On November 26, IUCC and University Synagogue celebrated our 31st annual Thanksgiving interfaith service together. It was a warm and gracious evening that included welcoming remarks from Rabbi Rachlis and Pastor David Pattee and a keynote speech by Professor Jeffrey Kopstein, Chair of the Department of Political Science at UCI.

Other participants included guests from the Unified Mosque of Irvine, Iglesia Vida Abundante, and Center for Spiritual Living. Our combined choirs shared beautiful music, and there was a wonderful spirit of love, goodwill, and thankfulness all around!

*Photos courtesy of Felicity Figueroa & Tricia Aynes*
The story is told that long ago, in a far north country where the Good News of the Gospel had not yet been heard, there was fear that when the days got shorter, in the late fall, the Sun God was abandoning them. As it got colder and darker and the muddy roads turned to impassable frozen ruts, fearful people took wheels from their now useless wagons and hung them from the ceilings of their little huts.

They cut fresh pine boughs, an evergreen symbol of life, to lay upon the wheels and, in succeeding weeks, as the darkness deepened, they added lamps to the wheels in hope that each new light would encourage the Sun God not to leave them, but to return again.

Sure enough, it worked! By the time of the Winter solstice, with several lamps burning brightly, they perceived that ever so slowly, even as the days got colder, the light – the Sun – was returning. New life would soon follow as the ground thawed and the rutted roads became mud again, and they could put the wheels back on their wagons, take their children to the village for festivals, and plant grain, and live without fear of starving.

So, when the Gospel reached these northern people and they learned of Jesus and the stories of his birth – Emmanuel, God with Us – they kept their tradition of the wheels dressed with evergreens and candles, a sign of the light that is never taken away, the love of God that comes to our world and will never abandon us, even at the darkest moments: Jesus Christ, the light of the world.
Stewardship! A new approach!

Over the next month you will hear more about the change coming in the timing of our annual Stewardship Campaign.

How many appeals are you receiving in the mail from various charitable organizations? The TV Station PBS? The Radio Station KUSC? The Orange County Mission? Doctors Without Borders? The Heifer Project? The Bowers Museum in Santa Ana? the list goes on and on!

Instead of looking at Stewardship as merely fund raising, we are changing the focus of Stewardship to one of ministry. Giving of your monetary gifts is a spiritual practice. Just as visiting the sick, preparing food for coffee hour, serving on a committee, singing in the choir or serving as worship leader are all aspects of personal ministry to IUCC.

In this change, we are moving the timing of Stewardship from fall to January…to Epiphany when the Magi brought their gifts to the Christ child. We’re changing the focus to be on the Magi …becoming role models for seekers who are on a journey to discover God’s presence in the world.

Nothing will change as far as your giving schedule for 2020…just the timing of your pledge. (Of course pledges made on the previous schedule of fall will be joyfully welcomed!)

Yours in faith and community,
Stewardship Campaign
Janet Emery, co-chair
Susie Lang, co-chair
Connie Jones, committee member

Thank you, Marilyn!

Ten IUCC women have been blessed with the grace of open, generous, authentic connection through a six-week discussion of the book, Women Rowing North, by Mary Pipher. In a spirit of trust, we shared wisdom and listened thoughtfully to the real-life challenges and blessings we are encountering as we grow older. Together we drew closer, stronger and braver in sisterhood. With grateful hearts, we thank Marilyn Smith for organizing and leading this discussion, which she will repeat in January for another set of lucky women.

Women’s ministries at IUCC spring from such inspirations of the Spirit and from the initiative to follow that lead. Sisters are ready to help, and the rewards are great. Thank you, Marilyn, for your gift to IUCC’s women.

—Laura Long
Progressive Christian Congregation Seeks Full-time Permanent Senior Minister

IRVINE UNITED CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH (IUCC) www.iucc.org, located in Orange County, CA, a congregation of the United Church of Christ, seeks a full time Senior Minister to serve a growing congregation of approximately 350.

To receive serious consideration, candidates will be able to demonstrate collaboration and program leadership talents well-suited to leading a program-size church. A commitment to Progressive Christianity is required. The search committee is especially interested in candidates who can demonstrate gifted homiletics attractive to a well-educated community, as well as the following commitments:

- to “open and affirming” embrace for LGBTQ+ persons
- to racial and ethnic diversity and inclusion
- to social justice causes including climate change

Our next permanent minister will collaborate with others to build programs that are attractive to young people and young families.

Orange County, once known for its very conservative political culture, has been represented exclusively by Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives since 2018. The University of California, Irvine is a strong economic and cultural influence on our city.

