kid friendly event: no books, art, or organizations that promote hatred, violence, or discrimination will be accepted and/or included.

Please email Dr. Priya J. Shah for more information: priyajshah31@gmail.com
Reminder
Did you know? You can check for updates on our website (www.iucc.org) and look for pictures and videos on our Facebook page and on Instagram!

Trunk or Treat Returns!
Time to get your car ready for IUCC's annual Trunk or Treat, taking place in our parking lot after second service on Sunday, October 27.

Coffee Hour hosts needed
Dear friends, have you ever noticed that when congregants exit a service, very few of them head straight for their cars? There is so much going on under the eaves of the Child Care Center that our curiosity is piqued. There are letters to sign, events to sign up for ... and conveniently located on the path, coffee, food and conversation! What would we do without Coffee Hour??!!

A million THANKS for the servers of the past three months. But volunteers have been dwindling of late. We would love to believe in the miracle of Coffee and Donuts, but a miracle may begin with YOU!! Sign your name on the volunteer sheet on the table, and a second person will team with you. What a great way to get to know people!

Coffee Hour has never been easier! Tables are set up by the Deacons, and coffee is made by the chairpersons. Weekly cleanup assistants help clean up!

So “what do I do?” you may ask. YOU (and a cohost) supply the snacks, keep the table refilled, and visit with congregants! Approximate time commitment: 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. You can attend the 11 a.m. service. Thank you!

Yoga of 12-Step Recovery
Kelly Garrity’s early Sunday Yoga (7:30 a.m. in the Wisdom Room) will be held every other week for a while, on Oct. 6 & 20, and Nov. 3 & 17. Stretch your muscles and center your mind!

Isaiah House
Wednesday, Oct. 9, 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 Seekers Women's Group
Tuesday, Oct. 15, 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.
Last month we began a consideration of a “situational framework” for approaching child/teen non-compliance with adult expectations. We are borrowing the principles from a leadership model, but in my experience I found it equally useful for helping both adult staff members, and child/teen clients, with moving past their resistance to doing what they are being asked to do. In past columns we've looked at the “why” of behavior from various points of view. Situational problem solving is yet another way to try to understand non-compliant behavior that we find challenging. To my mind, the more viewpoints and approaches we can come up with, the better, for both child and adult.

This month we will delve more deeply into the notion of “readiness.” In this framework, we are asked to look specifically at what we are asking the child/teen to do. In other words, we want to examine non-compliant behavior through the lens of a specific task. This “task” can be either behavioral or academic, thus framework, or model, can be helpful with a wide variety of expectations. It may be that we want a brother or sister to change the way they are treating their sibling. Or, it may be that we want the child/teen to complete a homework assignment. As we mentioned last month, task “readiness” is comprised of two features: 1. Ability; 2. Motivation.

**Ability.** For someone to be “able” to do a task, two things must be true:
- **Skills:** The individual must have the necessary skills for completing this particular task successfully. They will have needed to have been taught how to do it earlier, and they will need some past experience doing the same or similar tasks.
- **Understanding:** The individual must have some knowledge of what to do and how to do it, including awareness of what is needed to get the task done, and how priorities need to be set to see it completed. Again, as with skills, past experience with the same or similar tasks will be necessary.

**Motivation.** Again, two things must be true:
- **Desire:** The individual wants to achieve completion of the task, and may need necessary meaningful incentives to accomplish the task.

**Confidence:** The individual must be secure about their abilities to do the task and believe that they can be successful. To some degree, the child/teen must be willing to accept personal responsibility for getting the task done. *Motivation has a lot to do with attitude.*

Using this framework, the combination of these features – ability and motivation - determines what kind of intervention will be helpful. All children will be more “ready” to do some tasks than others. It is also true that a child may be “ready” to do something the way they want to do it, and less “ready” to do something the way their parents want it done. Next month we’ll talk about “matching” parenting style to the “readiness” of a child for a particular task. For now, here are Four Readiness Levels:

**Readiness Level 1: Unwilling and Unable**
- The child/teen is low in ability and low in motivation: they don't want to and they don't know how to.
- Lack of motivation may be either due to a poor attitude, or due to a lack of personal confidence in their ability.
- They might be unwilling because they don't understand the task.

**Readiness Level 2: Willing – Low Ability**
- The child may have a lot of motivation (desire) but without the necessary skills.
- Because of the high desire, the child will be open to learning why things have to be done a certain way, as well as what to do.

**Readiness Level 3: Able – Unwilling**
- The child may have the ability to do what is expected but may be low in motivation due to insecurity.
- We may be asking a child to do something they've never done before.
- The child may be hesitant, but you are convinced they can do it.
- The child may be capable but disinterested.

**Readiness Level 4: Able and Willing**
- For this task, the child is high in ability and high in desire.
- May need to clarify directions only.
- May be unmotivated due to previous lack of recognition.

Homework for this month: When giving your child/teen an instruction to do something (schoolwork or behavioral) and you notice them not complying with your request, practice your analytical skills in determining at which “readiness level” you place them. Next month we’ll start matching where they are with how we want to help them comply.
In launching George’s new book, we are having eight celebrations here in California. It also was decided that I will go to Minnesota, our former stomping grounds, as George’s ambassador to introduce the book. Two book events will be held in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. It was decided. Settled.

