

IUCC and Covid-19

IUCC members and friends already know that we are holding worship services online via Facebook, and other necessary meetings are using Zoom Internet video. **Here are some headlines about what else has been going on.** Each is discussed in more detail below.

- **Our preschool, the Early Childhood Center, was shuttered upon the close of business on March 16, and has no definite date for reopening. Preschool teachers have been furloughed in a context of generous decisions.**
- **Our church office remains open.** Administrative Pastor Steve Swope and Bookkeeper Heidi Wilcox are keeping their usual hours as of now; and Interim Senior Pastor David Pattee joins them.
- **The Women's Retreat, scheduled for May 1-3, 2020 at Pilgrim Pines, is cancelled.** We have requested a new date for 2021, but nothing has been confirmed.
- **The Search Committee for a new Senior Pastor continues its work.**
- **The plan to host homeless families in Plumer Hall for two weeks in April has been transformed into a rental house stay,** facilitated by the Family Promise organization and funded via generous donations from IUCC members and friends.



Message from the Moderator

One of the great privileges of being Moderator of IUCC is to be the worship leader on Easter Sunday. For our community of faith, it is a day of soaring music and a reminder of the power of resurrection of spirit and renewal of purpose. However, Easter will be different for all of us this year. Nonetheless, we can still all share our faith and gather in community - as a church - no matter where our physical location may be. A wonderful, comforting thought indeed!



As your moderator, I've been busy thinking and planning for a future full of promise and renewal. What does that mean? One of the hallmarks of IUCC is incredible leadership: pastoral, staff, and lay. That has never been more evident than over the past few weeks. Pastor Dave continues to lead worship, with the result that while we are not together in body, we are united and fulfilled in spirit. Pastor Steve has worked diligently to ensure that our office is open and that the day-to-day work of IUCC goes on. Our new MYP director, David Perez, has been "meeting" online and offering a Fresh

Word on Sunday morning. Chris Peterson, along with our accompanist, Josh Chandra, and our musical interns, Steven, Jacob and Brianna, continue to give us the gift of music during our worship service. Heidi Willcox, our bookkeeper, keeps our finances and books updated. Irma Rosales, our preschool director, continues to offer her services even as the Early Childhood Center is closed.

Our lay leadership has shared their talents willingly and tirelessly. The Administration Board - Daniel Blackburn, chair, and members David Carruthers, Dorothy Duncan, Apoorva Ghosh, Laura Palen, Penny Portillo, and myself - have been meeting online, sharing emails, and keeping abreast of the many financial and personnel issues that are part of dealing with the Coronavirus crisis. Mark Allen, our former treasurer, has been in almost daily contact to discuss our finances over

the year ahead. Dale Vaughan, our Human Resources committee chair, has offered invaluable guidance to me and to the Administration Board as we discuss a myriad of personnel issues. Keith Boyum, Chair of the Child Care Committee, has coordinated with Pastor Dave and Irma Rosales to address the complex issues of closing the preschool and the employment status of our preschool teachers.

So what can you as members and friends of IUCC do? Understand that we need you to lift each other and your church in prayer. Understand that we also need your continued financial support (to donate, go to <https://www.iucc.org/giving/give-online>). Understand that the work of the church goes on through online classes and meetings. Understand that the work of the Search Committee for our next “settled” pastor is going on. Understand that we will gather together in a congregational meeting (but perhaps not in May) to elect new officers and hear plans for the future. Understand that we will gather together as a congregation to call our next pastor. Understand that we will do all of this in faith and community.

~ *Rena Boyum, Moderator*

Decisions about the IUCC Early Childhood Center

In the face of the Coronavirus, Irvine public schools (and literally all of the other public schools in Orange County) were closed beginning on Monday, March 16. Our Early Childhood Center opened on that same Monday morning – but most of the children did not come. That same day we gathered information from other child care centers in Irvine, and with one exception, all of the church-related preschools that we contacted had closed. The Coordinating Council decided to close the IUCC preschool, beginning March 17, and the Administration Board subsequently affirmed that decision.

Our preschool staff (our teachers and our cook) were paid for the rest of the week, and also for March 23. Meeting via Zoom Internet video on March 23, the Administration Board reached the difficult decision to furlough nine teachers, two substitute teachers, and our cook. Our Early Childhood Center Director, Irma Rosales, was not furloughed. We “furloughed” staff rather than laid them off, meaning that we plan to recall them when the Early Childhood Center reopens. However, furlough status allows them to apply for unemployment benefits, which is a benefit for them: they receive income that way.

