Dear Congregation,

During the current pandemic and lock down, it is unlikely that state orders will allow us to conduct a large in-person meeting in our sanctuary. Even in the unlikely event that state orders are relaxed within the next several months, we are very reluctant to conduct any kind of large, indoor meeting until it is safe to do so. Our members’ health and well-being are a top priority, and we do not want to risk endangering you in any way.

Members of the Search Committee, the Administration Board, and the Bylaws Committee have been conferring to try and figure out a way to conduct the Spring Congregational Meeting. Some of us have been spending sleepless nights trying to figure out how to conduct our next meeting safely and effectively.

We would like to try meeting via video conferencing. Because our Bylaws are silent about conducting congregational meetings via electronic means, we must follow California Corporations Code Section 9411, which sets forth the terms under which such a meeting may occur. In summary, the Code requires:

1. That members be given a reasonable opportunity to participate and to vote, including an opportunity to hear the proceedings concurrently.

2. That a record of votes or actions taken is maintained.

3. That we follow Section 20(b) of the Corporations Code, which requires that any such request for an electronic meeting shall include a notice that absent consent of the member, the meeting shall be held at a physical location. (Ergo, the objection of even one person could disallow meeting via electronic means).

On June 10 you will receive an official notice for the upcoming June 28 congregational meeting. On June 10 you will also receive information about the candidate selected by the search committee to be the next senior pastor at IUCC.

In the spirit of transparency, collaboration, and cooperation, we implore you to take this leap of faith as a community and embrace the technology that will allow us to conduct the business of the church electronically (likely via Zoom, which many of us have used already). Because our church is congregational, we are governed by the congregants, each of whom is treasured and necessary to govern effectively. Your leaders are congregational members too – we are all volunteers who serve because we love the church and its people. We want to do our best to protect ALL the people. Please support this plan so we can move forward in faith and community. Thank you for your understanding!

Renae Boyum, Moderator
Just about five years ago I wrote my first column as Moderator of Irvine United Congregational Church, and now I am writing my last column as your moderator. What a five years it has been, full of change, progress, challenge, opportunity, celebration, and continuity - sometimes all happening at the same time!

Here are some of the moments I remember:

- **Embracing the future** Capital Campaign - under the leadership of Anne Rosse and Mark Allen, members and friends raised more monies than at any other time in the history of IUCC.

- Planning, construction, and finally, the opening of our new meeting and office spaces with feelings of joy, frustration, celebration, and the opportunity for new programs and outreach to the greater community.

- The celebration to mark the 10th anniversary of Pastor Paul’s tenure with us as pastor - a joyful day with music, cards, and gifts.

- The celebration to commemorate and celebrate the 25th anniversary of IUCC becoming an Open and Affirming Congregation (ONA) - events that highlighted the processes and challenges of attaining this designation culminated with our Pastor Emeritus, Reverend Fred Plumer, returning in a marvelous service of love.

- Saying farewell and God speed to incredible members of our staff - John St. Marie, Pastor Sarah Fiske-Phillips, and Michael Spindle - the gift of their time and talent was a remarkable gift to us all.

- Welcoming new staff members - Rev. Steve Swope, Dr. Chris Peterson, and David Perez - their gifts enrich and enhance the life of IUCC in so many ways.

- The incredibly talented, caring lay leadership we have here at IUCC - there are too many to mention but I hope you appreciate, as I do, what a difference they make for all of us. It is truly the gift that keeps on giving!

- The opportunity to work with Pastor Paul and to witness first-hand his special talents. He and I shared many hours of conversation, discussion, and just “wasting” time together. That is a gift I will treasure always!

- The blessing that Pastor Dave has been to me and to IUCC - his experiences and wisdom have been of immense help to me and have truly made a difference during this time of transition.

- The ongoing support of Heidi Willcox - her behind-the-scenes work is truly a gift to us.

- COVID 19 and the challenges it has presented to IUCC - and the way we have stepped up with the knowledge that our church is more than just a building.

- And on a personal note, I am so thankful for the love and support of my soulmate, Keith. He has always been there for me through the good and not-so-good times!