Then a week later, this: “I’ve decided that I’m going to Minnesota with you to launch the book,” George says, his eyes strong with conviction. “Think about it, Vivian. Don’t answer yet.”

My stomach clenches. How would he manage a trip in his frail condition? Travel is tough, wearing. Germs of all sorts are shared on a plane. Then a book signing, talking, shaking hands, where would he get the energy? And me, how would I manage taking care of him plus all the details of a book launching 2,000 miles from home?

Knowing that arguing doesn’t work, I say, “Hmmm, let’s think about it.”

The next day George has an appointment with the nephrologist, his kidney doctor. I take this opportunity to run the Minnesota idea past him. With his dark eyes locked on George and a hand gently touching his arm, the doctor says, “No. I cannot condone that. Even I, a much younger person, find that travel is difficult on my body. You would end up in the hospital away from home.” My stomach unclenches.

George excuses himself to use the restroom. The nephrologist says to me, “He is very frail. Death is not imminent, but …” Thank God for this supportive, compassionate truth teller.

When we return home, we sit at the kitchen table to review the appointment, our usual custom. George says, “Well, the doctor didn’t say I can’t go to Minnesota.”

Oh brother! I attempt to remind him of the conversation: “Let me tell you what I heard the doctor say. He said, ’No, I can’t condone that. I understand that you want to see Minnesota for the last time. It’s an emotional need. I get that. But the medical aspect is what is important now. You are not able to travel, you would end up in the hospital, and I must not condone it.’”

After a few hours, George seems to accept my recall of the doctor’s decision. However, two days later he says, “I don’t have to do what the doctor says.” I nod and say, “But I’m so glad that you will.”

That night when he lay in bed, I went to him and gave him his goodnight hug and kiss. He looked at me with his still beautiful soft-blue eyes, and murmured, “You are so good to me. I never tire of looking at you.”

I smiled all night.
One of my favorite poems is *Desiderata*, and I have a framed picture of it next to my bed. I love its opening line, “Go placidly amid the noise and the haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence.” A similar thread is heard in a Maya Angelou poem: “Each person deserves a day away in which no problems are confronted, no solutions searched for ...”

All of us need time and space to get away - to visit a place where we can emerge feeling refreshed and renewed. Unfortunately, there is precious little peace to be had in the noisy hubbub that is Orange County. Where can we go to clear our heads and commune with God and nature?

You may be surprised to learn that it’s not hard to find a completely different world where you can connect with nature. Here are my top nine serene places – they’re nearby, and most are either low cost or free.

**Fullerton Arboretum, Fullerton** – Located on the grounds of CSU Fullerton, this scenic botanical garden features a meandering trail through a variety of landscapes. There’s even a beautiful pond with ducks and turtles! It’s a wonderful place to relax and think.

**Heisler Park, Laguna Beach** – Along the bluff from Cliff Drive to Las Brisas restaurant is a gorgeous walk with views of clear blue waves, craggy rocks, and breathtaking scenery. It’s the perfect place to calm down and reset your troubled mind (see photo above, taken at sunset).

**San Joaquin Marsh & Wildlife Sanctuary, Irvine** – This secluded and hard-to-find sanctuary is owned by the Irvine Ranch Water District. Most people don’t realize that it’s open to the public. Dotted with numerous large ponds, this tranquil and serene wetlands area is home to a variety of bird species and other wildlife.

**Oso Creek Trail, Mission Viejo** – One of the great hidden treasures of South County, this easy trail is nestled behind the Norman Murray Center near La Paz and Veteran’s Way. It features mosaic columns, a babbling brook, a butterfly garden, and other charming surprises. There’s even an outdoor fitness area for those who want to exercise.

**Laguna Coast Wilderness Park, Laguna Canyon** – If you’ve ever wondered what California looked like to the early pioneers, look no further than this 40 mile network of trails through willow, oak and sycamore trees and native grassland. Long and short hikes are available depending on your time and energy.

**Bolsa Chica Ecological Preserve, Huntington Beach** – This 1300 acre wetlands area across from the beach is a tranquil spot where you can view many species of birds and other wildlife. It’s an easy, three-mile hike through a gorgeous preserve. Bring your camera to capture the beauty!

**Buck Gully Reserve, Newport Beach** – Check out this gem tucked away in a Newport coastal canyon if you’re looking for a moderate hike that will take you through pretty wildflowers and greenery with a lovely view of the ocean at the top of the hill.

**Oak Canyon Nature Center, Anaheim** – If you’re in the mood for a pleasant walk through oak woodland and coastal sage, this 58-acre natural park fits the bill. Four miles of trail take you alongside a pretty stream and old growth forest that is sure to ease your mind.

**Irvine Regional Park, East Orange** – This sprawling park is the oldest one in California. It has something for everyone: mature oak trees, a beautiful lake with paddle boats to rent, small zoo, train rides, bike rentals, nature center, pony rides, and an assortment of peacocks roaming around. It’s a great place to bring children – or just stroll around and enjoy the ambience.

"Tricia"