The Administration Board also decided to award a \$500 bonus to each furloughed staff member, and decided to pay all of the health care plan costs for each person – the portion that we as employer normally pay, and also the portion that employees normally pay. The Board sought to be generous in these ways, and to demonstrate to our staff that we cherish them and hope they will return when we reopen. We are also pleased that Congress passed a very large relief bill which will both extend the possible period of time over which furloughed employees can receive unemployment compensation, and add \$600 per week to the compensation itself. Those things will help our teachers to cope with this emergency, and this closure of our preschool. ~ *Keith Boyum, Chair of the IUCC Child Care Center Committee*

Managing Our Facilities in Coronavirus Time

When the Orange County Health Officer and the Governor of California prohibited gatherings of more than 10 persons in mid-March, all outside groups were informed that they could not meet at IUCC until restrictions were lifted.

With the closing of the Early Childhood Center, this meant that our facilities were, for the most part, empty all week long. Signs were posted as reminders that our buildings were closed (and noting how to find online worship).

All non-essential repair or enhancement projects have been postponed, and our computer-tech vendor is prepared to install software allowing staff to work from home if and when that becomes necessary.

To save energy and cost, all thermostats were reset to “empty” levels (55 for heat, 81 for AC). Buildings and grounds are being checked regularly to ensure that lights and water are off. Janitorial service has been cut back to two days a week.

Hospitality Ministry cleaned out the Plumer Hall refrigerator and cabinets of out-of-date or near-out-of-date items. Plumer Hall has been configured for open space in case of any emergency need, and the new meeting rooms have been set up for optimal usage at need.

~ *Steve Swope, Administrative Pastor*

Family Promise Update



Wow! With your generous support, we reached (then surpassed) our goal of \$2,400 to host Family Promise families in motels and Airbnbs for April 5-19! To date, \$2,600 has been raised. A large and sincere THANK YOU to all those who contributed! Your generosity will help these families get back on their feet. Keep saving your pennies, because we don't know what the next challenge will be. And remember that you can always give to IUCC and its work and witness by sending a check in the mail or going online at <http://www.iucc.org/giving/giveonline>. Thanks!

~ Steve Goetz & Sharon Lynn for Mission & Service

Update from the Search Committee for a Senior Pastor



Our search is already a success! The search committee has narrowed its focus to a small number of candidates for our next senior pastor – and here is the good news! Any of them would be a strong next “settled” pastor. Only successful searches have more than one very strong candidate. With four remaining candidates on our short list, we have let the Conference office know that we are now closed to new applications. This is a remarkable milestone.

The Coronavirus impact on our process remains uncertain. The challenges of the virus are likely to slow things down. As the nation stays indoors and creates social distance, in-person interviews are no longer possible. We have discussed these issues with the IUCC Administration Board to ensure that the congregational leadership is aware of our path forward. Zoom meetings with our remaining candidates will take place in April. The final stages of the process pose a challenge during the current crisis. Please know this: we will fight through any hitches and delays, and continue with God's help in our discernment process. Please keep us in your prayers as we evaluate reference phone calls and move toward interviewing candidates via Zoom internet video.

~ Keith Boyum & Craig Tyrl for the Pastoral Search Committee

Keep in Touch



If you've missed our live worship services on Facebook, you can watch them at this link: www.facebook.com/irvineucc. The IUCC prayer chain continues to be active in intercessory prayer during the coronavirus crisis. Prayer requests can be sent through the church office, iucc@iucc.org, or to Lorraine Fox, pgfsc@cox.net.

Email the church office at iucc@iucc.org to receive a link to participate in Ken Wyant's Bible Study on Tuesdays at 4 p.m. on Zoom!

Give



Your church is especially in need of financial support right now. You can give to IUCC online or through the mail. Make your contribution at <https://www.iucc.org/giving/give-online> or, if you prefer to send a check, be assured that we are keeping normal office hours and receiving the mail every day.

Women's Retreat Cancelled



The Women's Retreat scheduled for May 1-3, 2020 at Pilgrim Pines, is cancelled. We have requested a new date for 2021, but nothing has been confirmed.

The Coronavirus Bill and Charitable Contributions

IUCC and its leaders strive to offer stability amid the uncertainty of this ever-changing time. If you are wondering how to maximize support for your church in its work and witness, this *New York Times* article may offer some new opportunities.

Please Note: IUCC is not giving tax advice, we are merely passing along information from the New York Times. Also please consult the final bill as details could have changed and this is just a summary of the issue. Other critical details could be omitted from this summary. And as always, please check with your tax professional or tax attorney before making the types of gifts outlined below as your individual situation may alter your choices and the deductibility of these type of charitable gifts.

NY Times 3-27-20

F.A.Q. on Stimulus Checks, Unemployment and the Coronavirus Bill Charitable Contributions

I want to help people who are suffering from the pandemic. Does the bill do anything about charitable donations?

Yes. The bill would make a new deduction available — and not just for 2020 — for up to \$300 in annual charitable contributions. It's available only to people who don't itemize their deductions, and you calculate this new one by subtracting the amount you give from your gross income.

To qualify, you would have to give cash to a qualified charity and not to a donor-advised fund, which is a charitable account that affluent people often use to bunch contributions in a particular year in order to maximize deductions. If you've already given money since Jan. 1, that contribution counts toward the \$300 cap.