Through all of these times, and the many others I didn't mention - the words of faith and community have been my guide star. Let me share what those two words mean to me by quoting from my moderator’s column of 2016:

Two quotes come to mind: The first is from a recent sermon of Pastor Paul’s, and it speaks of faith: What we begin others will complete. The good is like the building of cathedrals. Only through faith can those who lay foundation stones hear bells ringing in unraised steeples. Faith makes a difference in the lives of each person here at IUCC. Faith makes a difference in this vibrant place. Faith is what compels us to be free to soar, to dare to dream, and to put those dreams into action.

The second quote speaks of community: Community is the ability to pass time with people just to build trust, just to be sure of each other. A community is not just something you have. It is something you do - and you have to do it all the time. When we gather together as a community we are doing just that - building trust, building the ability to be sure of each other. We are “doing” community. It’s not automatic: we must do it. So: let us continue to be a community. Let us continue to do community in all that we do.

It has truly been an honor and privilege to be your Moderator - I look forward to continuing to be a part of this dynamic faith community and sharing that experience with you.

And as always, we will do that in faith and community!

*Renae*
As we look forward to the possibility of in-person on-campus worship services and other kinds of meetings, church leaders will be thinking through the variety of issues involved, and staff are developing specific proposals for the administration board and ministries board to consider. Based on what is known at this moment, here's how it looks to me.

Much as we miss each other and want to get together again, we must be deliberate and responsible. The coronavirus is dangerous and, presently, it is not under control. Until there is an effective vaccine and treatment, we are obliged to be very cautious about when and how we invite people to gather, taking into account government regulations, the best science-based advice, and counsel offered by the United Church of Christ.

We should continue to do what we have been doing with online worship and other meetings, and strive to make them better as we go. Our congregation is larger and more active than what we would be able to accommodate on campus, following the current guidelines which limit us to gatherings of no more than 50 people. We've made new friends and developed wider participation through online programming and, for many in our community, especially the most distant and the most vulnerable, online connection is going to be the best or the only option for the foreseeable future. The internet and social media are more than tools for the crisis; they need to be part of our strategy going forward too.

When we do gather on campus again for worship and other large(er) gatherings, we're going to have to be creative, flexible and disciplined. It will be necessary to regulate the way people enter and exit the facility, and where they sit, but this also opens up some new possibilities for movement and meditation. It will not be possible for us to join in hymn singing or even in reading aloud, but this also points toward new opportunities for music and making “a joyful noise unto the Lord.” We won't be able to have a “serve yourself” coffee hour, but this also invites us to engage new ways of serving each other and sharing in fellowship.

In March, when it became clear that we would have to suspend in-person on-campus worship services, it was hard to see how we would carry on. We weren't sure of what to do or how to do it but, as we kept faith with God and each other, we figured it out. The whole church – staff and lay leaders and members - we started with what we knew and, working together, we learned and got better as we went along. That's how this next chapter is going to go too: we'll start with what we know and work together to get better. And it is my firm belief that, as the crisis passes, you will be a stronger and more effective church than you were before it began.

Pastor Dave
Another month brings another opportunity to study and discuss our faith on Zoom! We’ve got three weekly groups going right now, and a fourth will carry us at least into July.

Ken Wyant’s Tuesday Bible Study meets on Zoom at 4 p.m each week. They have started to consider the stories about King David, which are found in 1 & 2 Samuel in the Old Testament.

Steve Swope is guiding a survey of the Hebrew scriptures on Zoom, Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. The stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will lead into the Exodus over the next few weeks.

And Eduardo Arismendi-Pardi and Craig Repp are going to finish the Lenten study of Eric Smith’s Paul the Progressive? for four Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. on Zoom, beginning May 28. Copies of the book are still available through the office.

How do YOU participate in any or all of these studies? Just email Steve in the church office! The weekly Zoom link is emailed on the day before each session.

Our Women’s Ministry has also been holding book groups on Zoom, and they’re working on ways to make up for the cancelled Women’s Retreat at Pilgrim Pines.

And how about a little facilities news? We had hoped the new patio cover would be installed by now, but the pandemic closed Irvine city offices, slowing down permit approvals. We’ll start as soon as possible.

Carpets are being cleaned, and seating changes discussed in preparation for being able to meet together again – safely. Other recommendations – from the governor’s office and the CDC – are also being seriously considered.

The landscaping looks lovely and is well cared for. Parking-lot LEDs provide effective light at night without wasting energy. The trees have filled in nicely after a much-needed trimming last fall.

