IUCC’s Christmas Pageant on December 22 put a modern spin on the story, and much merriment ensued!

Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes
On December 8th, IUCC’s choir presented “We need a little Christmas,” an uplifting and humorous concert to ring in the holidays. The show was so good that it generated a standing ovation from the packed church! Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes
More photos of the choir concert!
It’s an election year, of course, and there are some changes you’ll need to know about. The presidential primary is March 3, and Vote Centers open on Feb. 22. Terry LePage will share information on the new **Vote Centers for 2020** at 12:30 on Sunday, Jan. 26.

Find out about the changes coming to voting in Orange County to make voting more accessible, more secure, more direct, and more convenient. Gone are the local polling places limited to voting precinct locations. Voters can choose their favorite way to cast their ballot, and even register to vote, at full-service Vote Centers, or drop their mail ballot off at secure locations.

**Sunday Adult Education** – Lots of variety this month! Jim Martin will share, on Jan. 5 & 19, a presentation on climate change he made at an aerospace conference in November. On Jan. 12, Terry LePage will lead her second anti-racism session, **Facing Implicit Bias & Walking the Talk of Anti-Racism.** Join the always enlightening conversation at 8:45 or 10:00 on Sunday mornings!

**Tuesday Bible Study** – Ken Wyant keeps us moving through the books of the New Testament in the order they were written. We’re in 1 & 2 Timothy this month, and heading toward the end with Titus and 2 Peter. The conversation is always lively and laced with humor, and newcomers are welcome! Get with Ken and the Tuesday crew at 4:00 in our new meeting rooms.

**Faith & Works** – Pastor and author John Pavlovitz will be our guest speaker in March. He has a huge online following, so reserve your spot soon! Pavlovitz will preach at both services on Sunday, March 15, then speak and answer questions beginning at 1:00 p.m.

A light lunch will be available at 12:30, and Pavlovitz will bring books, t-shirts, and other merchandise. Plus, there will be an opportunity for a small group to meet him and his wife over dinner Saturday evening! IUCC folks will have “first dibs” on the limited number of dinner seats, so watch for more information in the weekly email.

Other offerings include **Yoga of Recovery** with Kelly Garrity at 7:30 am in the Wisdom Room on the 2nd and 4th Sundays, and **TED Talks** discussions with Al Gumb on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays at 4:00 p.m. in the Peace Room.

And don’t forget the church **Library** – still organized and labeled – in Plumer Hall, with plenty of progressive resources!
As I sat down to write my monthly column and typed in the number 2020, I was amazed at how quickly the last decade has flown by. It seems only yesterday that the year was 2010 and IUCC was in the beginning phases of planning and thinking about new spaces and the new programs that could result from those new spaces. Now it's 2020 and we have been in our new spaces for a little over a year.

So what has that meant for this vibrant faith community? On the practical side, we now have ample space for our incredible office staff to do their work effectively. Our pastor has private space that can be used for meetings and counseling. On the program side, our new space has been filled with a variety of meetings, workshops, and adult education opportunities for our use - meeting space for the convenience of members and friends. At the same time, we have opened our facilities to external organizations and groups so that we can welcome the greater community and be a beacon of faith and hope.

What’s next for IUCC? How do we continue to make a difference? How do we fulfill our vision of being an open and affirming, just peace, global mission, and green faith church? How do we make those phrases become alive and an integral part of life and mission of IUCC? Pastor Dave has begun conversations with various lay leaders and the Ministries Board about putting our “labels” into action. This will surely be a point of emphasis over the next few months.

But there’s something else I want us to think about and intensely embrace. My thought begins with a memory of a children’s time during this past Advent season. Our Director of Music, Dr. Chris Peterson, displayed yet another one of his talents by first leading us all in the singing of a Christmas song we all know: “Santa Claus is coming to town. He sees you when you’re sleeping. He knows when you’re awake. He knows if you’ve been bad or good. So be good for goodness sake.” Chris described this accurately as conditional love. He then went on to talk about the power of unconditional love - the kind of love that we experience here at IUCC. We are loved unconditionally through the presence and power of Jesus in our lives. And hopefully, we share that unconditional love with all who are part of this community of faith.