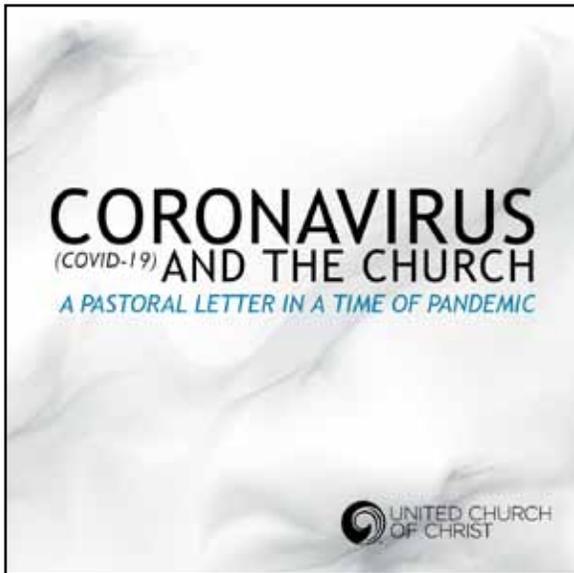
I am lucky to have substantial wealth, and I want to give more to charity than I usually do. Have the limits on charitable deductions changed?

Yes, they have. As part of the bill, donors can deduct 100 percent of their gift against their 2020 adjusted gross income. If you have \$1 million of income, you can give \$1 million to a public charity and deduct the full amount in 2020.

The new deduction is only for cash gifts that go to a public charity. If you give cash to, say, your private foundation, the old deduction rules apply. And while the organizations that manage donor advised funds are public charities, you do not get the higher deduction for donating cash to your donor advised fund.

If your assets are substantial enough that you can give more than your income this year, you won't lose the deduction for the excess amount. You can use it next year, as has always been the case.





From our UCC parent denomination:

A Pastoral Letter in a Time of Pandemic

As leaders in our beloved United Church of Christ, we write to speak a word of tender care to our congregations, our clergy, and our members.

We are sensitive to the grief and loss that many of you are experiencing. Most of us have never seen anything like this. The pandemic has interrupted our lives. Some have suffered the premature death of loved ones, while others live through and with severe pain and suffering. People are losing their jobs. Many of us have been placed under orders not to leave our homes and to shelter in place. In most of our communities, orders have been given to limit gathering in public spaces. This has been hard for all of us.

As leaders, we also bear witness to acts of profound kindness and creative ingenuity that remind us of the better angels within us. We are watching a Church prove itself to be incredibly adaptable as orders to stay at home have not ended our collective need even in times like these to give our thanks to God. Churches who not only have never gathered in a digital community, but who never thought they would need or want to, are doing just that – and experiencing something very profound and very meaningful. We have heard stories of whole families, spread across the country, being able to gather together for the same worship service via digital broadcast. That is such a meaningful gift the church has to offer in a season such as this.

We grieve deeply with you the losses that we are all living with; but we also celebrate a body of Christ that can adapt quickly to meet the emerging need. It is our hope and prayer that what we are learning about ourselves – about our capacity for grace, for hope, for change, for love beyond our walls – will enrich us long after this pandemic ends.

We strongly encourage churches to suspend your traditional ways of gathering to worship. Gathering to worship in this moment places our loved ones at risk. On the website of the denomination you can find resources to help you create new ways to worship as a sequestered community. Our Conferences are regularly offering networking opportunities so that you can share creative ideas and practical learnings.

Remember that we are a Christmas people, and that Jesus is incarnated in every act of love and kindness we extend to one another.

Remember that we are an Easter people and we know that God can reach us beyond all the barriers the world can create.

Remember that we are a Pentecost people who know that the Holy Spirit can revive us and who will be our strength in times of great distress.

We can do this. We are the Church, the body of the risen Christ. As leaders called to serve you, we pledge to you that we will continue to draw on every resource available to us that will help you through this season.

In the love of our blessed Redeemer, we remain as always your humble servants and your beloved covenant partners.

Faithfully,

The Council of Conference Ministers
The Officers of the United Church of Christ
The Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer
The Rev. Traci Blackmon
The Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson

A Note from Pastor Dave

by the Rev. David Pattee, Interim Senior Pastor



Join us Sunday morning, April 5, 11:00 a.m. at www.facebook.com/irvineucc for a special **Palm Sunday** worship service. Enjoy the beautiful music, familiar faces and a couple of surprises, engage with scripture and prayer and be ready to shout ‘Hosanna!’ at the blessing of the palms. If you can’t get a palm strip/leaf from your yard, you are welcome to drive through the church parking lot where we will have palms out and available for you to pick up, beginning Thursday afternoon, April 2.

A new feature of our gathering this Sunday will be a live **online coffee hour** to which you are all invited. Watch for the Zoom link coming to you by e-mail on Friday in the “Story from Steve.”