Not later than in December 2019, interested candidates will be able to review our job listing, to express interest by making their Ministerial Profiles available to the search committee, and upon mutual discernment, to review our extensive congregational profile. These transactions will be via the United Church of Christ website. Please visit https://www.ucc.org/ucc_ministry_opportunities

Informal inquiries but not applications may be directed to the search committee chair at: keith.boyum@gmail.com

Update on the Search continued on page 5
Part II. Finding and Evaluating Candidates. Certainly not later than early in 2020, the process of receiving and evaluating candidates for our Senior Minister position will be in full swing. The Search Committee will naturally evaluate applications, and will identify a small number whose references will be solicited, and a still smaller number who will be interviewed. “Zoom” video technology and of course telephones can be good tools for initial interviews. Our committee already has a draft rubric for scoring candidates. We may refine the rubric as we gain experience, but the essentials are pretty clear, and come directly from the Congregational Profile. We want the core elements that we have included in the job announcement discussed above, and even now posted at IUCC.org.

Part III. Identifying and Recommending a Particular Candidate. The United Church of Christ process is outlined on the UCC website here: http://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/S-C-Guide-for-Congregations.pdf. When a particular candidate is identified by the Search Committee, that person is invited to preach in a “neutral pulpit,” that is, at a nearby UCC church, with the Search Committee in attendance. Following the neutral pulpit experience, and with an abundance of prayer and discernment, the Search Committee reaches a decision to recommend a particular individual, and a “Candidating Weekend” is set. During the candidating weekend, the congregation meets the candidate at one or multiple events, and then experiences worship with the candidate leading and preaching. In accordance with IUCC bylaws and UCC practice, the congregation then votes whether or not to call the recommended candidate to be IUCC’s next settled Senior Minister.

There are more details, of course, including such things as Administration Board-led negotiations concerning the particulars of the new hire, including salary and housing allowances. But this review of the process can end with the Search Committee’s hope that the congregation will support us with prayer and affirmation, as we seek the Spirit’s guidance in this important task.

- Keith Boyum

The Nutcracker – a Holiday Tradition Since 1940

You hear the music as soon as the season begins – Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy, Waltz of the Flowers, March of the Toy Soldiers.

And in cities and small towns across the country, ballet schools produce parts or all of the ballet set to the music of Tchaikovsky.

There are plenty of performances to attend in Orange and LA counties, but you might consider these two especially:

**Pacific Theatre Ballet Company**

with IUCC youth Eliza Walls  
Dec. 13th & 14th (7 pm)  
Dec. 14th & 15th (3 pm)  
at Coast Hills Church, Aliso Viejo  
www.pacifictheatreballet.com/tickets.html

**Orange County Ballet Theater**

with IUCC staff Steve Swope  
Dec. 7th (2 & 7 pm) & 8th (3 pm)  
at Northwood High School, Irvine  
www.dkcba.com/the-nutcracker-2019/  
Dec 12th & 13th (7 pm)  
at Casa Romantica, San Clemente  
www.casaromantica.org/calendar
At Christmas, we all receive gifts from friends and family. Some we consume, like a bottle of wine and a box of See's candies. Some are items of clothing that we wear for a while and enjoy. Some are more sentimental, like a picture of a special moment. Some are intangible, as in the moments we share with those we love. Occasionally we receive a gift “that keeps on giving.” That idea - of the gift that keeps on giving - is how I see the buildings on the IUCC campus. More than just buildings, these are the places where we see our vision of “a just world for all” come to fruition.

Let me give a few examples of what that means. Every weekday morning in Plumer Hall, AA members come to a safe place where they can share a cup of coffee, tell their stories and receive support. Plumer Hall is also a place of worship for a local mosque and for a Buddhist gathering. That space is also the gathering place for Scouts BSA Troop 602, which includes both boys and girls. Once a month, Plumer Hall is the place for Seekers - a group of IUCC women who come together to share fellowship and discussion. In August, IUCC’s Mission and Service Ministry hosted Family Promise, a program that provides food and shelter for families that are temporarily homeless. In 2020, we will again host Family Promise for two 2-week periods. The list could go on and on, but here is the essential point. The recent upgrades we made to this space - new air conditioning, a new roof, new skylights - all have made the space a better and more welcoming space. That is a gift that will keep on giving.

Another example of this kind of gift is the Early Childhood Center (ECC). On any weekday from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., the ECC is staffed by caring professionals who provide a learning environment for up to 60 children - children who represent the cultural and ethnic diversity of Irvine. These children gather in brightly painted classrooms with updated furnishings and cooled by new air conditioning units. The new classroom for 2 year-old children (created out of what was the former office space for our Pastor and office staff) provides a much-needed community service for younger children. As the children arrive and leave the preschool with their parents, it’s clear that the ECC is a gift that will keep on giving far into the future.

Then we have our new meeting spaces. What a joy it is to meet in light-filled and well-equipped rooms. The Peace, Justice, and Wisdom meeting rooms provide room for boards, committees, and ministries of IUCC to gather. These rooms are “home” to Bible studies, ministries fair, education gatherings, and even our Ash Wednesday service. And both Plumer Hall and the new meeting rooms are not just used by IUCC groups but also by a countless array of community groups that help us to realize our vision of a “just world for all.”