That willingness to love unconditionally and to care for others with “no strings” attached is what sets our faith community apart from other groups. No matter if we disagree over programs or ideas or policies or the politics of our decisions, we will be there for each other to love, support, care, and pray for one another. That is an amazing idea and one that I hope we will strive for in this coming year.

So what will 2020 bring to IUCC? We will begin this year with our stewardship campaign: “What can we bring.” Please prayerfully and thoughtfully consider how you can share of your time, talents, AND treasure - of your unconditional support - over the coming year. The stewardship campaign will run through the month of January. Ordinarily, our Winter Congregational meeting would be held on the last Sunday of this month, January 26. But, because of the different timing of our stewardship season, we will be moving the meeting to February 9. You will be receiving information about this important meeting very soon. For now, please mark that date on your calendar.

Also in January, the Search Committee for our Settled Pastor will begin receiving profiles from candidates for the position. As a congregation, we will offer our prayers and support during a commissioning and blessing as part of the January 26 services. Plan to be part of this way to offer your unconditional love and support to the committee.

I look forward to 2020 with all the opportunities and challenges that it will bring. I am blessed to have all of you as part of my IUCC family and to share in the power of unconditional love and caring with you!

As always, we will do that in faith and community.

Renae Boyum, Moderator
Stewardship Campaign begins January 5th!

Join us in church on Epiphany Sunday, January 5, as we begin the exciting IUCC 2020 Stewardship Campaign!

You can pledge by bringing your pledge card to church, mailing in your pledge or better yet, pledging online at https://www.iucc.org/giving/pledge/. Your pledges will be dedicated on the last Sunday of January when we conclude the campaign and make our 2020 Budget!

See you in church!

Susie Lang
Janet Emery
Co-Chairs Fund Development Committee

OC Women’s March – January 18

The Fourth Annual OC Women’s March will be held January 18 in downtown Santa Ana starting at 10 a.m.

It’s been three years since the first OC Women’s March in 2017, when over 20,000 people peacefully took to the streets with signs of protest, solidarity, and to make their voices heard. Thousands of women, men, and families came together on a variety of issues and to demand change.

If you would like to march with your fellow IUCC members holding our IUCC banner, and carpool from IUCC promptly at 9 a.m., please sign up on the patio in January. And since the organizers need an estimated headcount, please sign up on their website: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2020-orange-county-womens-march-tickets-79056894299

Any questions, please contact Tommie at tommiek@cox.net

IUCC members at last year’s Women’s March

Join us on Sunday, January 5, from 3-5 p.m. at IUCC for the blessing of the new Family Promise Shower Trailer! 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!

You're Invited!

Shower of Blessings

3 PM - 5 PM | Sunday, January 5, 2020
Irvine United Congregational Church
4915 Alton Pkwy, Irvine, CA 92634
Wine, Cheese & a Shower of Blessings!
On December 17, a merry group gathered for holiday cheer & good food at Pat Sauter’s home.

Photos courtesy of Barb Carse

On December 9, church leaders met at the Boyum home for an evening of fun, food, and fellowship!

Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes

Our hard-working chancel choir had a party on December 19!

Photos courtesy of Jeff Oleson
Even though they’re a bit passé these days, I still like wall calendars. Every November, I use a computer program to design a family calendar using photos taken during the previous year, and it provides us with a nice history of the highlights of our annual activities. My newly installed 2020 photo calendar is pristine right now, waiting for meetings, vacations, appointments, and get-togethers to be added. I don’t know what events will fill it up, so I’ll admit to a little trepidation mixed with my usual optimism.

There’s an important date on the church’s calendar coming up on January 6: Epiphany (IUCC will celebrate it on January 5). In Christianity, Epiphany refers to the time when the Magi visited the young Jesus, revealing him to be a special emissary of God. On that day, Christians remember the visit of the wise men and sometimes also commemorate the day Jesus was baptized.