Maunder Thursday, April 9, at 7:00 p.m., you are invited to share in Holy Communion, via www.facebook.com/irvineucc. Yes, it will be fine for you to pour a glass of good wine for this (I will!) but grape juice or any other juice you have will do just as well. If you can, pair your drink with a matzo cracker. Again, anything will do, but an unleavened bread is a little better as we recall that Jesus’ Last Supper was a Passover meal. Place your bread and drink near your computer (or wherever you’re watching the videocast) and be prepared to raise them as I raise mine and pray with me.

Easter Sunday, April 12, won’t be so extravagant this year, but God is good all the time, and we’ll do our best to make a joyful noise of gratitude and praise. Again, we’ll gather at www.facebook.com/irvineucc for a service beginning at 11:00 a.m. We’ll sing some of your favorite hymns, and I ask you to have a bell at the ready for our RESURRECTION RING! Yes, that’s right, a bell! Any kind of bell will do -- sleigh bell, school bell, dinner bell – just have a bell at hand when I ask you on Easter morning to RING! Even if we can’t be together in the flesh, we can have some fun and make a little noise!

Before anyone ever called it a Holy Week, these days we are remembering were a helluva week for Jesus and his friends. I feel that truth more sharply this year than I have for a while. It’s a strange time and it’s gonna be a helluva week. There’s no way around it. But I know we’re going to get through it. I know there is something beautiful, full, and free on the other side of this. I know that God is not done with us yet.

I’ll see you (online) in church.
Pastor Dave

Adult Education

by the Rev. Steve Swope, Administrative Pastor



“April is the cruelest month,” said the poet. Frankly, I think March was pretty dastardly this year. My desk calendar for March and April is an absolute mess of crossed-off events and programs.

But so is everyone else’s, and with my complaining out of the way, here’s what I see. First, people have been understanding of change and willing to adjust.

We moved Ken Wyant’s Tuesday Bible Study and Pastor Dave’s Wednesday Lenten Study on Paul out of our physical spaces and onto the internet via Zoom. We quickly agreed on a new date for John Pavlovitz’s visit (August 29-30 – more details later).

Comma Group leaders have looked into “virtual” gatherings, as have Ministry and Board chairs. And we’re still discovering new ways to use technology to gather, to connect, and to communicate.

Second, all of this upheaval and adjustment have highlighted the importance of what IUCC is and does for the lives of so many people. Our first Facebook worship service, on March 15, registered over 1000 views in less than a week! Bible Study sees as many participants online as when we meet in person.

Third, we can do this! Maybe not all of it, right away. Maybe there will be a learning curve to climb, or some technical hurdles to overcome. But we can be a caring, learning community online – and when we’re able to gather in person once again, we’ll have a new tool in our toolbox that can expand and enhance our work and witness.

Here’s what to look for in April. Tuesday Bible Study will be on Zoom (a video conference tool) until further notice. I try to send out the log-in information on Mondays. If you don’t get it, let me know!

After Easter on April 12, I’m going to work on a way to have Sunday Adult Exploration online, too – although it may not be on Sunday mornings. But if we’re going to “shelter in

place,” we might as well spend a little time learning! Watch the weekly emails for more information.

There will be other opportunities for online growth and learning, too. Not all of them are fully developed yet, but we have a congregation full of bright, talented people who know interesting things. I’m grateful to so many of them who volunteer to share!

Special thanks to Al Gumb for beginning the DVD series on Marcus Borg, “Beyond Belief.” Al completed the first two sessions before we stopped in-person gathering, and he’ll pick it up again as soon as possible.

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39) That is what we will always endeavor to be and share, here at IUCC.



Casta and Community Comma Group

We recently purchased all the items on Mr. Ridgway’s Wish List for his kindergarten class and he’s pictured here on the floor surrounded by these teaching aids. He teaches at Kinoshita Elementary School in San Juan Capistrano, which has a 100% Latino population. He shared the struggles and the joys of teaching 5 year olds and his enthusiasm was apparent. He mentioned there are other teachers at the school who also have Wish Lists if another group is interested in granting a wish.

~ Barb Carse

Photos from a happier time!



“All You Need Is Love” was the theme our Winter Party and we dressed accordingly!



Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes



News & Events



Diversity and Inclusion Task Force

Our Diversity and Inclusion group had a very successful Zoom meeting after Facebook church on Sunday, and we decided that we will now be meeting every other Sunday at 12:30. Everyone is invited!

For our next meeting on April 5, we ask that people watch a short video on racial profiling beforehand and be ready for a discussion at the meeting. Here's the link for the video: <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/racial-profiling-2-0/>. I will send out a Zoom invitation a few days before via our D&I email list; those not on the email list who would like to join the meeting can email me at felicitynf@aol.com and I will send them an invite directly.