Our new office spaces provide comfortable, professional, and accessible work stations for our office staff. The offices for our pastoral staff are private and allow for far greater confidentiality for meetings and conversations. What an improvement they are over our previous cramped and certainly not private offices. How is this a “gift that keeps on giving”? These newly created spaces help us to provide additional necessary support for the myriad of programs here at IUCC, so that we can create more opportunities and programs.

Even our outside spaces - the community patio, the well-landscaped frontage on Alton, the variety of native plants that speak of our commitment to green faith, the “sooner rather than later” new pergola and shade cover - speak of a place that is welcoming and a presence in the community. Gifts that keep on giving.

The key element and importance in all of our buildings is that they are more than just wood and stucco and paint and windows. Those are just the things we see from the outside. What happens inside all of these spaces is what matters. As we celebrate the joy of Christmas and the birth of Jesus may we reflect on that.

As always, we will do that in faith and community.
“We are here to address racism. It’s still here, and we need to learn ways in which we can be more mindful of each other and cause less hurt,” said Lesli Mitchell, co-chair (with Felicity Figueroa) of IUCC’s Diversity & Inclusion Task Force (DITF) at a presentation on November 10. “It’s really about what’s in people’s heads and what’s in their hearts.” She spoke of several experiences over the years that had frightened and alarmed her.

Facilitated by the two co-chairs, the wide-ranging exchange involved over thirty people gathered in a circle to talk informally about the issue. It was an opportunity for IUCC members and friends to start a discussion that is important and timely.

While many were there to listen and learn, others had painful stories to tell. One participant spoke about the covert racism he experienced, saying “It seems to me that structures and organizations benefit those who look like the dominant culture. The covert racism is more harmful because you can’t point it out. Don’t treat us as aliens because we don’t look like the dominant culture.”

Another participant spoke of so-called “friends” who taunted her for refusing to use a racial epithet and then laughed about it afterwards. “They were joking about the word. I told them how hurt I was, but they were oblivious. They said, ‘Why are you crying? We said we were sorry. We don’t understand why it’s such a big deal.’”

We learned that for multiracial people who don’t fit into binary categories, racism can come from within their own race. One woman spoke of experiencing racism when she was ridiculed for having lighter skin than others in the group. “It’s not always an opposing culture that can make you feel ‘less than’ – sometimes we feel abuse within our own race,” she said. “To keep this from propagating, we need to know our history so we don’t repeat it.”

An older white man reported his own experience with racism while growing up. “I grew up with segregation,” he said. “My dad was in the military so we bounced around from coast to coast. In the south, everything was segregated: the water fountains, the bathrooms. Discrimination went on there, and it was the law. The time I noticed it the most was when my dad was transferred to Virginia just as the schools were being integrated. In my high school, that meant 20 people of color out of 2000. I befriended a boy of color and was subjected to many of the same taunts and slurs that he was.” The man went on to attend the March on Washington and hear the “I have a dream” speech by Martin Luther King, Jr.

One woman spoke of growing up as a Polish Catholic and having her grandma tell her to “stay with your own kind.” She asked the group, “How do we get people to stray from that belief? It builds resentments, and it escalates. I appreciate the honesty of those who shared their experiences.”

Co-chair Felicity Figueroa offered, “We need to keep in mind that the outside world can create triggers for people of color. When someone here at IUCC says something that triggers them, they may react to it. We don’t just want to put more people of color in leadership roles, we want to make white people more aware. We want to change people’s perceptions so it happens naturally.”

It was a time of sharing and trying to understand one another more fully, and the speakers were candid and honest about their feelings. Near the end, a heartfelt sentiment was offered by one of the last to speak: “We need to move forward in a way that’s respectful and loving.”

Felicity reported that the agreed-upon goals of the DITF are:
1) Increasing the presence of people of color in church leadership positions.
2) Changing the culture of our ministries and admin boards to make participation more attractive to people of color.
3) A concerted effort to make our church more attractive to people of color and families of color so that they want to become members.

On January 19 after church, the DITF will have a more official panel discussion. Come and learn more!
Once a month, IUCC members provide a meal for Isaiah House in Santa Ana. It’s one of many ways IUCC helps care for our neighbors. Mission and Service members Carol Tuch, Peggy Stalter, Bob Stalter, Susan Sayre, Lyle Norton, and Steve and Peggy Goetz (who provided the picture) are some of the people who help out regularly.

Join us as we bless our new Shower Trailer!

IUCC’s Bil Aulenbach was instrumental in getting the funding for Family Promise’s portable shower. Join us on Sunday, January 5, 2020 at 3 p.m. at IUCC for the blessing! Cheese and Wine will be served. Please RSVP if you will attend: lbertson@familypromiseoc.org

This trailer will be of tremendous help to the families served by the agency, enabling them to shower on site as they stay at various churches. IUCC will be hosting families twice for two weeks each time in 2020.
Winter Choir Concert
Sunday, December 8, 7 p.m.
Join our Chancel Choir for an evening of song to lift your spirits this holiday season. There’s something for everyone including solos from our interns, audience participation, familiar old favorites and perhaps some new ones.