Over time, an epiphany has come to mean a revelation or illuminating appearance of divine inspiration in the world. The Irish novelist James Joyce called it “a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether from some object, scene, event, or memorable phase of the mind — the manifestation being out of proportion to the significance or strictly logical relevance of whatever produces it.”

Most people have experienced at least one epiphany in their lives: an overwhelming realization of truth; an “aha” moment when all the puzzle pieces finally come together; or a bombshell of insight that comes out of the blue. By their nature, epiphanies can be life-changing and profound.

Epiphanies are rare, however, and we plan as best we can with the information we have. Even so, there’s an old saying that’s all too true: “We plan, and God laughs.” We’ve all had the experience of careful planning that gets upset by something out of left field that we never saw coming. In some cases, we have a general idea of what will happen in the new year. In 2020, IUCC can expect to welcome a new settled pastor. We can anticipate budget forums, congregational meetings, elections, youth Sundays, choir performances, and much more. Most of us look forward to these rituals because they are reassuring and comforting in an uncertain world: something solid and dependable that we can use to ground our lives and give us purpose.

Still, much of the new year is a mystery for you and for me. We’re not sure what is coming, what life changes await us in the new year. There could be a death in the family, or the birth of a new baby. A relative or friend could get married (or divorced).

All we can depend on is that God will be with us on the journey, and I pray that we can set aside our egos and be there to love and support each other, come what may. I hope that we can be gentle with one another and provide a place of love and acceptance in this crazy, tempest-tossed world.

Despite the political chaos, personal crises, and struggles that are bound to occur, we can cope as long as we can lean on one another and look to the Creator for strength and sustenance. God is there in the delicate beauty of the rainbow, the shimmering colors of the beach at sunset, a baby’s dimpled smile, and a friend’s compassionate eyes. All these wonders are present for those who have eyes to see. When things look bleak, I focus on the lovely sights around me – I delight in these things - and feel the peaceful presence of God reassuring me that this too shall pass.

This January, I wish all of us a wonderful Epiphany. And a lower case “epiphany” as well! May we be blessed with what the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines as “an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure” - one that enlightens us and brings us closer to the divine wisdom of God.

I look forward to taking lots of photos for next year’s calendar too. My phone is charged up and ready to capture those special moments of joy. Shalom and happy new year, my friends!
What a lovely and meaningful Christmas Eve service at IUCC - full of grace and beauty. Thanks to our wonderful choir, pianist, harpist, readers, soloists, and flutist for all the care, practice, and thoughtfulness that went into it. We are truly blessed!

Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes
Thank you from Concern America

On Dec. 1, 2019, hand-crafted textiles, baskets, ceramics and wood products from Concern America were displayed. As a community of the faithful, you were generous in purchasing handicrafts valued at $982.00. We are very grateful to Rev. David Pattee for his hospitality and support, and to everyone who purchased handicrafts. Through your generosity you have helped to spread hope for a better future to hundreds of economically disadvantaged people in many developing countries throughout the world. Thank you!

For information about Concern America’s many programs or if you would like to see a selection of Concern America crafts, you are invited to visit our web site at concernamerica.org. To place an order for something you saw at the sale, please call our office at (800) CON-CERN (800-266-2376).

Invitation to be a Worship Leader

Have you ever considered being a worship leader, but weren’t certain how to go about it? It’s quite simple, really. Simply send an email to Steve Goetz at sgoetz53@gmail.com indicating an interest. That’s it. You’ll then be included in a monthly mailing list offering Sundays available, and you can decide on the date when it is most convenient for you to volunteer.

Yoga of 12-Step Recovery

Kelly Garrity’s early Sunday Yoga (7:30 a.m. in the Wisdom Room) will be held on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month. Stretch your muscles and center your mind!

Facing Implicit Bias & Walking the Talk of Anti-Racism. (Anti-racism Sunday School #2) with Rev. Dr. Terry LePage. Sunday, Jan. 12

We will watch a short video on implicit bias and discuss it. As time allows, we will begin exploring practical steps to become more welcomed to (racial/ethnic) diversity, using the UCC Welcoming Diversity Inventory. Two sessions, 8:45 a.m. and 10:00 a.m.