~Felicity Figueroa



4/01 Jim Carse
4/29 Natasha Dahline
4/17 David Deshler
4/19 Janice Gately
4/13 Dick Henderson
4/29 Linda Hidy
4/15 Janice Johnson
4/07 Lee KeslerWest
4/21 Dale Lang
4/21 Kyle Lutz
4/15 Connor McDonald
4/07 Jennifer Mirmak
4/22 Steve O'Dell
4/18 Jim Raver
4/22 Cheryl Schou
4/30 Mark Willcox



This year's Orange County AIDS Walk has gone virtual! The importance of providing essential medical services and maintaining the food pantry deliveries is paramount to assisting our OC neighbors who are even more compromised during these difficult times. Join us in supporting this monumental effort and help us build community around the event by sharing your photos and videos of you walking, running up stairs, working out or otherwise supporting the spirit of the Walk from the comfort of your own home!

We will still have our IUCC Walk the Walkers Team, and potential "walkers" can sign up just like they have in the past. Please sign up with Team IUCC to "walk" with us! Donations can also be made directly to our IUCC Team through the AIDS Walk website. Here is the link both to join the team and to donate: <https://www.classy.org/team/289881>



Isaiah House

We will not be providing dinners to Isaiah House as usual in April, May, or June. They are currently locked down, but donations may be left on the front porch. Our Isaiah House team visits will be entirely cancelled for these months. We appreciate all of you who regularly contribute to our menus each month. Hang tight until we get back to a normal meal schedule.

Connecting in Isolation

by Tricia Aynes



This is such a surreal time. I've been watching the unthinkable happen: our bustling, crowded, noisy, technicolor nation has ground to a halt. Even though the calendar says it's Spring, we are barely aware of it as we hunker down in our homes to protect ourselves and others. There are many unknowns, and we are scared, sad, and anxious. We are

trying to wrap our heads around the fact that this social isolation thing might last a long time. Many of us will get sick, and some of us may die. It seems so out of our control.

Still, there are things we CAN and SHOULD control. We can stay home, stay informed, and practice social distancing. We can be thankful for the blessings we have and the people on the front lines who are trying to help. We can show generosity of spirit with ourselves and with others. We can reach out to one another and provide comfort and support. We can be together in spirit and community even when we can't be together physically. Because as soon as we reach out to others, we are no longer alone. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, "What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies *within* us. And when we bring what is within us out into the world, miracles happen."

Sure, the virus has exposed real ugliness. Some have suggested that we should sacrifice the lives of the elderly and disabled to bring people back to work and boost the economy. It smacks of eugenics - survival of the fittest at the expense of others. That's abhorrent, and it's unacceptable in a civilized society. Yet such talk is quickly drowned out and overwhelmed by all the good things happening out there - people with generous spirits looking out for each other, helping each other.

There's a beautiful song called "You are not alone," and the sentiment is true. I have only to look at my Facebook feed to see many examples of our joy and positivity: singers sharing uplifting songs, people posting funny stories, photographers sharing pictures of their walks (that's my specialty), and people providing words of hope and encouragement. Everywhere I look, I see little miracles of the human spirit: people reaching out to others when they see loneliness and need. Crisis often brings out the best in us - the angels among us.

For people of faith, going to churches, temples, synagogues, or mosques is a time to center ourselves and connect with like-minded believers. Faith communities all over the globe are finding new ways to bring parishioners together. Many are live-streaming services on YouTube and Facebook. While some of the productions are very amateurish, others are tech savvy. Wealthier churches may already have the technology and staff to do a seamless job, while others preach heartfelt sermons from home. Regardless of the result, I give them props for making the effort. The church is a community, and in community we find strength. Our bodies may be at risk for the virus, but our souls remain strong. Our church family sustains us and brings us hope.

Let's continue to do what we can to provide emotional support to each other on an individual level. Let's stay connected and try to show as much openness of spirit as we can in these troubled times. Sure, we'll make mistakes as we go, but that's okay. We'll learn from them and try to do better next time. We'll need to grant ourselves and others the grace to love the effort and forgive the mistakes.

To quote a Facebook post from my daughter Alia, "It is my deepest hope that this 'social distancing' is an opportunity for us to get to know ourselves more deeply. We're so used to our busy lives with so many distractions. In the chaos of this pandemic, there is also a stillness. Families are spending time in close quarters and deepening their bonds. Couples are facing challenges and finding resolutions for issues that had long been swept under the rug. Individuals are re-evaluating their priorities and focusing on what is truly important to them. Change is inevitable and forces us to lose some of what we once had, but change is also a metamorphosis. While we work to prevent losses and grieve the losses we cannot prevent, we must also stay present. The future is unshaped and how we face this moment and the moments to come will direct our path. Let us look within ourselves and find a deeper truth within. Let us grow our depth of appreciation for the loved ones in our lives. Let us extend loving support to one another."