Altar Poinsettia Sponsorships
Here is your opportunity to sponsor a poinsettia to honor, celebrate, or memorialize a person or an event. Sign up after service for a $10 donation. Your sponsorship will help put the finishing touches on our sanctuary decorations. Sponsors are welcome to take their poinsettia home after our candlelight service on Christmas Eve.

Advent Workshop & Chili Cookoff
Sunday, December 8, 4 p.m.
Join us for this fun-filled seasonal event that includes caroling, crafting, stories and more. In addition, there will be the annual chili cook-off. If you think your chili has the stuff to knock the socks off the judges, then sign up to enter. It’s always a great time!
Christmas Boutique to benefit Women’s Programs
Sunday, December 8, from 10:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Want to enhance your own Christmas decorating?
Want to find that last minute “little something” for a holiday hostess gift?
Want a festive holiday token for a particularly helpful friend or neighbor?
Want to support the expansion of IUCC Women’s Ministry?

You can do ALL of the above on the IUCC patio before and after services on Sunday, December 8, when you purchase a gift from the carefully curated items of new and gently used Christmas/Winter decorative items. There will even be a section of extremely discounted items! All proceeds will go to Women’s Ministry and aid in the expansion of our programs. Cash is preferred, but checks are welcome too!


Yoga of 12-Step Recovery
Kelly Garrity’s early Sunday Yoga (7:30 a.m. in the Wisdom Room) will be held on Dec. 8 and 22. Stretch your muscles and center your mind!

Isaiah House
Wednesday, Dec. 11, 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.

Women’s Fellowship
Wednesday, Dec. 4, 5:00 p.m.
Women’s Fellowship will begin at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday with a “pricing party” for the merchandise to be included in Sunday’s boutique sale. We’ll have appetizers and beverages to keep us hard at work, with our regular soup and salad supper at 6:30 p.m. Call Pat Sauter for more information at 949-461-0051.

The Seekers Holiday Luncheon
Tuesday, Dec. 17, 11:00 a.m.
The Seekers hold their annual Holiday Luncheon. Call Reefa for details - (949) 859-7091.

Coffee Hour hosts needed!
Coffee hour is about fellowship and giving back! Help spread the joy of fellowship by signing up! Get to know someone new! More than one person can sign up for any date. Part of an IUCC group? Promote yourselves by hosting as a group!

So “what do I do?” you may ask. YOU (and a co-host) 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.

Donated funds are available for reimbursement. Sign up online or at the Coffee Hour table on Sunday. Thanks!
We had a group of seven including Randy Romine, Ken Matsuyama, Colleen McNamara, Lavinia Cooper and Apoorva Ghosh from IUCC and Rev. Nancy Bacon UCC Tehachapi and Rev. Bill Freeman UCC Chatsworth.

On Friday Nov. 8 we spent a day at the border guided by a longtime Mexican missionary, Rev. Chuck Shawver.

We started the day at the El Chaperal border crossing bridge where migrants wait daily for their number to be called to either get on a list to wait for an entry interview or to be taken to a holding site for their initial entry interviews. The people with back packs or luggage are expecting to get to go to the US side for interviews, but must return daily until their names are called.

We next visited a migrant shelter, Espacio Migrante. It is a shelter for approximately 100 refugee families waiting for their interviews for US asylum. We met with three of the residents, two from Honduras and one from El Salvador. Two were victims of gang death threats in their country and one had left to escape a death threat from her husband. We were asked not to take photos at this site.

Our next stop was a visit to “Atencion Integral” administered by Methodist pastor Guillermo Navarrette (shown at left). This site provides a warm meal, clothing, and personal care items for migrants living in the nearby streets. Their program includes spiritual counseling and referrals to medical, legal aid and residential facilities serving migrants waiting in Tijuana.

Our third stop was “Al Otro Lado” a legal services facility helping migrants who are processing their asylum applications. The center is staffed by many US/Mexican attorneys and law school Spanish-speaking volunteers mostly from the San Diego area. They cross the border daily and aid in preparing all the paperwork needed for immigration hearings in the US and in preparing the refugees for their hostile interrogation entry interviews. It has become common knowledge that the current policy directives are to make the entry process as hostile and discouraging as possible and the legal center prepares refugees for what to expect. The site also maintains a website which preserves the refugees’ legal paperwork, which has recently been found to disappear frequently in processing. The lead staff of this site has been targeted for additional interrogation when entering Mexico by the US and Mexican government and they are involved in many class action lawsuits against current US asylum practices that do not follow current US law.

Our fourth stop, Jardin de Las Mariposas, was a large residence in an upper class area of Tijuana. It specializes in service to the trans community of asylum seekers in Tijuana, who are at high risk living in the border area as they are frequently targeted by gangs and sex trafficking. The facility location is generally kept quiet, but is well known in the trans community. They provide meals, lodging, drug rehab counseling and legal/medical/job referrals to their residents.