The Seeker's Women's Group

Tuesday, Jan. 21, 9:30 a.m.

The Seekers meet on the third Tuesday of each month for theological and spiritual study and discussion. Newcomers are always welcome!

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!
It’s a new year but it isn’t necessary to always look for a “new” way of helping children. Fortunately for us, there are many sound principles of helping children and teens that have been advocated for decades and that still stand up to the principles of effectiveness, kindness, and respectfulness. For the past few months, we’ve been considering the usefulness of approaching attempts to help children and teens with both learning and/or behavior challenges from a “situational” framework.

Last month we outlined an approach to helping for young people at Readiness Level 1: Unwilling and Unable. Now we’ll consider Readiness Level 2: Willing, but Unable. In this case, for a particular task the child is high in motivation/desire for the learning or behavior at hand, but lacks the necessary skill to complete the task successfully.

We have their positive attitude on our side, but strong motivation, while very helpful for the interaction, can sometimes get in the way of learning to do something correctly. Think of the small child who wants to help a parent do the dishes, or change the oil in the car. While we are happy they want to help, their enthusiasm could present problems if left on their own without adequate supervision. We will need to appreciate, but harness the enthusiasm in order to focus on exactly how something is done correctly.

Children approaching a task with a positive attitude will be wanting to know why we want something done a particular way, but unlike children in Readiness Level 1 where “why” questions can be used as a diversion and to avoid actually doing something, in Readiness Level 2 – high in motivation but low in skill – they will truly want to understand something. In this case, we will approach helping with high task focus AND high relationship involvement. All questions can be engaged: what, when, where, how, and why. We still want to provide close supervision but in this case, it is not because without supervision they will try to avoid the task, but because without supervision they may not be safe or may attempt a task in a way that will not work. We want to stay very engaged because children in Readiness Level 2 are in the best frame of mind to learn something well, either academically or with regard to behaving properly.

In Readiness Level 2 we stand by as the child attempts to follow our directions, to be available for problems that may come up. If we leave a child/teen on their own because they are well motivated, we risk them slipping into Level 1 and becoming “unwilling” if they get discouraged by a problem they can’t solve. To keep the willing attitude going while we build in new skills we want to stay engaged, providing both direction and supervision and a lot of encouragement and praise for effort.

Children at Readiness Level 2 take up the most time and require the most relationship involvement, but it pays off the most!

When parents spend a lot of time and energy on relationship with children who approach a task with a negative attitude or low confidence, the energy is wasted because the task isn’t getting done. However, once a child is working on getting something done that needs to be done – cleaning their room, solving a math problem, learning to get along with a sibling – the praise and encouragement pay off as they improve their skill.

When you encounter a child or young person who approaches a task with a willingness to learn, with the willingness to give something a try, and who is willing to accept your help, give these children most of your time and energy. You will get the most reward from your involvement with them, and they will get the most benefit from your help.

Next Readiness Level next month.
Have you heard of Ole and Lena, that cute Scandinavian couple? One day Lena found herself in trouble. She stole a can of peaches and now stood before a judge pleading her case. Ole, the ever-supportive husband, stood by her side.

Judge: “Lena, how many peaches were in the can?”

Lena: “Six, your honor.”

Judge: “I sentence you to six years in prison. One year for each peach.”

Hearing this, Ole spoke up: “Your honor, she also stole a can of peas!”

This is a funny story. Jokes aren’t meant to be used for serious application; however, this one served as a springboard for me to think about relationships and the assumptions we make about people. It is difficult, if not impossible, to know the truth of another’s relationships. Relationships are often nebulous, tenuous, conflicted, as well as being warm, secure and wonderful. It is far too easy to make assumptions, positive or negative, about others. Haven’t you wondered what it was that attracted a person to another as you observe some couples? In feeling envious of a relationship or in feeling condescending of another, our assumptions can be wrong on both counts.