She and I have been talking a lot about what to do at the other end of the crisis - when we emerge from our isolation and face a world that is very different from before. We've concluded that this pandemic can be a catalyst for us to create a better society. We can use this time alone to ponder and reflect. The goal is not to go back to how things were, but to learn from what we're going through now and build something better. After all, we will not only be mourning lives lost to this virus, we will also be forced to confront the social inequalities that this virus has laid bare. This can't all be in vain - it has to mean something. We must find a way to honor those we've lost by building a more equitable future for us all. Let it be so. Amen.

Powerful Parenting **Using Current Events to Help** **Children/Young People Manage Fear** **and Anxiety**

by Dr. Lorraine Fox



We are all well aware that children and teens are observing adult reactions (unplanned) and responses (planned) to fears and anxiety about the Coronavirus. They are witnessing both responsible and effective methods of managing such emotions, along with observing some very irrational emotional and behavioral reactions and responses. This is a

good time to do some teaching and modeling about various ways to manage a particular set of emotions that children will experience throughout their lifetime as they encounter some of the inevitable “unnerving” life events that are unavoidable: death of people they love, romantic break-ups, natural disasters, illness and accidents, etc. The next weeks give us a life-size “classroom” to help our young ones learn how to distinguish between reasonable, helpful methods of coping with fear and anxiety along with erratic, unhelpful ways of managing inner responses to outward threats.

Let’s begin by distinguishing between “fear” and “anxiety.” The most simplistic difference between the two is that “fear” is focused and specific, and “anxiety” is non-specific. Fear is prompted by a specific event that threatens impending danger to our well-being. When we are afraid and respond with fear, we know what we are afraid of. The object of our fear may be real or may be imagined, but it is specific. The fact that we can be afraid of something that is not actually posing a danger is important to point out to children who are watching people in their house or people on the news responding to fears not based on facts.

Anxiety is different from fear in that it is a general feeling of uneasiness, tension, or even dread that does not have such a specific focus. For example, we can have a general feeling of anxiety about getting sick without fearing a specific illness. If we’re in an airplane we can experience general anxiety about a plane crash even though nothing is wrong with the plane. If we look out the window and see the engine on fire, our anxiety turns to fear.

Our current situation is a combination of fear and anxiety: fear of a specific virus combined with general anxiety of being in crowds, not knowing if someone might be sick and posing a threat of infection. Fear is a response to a particular vicious dog who is growling or attacking us and tries to bite us. Anxiety is “fear of dogs.”

It is important for both adults and children to keep in mind that fear is a **gift** of nature designed to help us stay safe. In other words, it is not a “bad” emotion and not something to be avoided. We should not be afraid of being afraid. Rather, we want to closely examine the source of our fear to be sure the source is worthy of a fearful response, and then, if it is, to begin to design a plan to cope with it effectively. It is never a good idea to tell children not to be afraid! All living creatures – even those without brains – have a built-in mechanism that enables them to detect and respond to danger. A sea anemone will close up if it is poked!

Part of growing up is to experiment with fear, such as telling scary stories, or going on amusement park rides that cause us to feel temporarily afraid. We enjoy these because part of us knows the ride will end and we will eventually be safe. When we finish the ride and realize we are safe, we want to ride again! It’s a way of trying to both experience and control fear.

When fears are not contrived or “arranged,” it is important to learn how to manage our emotions so that we can experience some “relief” from our distressing feelings. As parents and adults who engage with young people, it is important not only to manage your own fearful emotions but to explain to your children exactly how you are going about doing that. What specific plans and interventions are you using to keep your fear in check and prepare to be safe?

Fear is “good” because it prompts us to plan and act! Actively engage your children in doing whatever you are doing to promote safety for your family. Explain all of your reasons for your actions. Help them understand why others in the community are doing what they are doing. Help them sort out what actions are sensible responses to the real problem, and what are unnecessary reactions based on fear without reason. Help them sort through truths and lies as they listen to people in the media. Help them learn to discern how some people will use “fake fear” to achieve personal gains. Help them listen carefully to wise and knowledgeable people who give useful advice. Why do we listen to some people and not others? As they grow, they will have to learn how to sort through real and manipulative information and figure out, on their own, how they are going to deal with real and imagined threats to their well-being. The gifts you give them now in terms of learning how to think and plan will serve them well.

It is unfortunate that we, as a world, are experiencing a situation that is producing massive amounts of fear and anxiety that are producing irrational, reactive and other distressing responses. However, it does provide those of us who care about children and youth with a myriad of opportunities to use up close and personal experiences to help younger people develop attitudes and skills that will serve them well in the future. Buy up the moments, my friends.

The Benediction

by Vivian Elaine Johnson

George raised his thin arms. In a whisper of a voice and while seated in a wheelchair, he prayed the benediction over those of us attending a seminar:

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord's face shine upon you.

*May the Lord's countenance be lifted upon you,
and give you peace.*

The words, and the heart from which they came, brought moisture to my eyes and slipped down my cheeks. George, at 87 and in ill health, has been my husband and a pastor for sixty years. After all those years of ministry and of pronouncing the benediction, I wondered if this would be his last.