Our Las Memorias day visit on Saturday included a day of hands-on interaction with the residents. We offered coffee, juice, fresh fruits and sweets for all in the facility. The residents could choose to participate in facial, massage and nail care services, to select from donated clothing and personal care items, and to join in Bingo with prizes. Colleen and Rev. Nancy visited everyone in isolation or too sick to leave their rooms for hands-on personal care and visitation. It was a fun day for all and we are told by the directors that our visits are a favorite for our Las Memorias friends. The facility was extremely appreciative for the $900 donation we were able to bring with us from central and southern conference Global Ministries and IUCC contributors.

We will be returning early next year and will post information in the Sunday bulletin and on our website.
Powerful Parenting
MATCHING WHAT WE DO TO HELP TO WHAT WE SEE:
INGREDIENTS IN THE “MATCH”
by Dr. Lorraine Fox

Over the past months we’ve been discussing “situational” problem solving, outlining reasons a child or teen might be either willing or unwilling, and able or unable, to cooperate with a request to do a particular task. Motivation and ability are not only about doing a task, but doing it the way we want it done. A child may have high readiness to do a task her/his way, but low readiness to do it another way. Think about the last time you asked your child/teen to “clean their room”!

Last month we talked about what a child/young person would need from a parent or other adult to be successful at completing a specific task. This month we’ll continue thinking about our “role” in helping a child to be successful at a given task by outlining how to “match” our approach to helping to the degree of motivation and ability we are seeing with regard to a specific request or expectation. Remember, ability and motivation are not about a person, but about a person with regard to a particular task. With that in mind, our approach for intervention to help is actually determined by the child, depending on what they are showing in terms of their motivation (willingness) and skill (ability). It is the job of the adult to meet the needs of the child, so they can learn to do what we want, the way we want it done.

To help a child (or anyone) complete a task, we blend a “task focus” with a “relationship focus,” in various proportions. People – young or older – need a combination of these two kinds of attention, but they need the attention in different degrees depending on how much trouble they are having with either their willingness to do the task, or their ability to do the task.

A task focus involves paying the most attention to telling them what and how more than about why. Getting into a long discussion about why something needs to be done, or done a particular way, does not help people at Readiness Level 1 (unwilling/unable) learn how to do something. Getting caught up in why also provides an excuse for not actually doing what they are supposed to be doing. When someone is having trouble doing something correctly, or at all, the adult is not a consultant but a task-master, and in that role “leads” the discussion, not the child.

A relationship focus is more about providing support and encouragement than about “what and how.” It involves more two-way communication and allows for questions in addition to praising, consulting, facilitating, etc. We cannot praise or encourage someone who is not doing the task because they don’t want to or don’t know how to!

The MATCH:
Readiness Level 1: Child is UNWILLING AND UNABLE
Intervention is High Task/Low Relationship
Adult is DIRECTING (Telling)
When helping someone who is low in ability and low in motivation - due either to a poor attitude, a lack of self-confidence, or a lack of understanding about what is actually expected - the adult will interact primarily about the task. The discussion will be “show and tell,” explaining how, not why. A low emotional style works best at this level. If the parent/adult starts yelling or getting frustrated, the young person will start to focus on the yelling more than on the task. The adult will need to provide specific direction, and provide very close supervision to see that the child is doing what they were told to do, the way they were told to do it. If they are left alone they will either stop doing the task, or start doing it any way they want.

Teenagers, especially, will likely become irritated and attempt to back the adult off, and adults must be careful to remember that they are providing the kind of help that is needed and not “treating them like a baby” or “dogging them” or whatever else you may hear.

We learn with a teacher, and learning how to live at home is the job of the parent, just as learning how to live in the classroom or learning particular subjects is the job of the teacher. Although I have many advanced degrees I have always been horrible at math. I needed a math tutor in high school, college, and graduate school. It never helped me when the tutor told me I was “smart,” because I am not smart in math. I have always been Readiness Level 1 in math and only survived when the tutor was willing to treat me as a beginner. Treating me this way was not a “put down” but a life-saver, as it allowed me to graduate. Never apologize when it is apparent that “show and tell,” without a lot of emotional energy, is what someone tells you, by their behavior, that this is what they need for this particular task. We’ll continue with the next three “Readiness Levels” next month.
Dementia is an umbrella term. It includes Alzheimer’s, Lewy Bodies, frontotemporal, Parkinsons, chronic traumatic and vascular dementia, as well as some lesser known conditions, according to neurologist Mark Mapstone.*

The vast majority of those with dementia have Alzheimer’s disease. I learned that the longer you live, the more likely you are to have Alzheimer’s. At 85 your risk is 50%. It is a worldwide problem with numbers increasing every year because our population is aging. It is now determined to be a public health crisis.

Since there is no current viable treatment, I find it imperative to join the Alzheimer’s Walk to raise financial support. It is encouraging to see large numbers of people walking in support of research, treatment, and caregiving. As a caregiver for my husband who has Alzheimer’s, I feel that in this walking group there is understanding and concern for the patient and the caregiver. It makes me feel like I belong; I am not alone in the daily struggle with this disease.