Furthermore, have you had a negative first impression of someone and learned through more involvement that you were completely wrong? I’ve heard of people who disregard someone because their first name reminds them of someone they don’t like. In the popular book, A Gentleman in Moscow, I was struck by author Amor Towles’s discussion of first impressions:

*After all, what can a first impression tell us about someone we’ve just met for a minute in the lobby of a hotel? For that matter, what can a first impression tell us about anyone? Why, no more than a chord can tell us about Beethoven or a brushstroke about Botticelli.* (p. 120)

First impressions can result in false assumptions: we may assume that being wealthy is synonymous with being smart or honest, or arrogant and greedy. Or that being elderly is synonymous with being wise, or boring.

Do I assume that a teenage girl is interested in makeup and boys? Is a professional athlete always a good team player or, conversely, egocentric with an unusually high regard for self? Is being patriotic synonymous with always agreeing with the government? Is being handsome or beautiful synonymous with being confident or with being shallow? I need to guard against stereotyping.

Again, Towles addresses our assumptions: *By their very nature, human beings are so capricious, so complex, so delightfully contradictory, that they deserve not only our consideration, but our reconsideration – and our unwavering determination to withhold our opinion until we have engaged with them in every possible setting at every possible hour.* (p. 120)

I take his words to heart. I’m learning that when a person has an Alzheimer’s diagnosis, some people assume that the patient can no longer communicate. That is not accurate. Yes, they may speak without filtering some thoughts, and they may forget things, but they still have thoughts. Some people have slower speech, or they take time to form words. I need to understand, stop my babbling, and give them time. If I do, I may hear some brilliant comments.

If a person uses a cane or walker, or sits in a wheelchair, such support systems aid their mobility and often have nothing to do with their other functions. Some who use a wheelchair report that people tend to address the one doing the pushing of the wheelchair. Is there an assumption that the pushed person isn’t capable of relating? Contrarily, if a person uses a motorized wheelchair, people tend to speak directly to them.

Initial assumptions can keep us from enjoying and learning from one another. Do we really know someone based on one or two encounters? Some studies suggest that one negative incident with a person of a different race or gender can take numerous positive interactions with a person of that race or gender to negate the one negative. I don’t want one negative interaction to result in my stereotyping of another; it may keep me from enjoying a delightful friendship.

One thing I know: My first impressions, and resulting assumptions, can lead to inaccurate judgments. I don’t want to emulate a man I know who has hardening of the attitudes. He believes, among other things, that all bearded men are “lazy, no-good hippies.” Instead, I want to be open to knowing people more fully. I think that Towle had it right: *People deserve our unwavering determination to withhold our opinion until multiple engagements with them.*

There is an exception: Ole, I’ll never forgive you for what you did to Lena!
Farewell to an old friend

by Tricia Aynes

I’ve been friends with Janet since sixth grade. We went to junior and senior high school together, then got together monthly with a small group of classmates when our kids were small. Janet and I had the exact same birthday, so we called ourselves “cosmic twins.” That’s us clowning around on our 16th birthday in the photo below: she’s in back on the right (in the orange pants), and I’m on the left.

Janet was diagnosed with lung cancer in late 2018 and recently died after it had metastasized to her brain. She opted for radiation, but not chemo. The prognosis was bad either way. She never smoked, never had any bad habits that I knew of. Yet there it was – one of those conundrums that defy our puritan need to blame bad luck on something the victim did. Sometimes it’s not bad karma that gets us, it’s just the whim of the universe. Sometimes all the clean living in the world isn’t going to save us, and all the misdeeds in the world aren’t going to take us down. It is what it is.

Janet was a conservative, cautious soul - a librarian by profession - who’d been raised a Southern Baptist. She was an accomplished pianist and regular church-goer. She’d lost her husband to cancer several years back, and her grief from his passing was searing, visceral and long-lasting. We feared she would never recover from it. Yet she did two extraordinary things in her last year: things that seemed wildly out of character. It was as if the cancer had magically freed her to try some new things, to take some risks she would never have attempted before. Still reeling from her terminal diagnosis, she decided to register on a dating site. Right away, she found a nice man who was just as devotedly Christian as she was. She told him about her prognosis on their first date. He’d just lost his wife to the same disease, yet her news didn’t discourage him. He proposed to her that same day, and she accepted. They had a small ceremony at the Registrar’s Office three weeks later (which I was honored to attend), then a more formal church wedding a few months later.