May the Lord bless you and keep you...

What is it about the benediction that touches hearts? For me, the benediction is ointment on my wounds, wounds caused by the difficulties of life. We live in a world that is random, chaotic and messy. Random in that a tornado destroyed four houses on your block, while yours was untouched. Random in that one child was born into a poor family, while another was born into a wealthy one.

Life is also chaotic. Chaotic in that you carefully planned your financial security, then the stock market crashed or a spouse had a serious illness; the finances flew out the window. Chaotic when you had the job of your dreams, then there was a merger of companies where employees got the shaft. Chaotic in that when we needed national leadership, it was lacking.

Unfortunately, life is not only random and chaotic, it is also messy, often due to personal choices. You chose an occupation and learned that you hated it. Messy because you bought the house of your dreams and found that your next-door neighbor was the pits. Messy because you didn't like your in-laws, or roommate, or co-worker. How do we make sense of such a world, such a life?

*May the Lord's face shine upon you, the Lord's countenance
be lifted upon you...*

Some people find an answer in religion, in a faith. Belief in God gives them meaning and purpose in life, especially if they believe that God values and loves them. The words of the benediction, "May the Lord's face shine upon you," suggest that God finds pleasure and favor with people. People of faith believe they are in God's hands. As the popular song goes, "He's got the whole world in His

hands." If they believe that God cares about the world – and its people – that doesn't necessarily remove some of the randomness, the chaos, and the mess, but it may offer comfort and perspective.

Contrarily, some people believe that we invented religion as a way to cope with life in this world. That may be true; it seems plausible to me. My question is: if a person receives peace, comfort, and positive direction through religious belief, is it not helpful – even if religion is invented?

On my faith journey, as the wife of a pastor and after long years of ministering in the church, I have become uneasy with certitudes. I hear some people claim with certainty: "God wants everyone to believe as I do." Or, "Religious people are moral," as though the non-religious can't be. How is it that some people believe they have the whole truth? As I heard a theologian say, "If people claim that they know with certainty all about God and God's will, it shows that they know very little about the nature of God." Holy books such as the Bible are not science books, nor books with answers that address all our contemporary issues. They are books revealing ancient people's thoughts about God. I'm so grateful that we have been given intellectual and intuitive ability that can be used to explore the deep areas of life, to wrestle with questions, to doubt, to contemplate and meditate. What a gift to not have to know all the answers!

And if that exploration, along with life experience, deduces that there is no God, who am I to claim otherwise for them? For me, it is helpful to believe that there was a wise teacher named Jesus who taught us to love, forgive, work for justice, help the vulnerable, and live in peace. Was he God? I don't know. But I do appreciate that he taught us how to live in this world. People of other faiths – Jews, Muslims, Hindus, to name some – also receive guidance from their holy books and their people of wisdom. In my experience, non-believers may also have a moral compass in their hearts that guides them in the path of loving concern for others.

... and give you peace.

We started with the beautiful words of the benediction. I am grateful for this prayer of blessing found in the Bible. I need to hear these words. For me, the words "and give you peace" are so comforting, so reassuring that I feel safe, calm and, blessedly, at peace in the midst of our random, chaotic, and messy world. If we each live by these words – blessing, keeping, shining, giving – we will bring peace, wonderful peace, into our lives and into our wounded world. And to you, George, my loving husband and good and faithful servant:

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord's face shine upon you.

May the Lord's countenance be lifted upon you,

And give you peace.

Requiem for Max

by Keith Dillon



Two possibilities crossed my mind for the film list this month. But it occurred to me that anyone living in voluntary confinement is not going to want to spend their time watching movies about killer microbes (I could be wrong). So, instead, I chose to remember one of the greatest actors in cinematic history. On March 8th, a scant three weeks ago, Max von Sydow entered immortality.

He was born Karl Adolf von Sydow on April 10th, 1929, in Lund, Sweden. In 1948, after serving for two years in the Swedish army (where he got the nickname Max), he began training as an actor at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm. While still in training, von Sydow made his film debut in two films by Alf Sjöberg: *Bara en Mor* (Only a Mother – 1949) and *Fröken Julie* (Miss Julie – 1951).

By 1955, he began work with the Malmö City Theatre, at the time under the direction of Ingmar Bergman. In 1957, they released their first film together: *Det Sjunde Inseglet* or *The Seventh Seal*. Oddly enough, the film is set amidst a plague-ridden Sweden. ‘Nuf said. *The Seventh Seal* won the special jury prize at Cannes in 1957 and is still remembered as one of the greatest films ever made.

Von Sydow made 11 films with Bergman. He acted in several languages and worked with such master film makers as George Stevens, John Milius, David Lynch, William Friedkin, Bille August, Martin Scorsese and Steven Spielberg. He even appeared in a *Star Wars* movie as well as episodes of *The Simpsons* and *Game of Thrones*. He passed away on March 8th, 2020, at the age of 90 in Provence, France by what I assume were natural causes.