It is important to belong. Belonging means to be a member or part of something: a group, organization, or class. You fit in a specified place or environment. Synonyms are: affinity, kinship, commitment, devotedness, fondness, constancy. All words that feel positive, even “warm.” Not belonging means displaced, lost, mislead, gone. Not good feelings. “Cold” feelings.

While I want to feel like I belong, Neurologist Daniel Potts broadened my insight when he wrote: “Nothing stirs the soul more than a feeling of belonging. We must do everything in our power to promote this kind of experience daily in people who are living with dementia.”** (Underlining is my addition.)

Nobody likes to feel left out. An anonymous Alzheimer’s patient wrote these poignant words:

> Just remember that I need you, that the best of me is gone. Please don’t fail to stand beside me. Love me ‘til my life is done.

How do we promote the daily experience of belonging for those living with Alzheimer’s? Poet Edwin Markham wrote:

> He drew a circle that shut me out – heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. But love and I had the wit to win: We drew a circle and took him In!

***Edwin Markham, American poet, 1852-1940

Let’s draw a circle of love and take them in.

*Mark Mapstone, PhD, University of California, Irvine, Department of Neurology **Daniel C. Potts, MD, Neurologist from Personal Wordpress blog, “31 Lessons Learned from Persons Living with Dementia and Care Partners” ***Edwin Markham, American poet, 1852-1940
The word prayer means to ask earnestly; its etymology originates from the Old French preire which in turn is derived from the Latin word precari meaning to entreat or ask. Within the aforementioned context, one can think of prayer as a Divine conversation that transcends petitions. As such, prayer can be broadly described as a dialogue between God—or something greater than oneself—and the one who prays.

What if one does not believe in God or doubts the existence or non-existence of God? If one is either atheist or agnostic, then why engage in this intangible exercise? Whether one is agnostic, atheist, or theist, all of us, at one time or another, have woken up in a fog of stress and anxiety. Such a condition feels as though one is being pulled in a multiplicity of directions caused by (a) stresses from work, (b) unresolved family issues, (c) unanswered emails, (d) sickness, (e) tiredness, (f) financial insecurities, and (g) fears—real or imaginary. There are so many things in the journey of life which can leave one unable to focus. These stresses are typical of modern society; there is an ancient solution—prayer. For thousands of years, Jewish believers invoked a spoken prayer as they arose to a new day. The prayer used by these Jewish believers was the Shema or עַמְׁש (pronounced shay'-mah) which comes from Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Shema means to hear and obey. Shema is an invitation to listen, respond, appreciate, understand, and act.

Prayer can also be a way to achieve mental centeredness. This mental centeredness can be accomplished if one is willing to entertain the probability of something inexplicably larger than oneself. A prayer could be either (a) the thought of a single word, such as Shema, or (b) the mental and internal recitation of a mantra or set of words as one acknowledges something larger than oneself. The positive outcomes of prayer are likely to lead one to engage in self-reflection, self-examination, contemplation, and inner peace.

I have personally benefited much from the practice of continuous practice. I once conducted a theological experiment to determine if it is really possible to pray continuously (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17). I was curious about the construct of praying continuously because the word continuous implies that there are no pauses or breaks between two points α and β. Within the idea of continuity I found that it is probable to approach a convergence point of praying continuously. Prayer is difficult; however, through this medium the distance between points α and β—where α means my way of doing things and β means doing things from the perspective of something larger than myself—are minimized. Doing things from the perspective of God is a sign of spiritual humility which provides a solid foundation for dealing with the challenges of life.

Praying led me to contemplate that (a) my way is to be resentful when not thanked for something I may have done for someone whereas God's way has allowed me to give simply for the sake of giving, (b) my way is to be envious of those more gifted than I whereas God's way is to provide diversity of abilities for the tasks before me, (c) my way is to spend money on myself whereas God's way is to be more generous, (d) my way is to think of my rights whereas God's way is to remind me of my responsibilities, (e) my way is to retaliate whereas God's way is to forgive (this is very difficult), (f) my way is to do things from my perspective whereas God's way is to show me a better way that is not necessarily linked to my perspective. Prayer allows me to grow in the ways of something greater than myself—the ways of God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer viewed prayer in general and Morning Prayer in particular, as an essential tool to set the day. Prayer allows one to rest in God when confronted by the ebbs and flows of life's uncertainties and vicissitudes. Within Bonhoeffer's context, prayer allows one to rest in God and to surrender the false-self, that is, satisfaction of instinctual needs of survival, while allowing the true self to emerge which is one's participation in the Divine life as manifested in one's own uniqueness.

Finally, prayer as a Divine conversation with God, or as a form of petitioning earnestly, or as a way to praise God by acknowledging His presence should be conducted in private (cf. Matthew 6:5-8). I believe that prayer is the mechanism that one can use to maintain a conscious contact with God or something much larger than oneself.