She invited everyone she loved to that church wedding, and the place was nearly full. After some lovely harp music and a brief recitation of vows, this very introverted woman took the microphone. She asked people in the audience to stand up so she could introduce them and tell each one what they meant to her. There were family members, work friends, and neighbors – everyone was acknowledged publicly. She had our little group of high school friends come up to the front of the church so she could talk about our long history together and how much she cherished our friendship.

As her daughter told me later, Janet was grateful to have the opportunity to acknowledge everyone this way: it served as her wedding and her celebration of life all rolled into one. She didn’t want a memorial service because she’d already had hers while she felt well enough to enjoy it. I had never seen anyone do that before, yet it was probably the most poignant and meaningful ceremony I had ever attended.

Janet opted for hospice at home, and her grown children took turns coming from their homes in various parts of the country to stay with her. Her new husband was by her side the whole time – a real trooper. Our little cadre of friends visited when we could, and it seemed to cheer her up. She was surprisingly happy and upbeat, convinced that she was “going to meet Jesus.” When her pain grew worse, the doctors increased the morphine. Several months of pain and opiates followed. She endured it to the end, and passed away in early December.

I’ve just returned from what she DID want in lieu of a memorial service. She wanted our little high school group to come to her house and pick out items of her clothing we’d like to have. She called it a “clothes party,” and she insisted her daughter arrange it after she was gone. I dreaded going, but it turned out to be a special time for us to get together, tell stories, look at photos, and talk with one other and her grown children (all stellar human beings). The clothes thing was a little weird, but nice.

Through it all, there were times I thought she was nuts (the hasty marriage, the refusal to consider drugs that could have shortened the painful process of dying) and times I thought she was courageous (the willingness to take a leap of faith for one last shot at happiness). But in the end, she did it all on her own terms and in her own way. She took some risks. That, in itself, was really quite admirable. She never felt like a victim, and she was ready to meet her maker with open arms.

RIP old friend. If there is a heaven, I hope you’re up there playing piano for the angels.
Hi Y’all. Happy New Year. The subject is silent film. I’ve written a little ditty about the foundations of silent film, but it’s too long for the newsletter. The list this month is an addendum to that article. I’ve added extra names at the end of the article. I recommend at least one film for each name. You can see most of them on YouTube. You can read the article at https://www.iucc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Silent-Films.docx. Enjoy!

Early Auteurs/Directors

1) United Artists (Charlie Chaplin/Mary Pickford/Douglas Fairbanks) – “City Lights” “Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm” “The Thief of Baghdad”
2) Mack Sennett - “The Knockout”
3) Hal Roach – “Safety Last”
4) Buster Keaton – “The General”
5) D. W. Griffith – “Intolerance”
6) Oscar Micheaux – “Within Our Gates”
7) Cecil B. deMille – “Ben Hur” (1924)
8) Lois Weber – “Suspense”
9) Abel Gance – “Napoleon”
10) Fritz Lang – “Metropolis” “Die Nibelungen”
11) F. W. Murnau – “Nosferatu”
12) Eric Von Stroheim – “Greed”
14) Robert Wiene – “The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari”
15) Victor Sjostrom – “The Phantom Carriage”
16) Benjamin Christensen – “Häxan”
18) Sergei Eisenstein – “Battleship Potemkin”
   “Alexander Nevsky”

Great Actors

1) Clara Bow - “It”
2) Gloria Swanson – “The Hummingbird”
3) Lillian Gish – “Orphans of the Storm”
4) Theda Bara – “Salome” “Cleopatra”
5) Pola Negri – “The Wildcat”
6) Harold Lloyd – “The Freshman”
8) Greta Garbo – “Flesh and the Devil”
9) Stan Laurel & Oliver Hardy – started in silent films – any of their silent shorts

Films about the History of Silent Films

1) Hollywood (James Mason, 13-Part Thames Television Series)
2) Dawson City: Frozen Time (Bill Morrison)