Ingmar Bergman:

- 1) *Det sjunde inseglet* (*The Seventh Seal* - 1957)
- 2) *Smultronstället* (*Wild Strawberries* - 1957)
- 3) *Jungfrukällan* (*The Virgin Spring* – 1960)
- 4) *Vargtimmen* (*Hour of the Wolf* - 1968)

Other Directors:

- 5) *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (George Stevens – 1965) – A long passion play just in time for Easter. Max played Jesus.
- 6) *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin – 1973) – I still can't watch this one.
- 7) *Pelle Erobreren* (*Pelle the Conquerer* – Bille August - 1987)
- 8) *Awakenings* (Penny Marshall – 1990)
- 9) *Europa* (Lars van Trier - 1991)
- 10) *Snow Falling on Cedars* (Scott Hicks - 1999)
- 11) *Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg - 2002)
- 12) *Le Scaphandre et le Papillon* (*The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* – Julian Schnabel - 2007)
- 13) *Shutter Island* (Martin Scorsese - 2010)
- 14) *Extremely Loud, Incredibly Close* (Stephen Daldry - 2011)

Next month?...who knows?



Max von Sydow

Becoming Black with God

by Dr. Eduardo Jesús Arismendi-Pardi
Adult Ministries, and Diversity and Inclusion



Liberation theology is a body of knowledge that yields a praxis that pertains to standing in solidarity, as progressive Christians, with the oppressed. Moreover, liberation theology means emancipation from every form of modern servitude, oppression, and persecution.

Becoming Black with God is a conceptual construct directly related to liberation theology from a Black perspective. The idea of becoming Black with God rests on the assumption that God is Black because God's identity is found in the faces of those who are exploited and marginalized as a function of their color rather than the content of their character. The exploited and marginalized within the context of liberation theology in general and Black theology in particular is the African American community within the United States.

There are two diametrically opposed points of view for standing in solidarity with the oppressed against modern servitude and oppression. These two opposing points of view lie within the spectrum of *divine love* at one end and *divine justice* at the other end. Reconciliation of these opposing points of view is difficult. The concept of divine love is grounded on the construct of *Agape* and non-violence as espoused and practiced by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Divine justice, on the other hand, is defined from the perspective of the methodology espoused and practiced by Malcolm X. The concept of becoming Black with God within these two diametrically opposing points of view is difficult to reconcile because "God is love" (cf. 1 John 4:8). How does one reconcile the construct of divine justice, that is, the destruction of the White oppressor as espoused and practiced by Malcolm X and divine love (*Agape*) as espoused and practiced by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.? The construct of divine justice seems to rest on violence whereas the construct of divine love seems to rest on non-violence.

The meaning of becoming Black with God from a purely Black theological perspective rests on the declaration that the conditions of the oppressed are, actually, God's conditions. From a liberation theology perspective in general, to know God means being on the side of

the oppressed and being one with them, that is, being in communion with the oppressed, persecuted, and marginalized. The identity of God is found in the struggle for freedom from oppression and modern servitude. In other words, becoming Black with God means rejecting the privilege of Whiteness and accepting one's Blackness. This acceptance of one's Blackness is what God means for Blacks. Becoming Black with God could also suggest God's love and participation in human suffering. But where is God when one suffers? Why does God allow suffering if he is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient? The answer to both of these questions is quite simple—humans have free agency.

Ascertaining the meaning of becoming Black with God rests upon the following three theological constructs: God as creator, immanence and transcendence of God, and providence. The construct of God as creator rests on the assumption that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1, NIV). God as creator of all things seems antithetical to the idea that the meaning and purpose of the world is found in oppressors. The meaning and purpose of the world is found in God and God is love (cf. 1 John 4:8). God as creator cannot be related to an oppressed society.

The construct of immanence and transcendence of God leads one to reflect on the possibility that God is involved in the affairs of humanity by liberating the oppressed as evidenced in the narrative found in the Book of Exodus. God's involvement in the affairs of humanity is difficult to conclusively ascertain because it is not possible to contemplate or grapple with the divine from a scientific view point. The scientific method, as per the father of the philosophy of science, Sir Edmund Karl Popper (1902-1994), cannot be applied to matters of the divine, or matters dealing with spirituality and theology. God is much more than one's experience.

The construct of providence is directly related to the reality of liberation for the oppressed. For Blacks, liberation of the oppressed means the liberation struggle against White privilege. Finally, in thinking about the meaning of becoming Black with God leads one to wrestle with the declaration that *there is no use for a God who loves White oppressors the same as oppressed Blacks*. Again, as alluded to previously, becoming Black with God may very well rest on the narrative of the Book of Exodus where it is recorded that God delivered the persecuted and marginalized Israelites from Pharaoh's oppression to the Promised Land. Being on the side of the oppressed, becoming one with them, and participating in the goal of liberation is to become Black with God.