What is the Purpose of Prayer?
Dr. Eduardo Jesús Arismendi-Pardi
Not long ago, I was in a discussion group where we were asked, “What quality do you possess that you think will serve you the best as you grow old?”

For me, the answer was a single word: openness. Openness to new ideas, new realities, and new ways of thinking. I think being open to new things may well be the single most important characteristic we possess as human beings. It means stepping out of our comfort zones - our “bubbles” - and immersing ourselves in a different world. In doing so, we gain new perspectives and broaden our horizons.

Every so often in my life, I’ve had the extraordinary gift of metaphorically taking one big step outside my regular “lane” and landing in a parallel world populated by people I had never understood before. I haven’t done it often, and I wish I’d done it more.

The first time it happened was when a bad experience with a homophobic pastor led me to experience a call to get involved in the LGBT community. The call came out of nowhere, but the still small voice deep inside me was powerful and insistent. I fought it at first because I couldn’t imagine how a shy, non-gay woman could possibly help the cause of gay rights. Ultimately, I set out on a road with many twists and turns that eventually led me to a job I loved at the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center of OC. I met the most warm and lovely people and entered their world, learning and growing and finding a level of acceptance I’d never experienced before. For the first time, the social anxiety I’d dealt with all my life was lifted and I was free to be myself.

The second time I stepped into another world was when I started visiting immigrants in detention as part of the Friends of OC Detainees program. As I spoke with these men, I learned about their lives and how hard it was for them. Most had been managing to eke a living until one slip up cost them everything: job, livelihood, and freedom. When a man I had been visiting for over a year was released, we celebrated! But that was only the beginning of a tortuous path to sort out his legal problems and try to get him back on his feet. The process was complicated and daunting: getting his record cleared, getting him a social security card, obtaining a work permit, obtaining an ID, etc. It was horrifying to see what we put these poor souls through with no roadmap to guide them through miles of bureaucracy for which they were ill prepared. After that, I saw the immigrants around me in a whole new light: saw how hard they worked just to get by, saw how many were one slip-up shy of disaster, saw how many lived together in cramped apartments, saw how difficult it was for them to get transportation, saw the many hurdles they faced.

Maybe you’ve had the experience of stepping into another world and having your eyes (and your mind) opened. I hope you have, because it’s truly a transformative experience to be able to escape your entrenched mindset and see people with new eyes. As an extra bonus, you get to see all the different people you are: every world you enter creates a new side of yourself, and you become a more dynamic and empathic individual.

I have no doubt that there are many more “lanes” out there to be explored. After all, there are over 7 billion people in the world! Even here at IUCC, there are plenty of opportunities to interact with diverse populations and learn from people of other races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and gender identities.

I’ve started reading White Fragility by Robin Di Angelo. The author is a sociologist who tries to unpack why white liberals find it so difficult to discuss racism. I’m uncomfortable with the issue, which is why I know it needs my attention - my openness to a new way of thinking. So far, I’ve found her perspective to be insightful and dead-on. This is another parallel world I need to enter, and I am open to unpacking and exploring it.

Being open to other worlds doesn’t mean giving up our own. Far from it. It means we leave some space open in our minds to accommodate people who may seem different from us. We don’t need to agree or even completely understand. But it is important for us to listen without judgment, to accept people for who they are. It’s how we learn and grow, how we connect with others, and how we become more loving human beings. Merry Christmas, everyone! I wish you the gift of openness.
Did you know? Here are even more reasons to love our denomination!

**UCC Firsts**

1700 | An early stand against slavery: Congregationalists are among the first Americans to take a stand against slavery. The Rev. Samuel Sewall writes the first anti-slavery pamphlet in America, “The Selling of Joseph.” Sewall lays the foundation for the abolitionist movement that comes more than a century later.

1773 | First published African American poet: A young member of the Old South congregation, Phillis Wheatley, becomes the first published African American author. “Poems on Various Subjects” is a sensation, and Wheatley gains her freedom from slavery soon after. Modern African American poet Alice Walker says of her: “[She] kept alive, in so many of our ancestors, the notion of song.”

1785 | First ordained African American pastor: Lemuel Haynes is the first African American ordained by a Protestant denomination. In 1776, in the midst of the fight for liberty in which he enlists as a soldier, he writes a defense of the liberation of African Americans from slavery: “Liberty, Further Extended.”

1846 | First integrated anti-slavery society: The Amistad case is a spur to the conscience of Congregationalists and other Christians who believe no human being should be a slave. In 1846 Lewis Tappan, one of the Amistad organizers, organizes the American Missionary Association—the first anti-slavery society in the U.S. with multiracial leadership.

1853 | First woman pastor: Antoinette Brown is the first woman since New Testament times ordained as a Christian minister, and perhaps the first woman in history elected to serve a Christian congregation as pastor. At her ordination a friend, Methodist minister Luther Lee, defends “a woman’s right to preach the Gospel.”

1972 | Ordination of first openly gay minister: The UCC’s Golden Gate Association ordains the first openly gay person as a minister in an historic Protestant denomination: the Rev. William R. Johnson. In the following three decades, the UCC’s General Synod urges equal rights for homosexual citizens.

1973 | Civil rights activists freed: The Wilmington Ten are charged with the arson of a white-owned grocery store in Wilmington, N.C. One of them is Benjamin Chavis, a UCC missionary and community organizer. Convinced the charges are false, the UCC’s General Synod raises more than $1 million to pay for bail.


2005 | Marriage equality: On July 4, the General Synod overwhelmingly passes a resolution supporting same-gender marriage equality. UCC General Minister and President John Thomas says that the Synod “has acted courageously to declare freedom, affirming marriage equality, affirming the civil rights of same gender couples...”

- From the Membership Ministry
I never know what to get people for Christmas. So instead of buying presents, I thought I'd tell you folks about some things I've recently seen on YouTube. YouTube is like Aunt Fannie's Attic; sundries are scattered about in no particular order. Audio and video quality is never great. Still, you can find some treasures, if you know what you're looking for. So here's my list; it's not exhaustive, but there are some treasures here. Enjoy and, above all, Merry Christmas.

**Best Picture**

1. **Popular Mack Sennett & the Keystone Kops Videos** (Mack Sennett – 1913) – If you've never seen the Keystone Kops, take the opportunity.
2. **One Week** (Buster Keaton - 1920) – Buster Keaton, the madman of the silents, abounds on YouTube. Take your pick.
3. **Applause** (Rouben Mamoulian - 1929) – An underpaid blues singer tries to save her educated daughter from a career in show business. Stars Helen Morgan.
4. **Broadway** (Paul Fejos - 1929) – Paul Fejos, the Dos Passos of Pre-Code Hollywood, spins a yarn of speakeasies, gangsters, chorines and…murder.
5. **War of the Worlds** (Orson Welles - 1938) - Orson Welles' original radio broadcast. People jumped out of windows over this thing.
6. **It Happened Tomorrow** (Rene Clair - 1944) – Dick Powell can read tomorrow's newspaper today. Rene Clair made this film while he was an exile in Hollywood.
7. **Miles Davis Quintet: Germany 1967-11-07** (Jay Roach) – These guys could change time, keys, tempo, grooves, all at a half second's notice. Miraculous.
8. **The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour** (1967-1969) - YouTube offers several full episodes. Find out what the hubbub was all about.
9. **(1970-09-21) - Week 1 - NY Jets At Cleveland (MNF)** – The first “Monday Night Football” ever broadcast. YouTube also has the first Super Bowl. Are you ready for some football?
11. **Muddy Waters and the Rolling Stones Live at the Checkerboard** (1981) – Mick Jagger looks as if he wants to shout “I'm on stage with Muddy Waters!”
12. **The Cherry Orchard** (Judy Dench - 1981) Chekhov as it should be done. Adapted by Trevor Griffiths. Comes in four parts.
13. **Das Rheingold** (Patrice Chereau/Pierre Boulez - 1981) – Though not well thought of, this was the first Bayreuth production to appear on American television.
15. **The Gospel at Colonus** (Lee Breuer/Bob Telson - 1983) – Presents Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* as if it were liturgical drama in an Afro-American church.
With the November 26 release of the latest U.N. climate change report, we learn that greenhouse gas emissions are still rising dangerously. The report authors say that “deeper and faster cuts are now required” in order just to mitigate the oncoming catastrophic climate changes.

But instead, in early November, the Trump Administration formally began the year-long process of withdrawing from the 2015 Paris climate accord.

In partial response, an interesting coalition has published a We Are Still In declaration. The online statement is endorsed by businesses and investors, cities and counties, colleges and universities including Cal State Long Beach and Cal State Northridge, 10 states including California, health care organizations, and tribes. The statement’s opening paragraph is this:

We, the undersigned mayors, county executives, governors, tribal leaders, college and university leaders, businesses, faith groups, cultural institutions, healthcare organizations, and investors are joining forces for the first time to declare that we will continue to support climate action to meet the Paris Agreement.

Some 263 faith groups have also endorsed the statement, including several UCC congregations. On November 25, the IUCC Administration Board approved a proposal that at our annual winter congregational meeting, IUCC consider signing the declaration, which runs to six paragraphs and can be viewed here: https://www.wearestillin.com/we-are-still-declaration

The Advocates for Peace and Justice encourages IUCC members to read the declaration, and to support a motion that the congregation endorse the We Are Still In declaration.

Dear Readers,

Wow, it’s the holidays! Oh my. So much to do! Gather the tree. Find the decorations. Trim the branches. Make a list of who’s naughty or nice. Buy the gifts. Tie ribbons and bows.

Plants for the holidays are most important. Gather pinecones. Create aromatic scents.

I try to recycle as much as I can. The recycling box is festive. Santa Claus likes it, too. Wishing you a very happy holiday!

Love,

Miss Lily

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.