Thanks to your continued generous support, our beautiful campus is being maintained and improved! We hope to be able to share it with you soon.
Pastoral Search Committee Reports

The Back Story and Details: The Work of the Pastoral Search Committee, 2019-2020
By Keith Boyum, Chair, IUCC Pastoral Search Committee

The Pastoral Search Committee is pleased to announce that our search process has concluded. We have a candidate to recommend for IUCC’s next “settled” senior pastor! Here, for those who may be interested, I want to recount the Search Committee’s journey. Tranquility Base here: the Eagle has landed! But what is the story of the journey to the moon?

Read on for the back story and the details.

On Sunday, June 2, 2019, the congregation elected a Pastoral Search Committee of seven persons. Upon the leadership’s encouragement, the congregation agreed to elect Aidan Mitchell specifically as a youth representative. Elected at large were Eduardo Jesús Arismendi-Pardi, Tricia Aynes, Keith Boyum, Connie Jones, Craig Tyrl, and Ken Wyant.

We completed our task of recommending a candidate for IUCC’s next settled senior pastor in less than a year, which by the standard of most congregational pastoral searches, is very fast work.

Our team organized after we were elected, and went to work. The large initial task was to create a Congregational Profile that followed a set UCC format, and that asked about everything from finances, indebtedness, attendance and staffing, to how we solve conflict, what we have learned from previous settled pastors, and what goals for ministry we foresee. I was prepared to offer Craig Tyrl’s hat size, but it turned out not to be necessary.

With drafting, writing, discussing, editing, surveying, and re-writing, we had the task complete before Christmas. Along the way, we received input from congregation members who joined us in a Sunday session in July, and from congregational leaders who generously devoted most of the July leadership retreat to discussing profile questions. Led by Aidan Mitchell, we surveyed the congregation, principally as to heritage, ethnicity, age, gender, and other demographics, and included the results in our Profile.

An Open Letter to the Congregation from the Pastoral Search Committee
By Craig Tyrl

Dear Congregation,

We are excited and grateful to announce the selection of our candidate to serve as the next senior pastor of IUCC. This selection is the culmination of a yearlong process permeated by a spirit of collaboration, discipline, faith, prayer, and trust. Although the details cannot be disseminated because of confidentiality and timeline, we want to share the good news while offering some reflections on our process past and present.

First, we are so grateful for the gift bestowed upon this committee. You have afforded us the blessings of friendship and service. We forged an unforgettable bond intimately grounded in the lives and history of our cherished community. We laughed. We cried. We listened. We prayed. We passionately debated. We changed our perspectives. We discerned. We were transformed. Sharing in this transformation leaves us a debt of gratitude for which we humbly say, “Thank you!”

As a reminder, our journey began a year ago. The congregation voted to have us be their voice on the committee. A detailed and exhaustive church profile was compiled to be our call to prospective candidates. Church and municipal demographics, financials, history, ministries, organizational structures, and theology were compiled. Moreover, the committee facilitated conversations with IUCC at its annual leadership retreat, small group sessions, pastoral interviews, and profile launch to the congregation. All voices were heard, and our call was made public. Over the last several months, we fielded pastoral profiles, evaluating them according to stringent criteria: activism, climate change, collaboration, cultural & ethnic diversity, gifted homiletics, just peace and global missions, LGBTQ+, progressive theology, managerial skills, and youth programming. Winnowing our pool, outstanding candidates submitted written responses to an evaluative rubric. Our four finalists provided references, sermons,
We asked UCC clergy in our congregation to critique our draft, and we benefited from the insights that David Pattee, Terry LePage, and Steve Swope offered. Of course, we also had the benefit of Ken Wyant as a team member. We reviewed our profile document at an October congregational forum, heard suggestions, and in accordance with them made final changes to the Profile. The document is 43 pages long and includes 89 enumerated answers / statements / tables of figures / mini-essays. Most congregational profiles are much briefer. We offer thanks to University Synagogue’s Rabbi Arnie Rachlas, to Dr. Robert Istad, Professor of Music at Cal State Fullerton, and to our former staff member, Robinmarie McClement, for acting as formal references for IUCC. Their names and contact information are included in the Profile, and each fielded questions from some of our candidates.

Beginning in January 2020, our search “went up” on the United Church of Christ website, a task accomplished on our behalf by staff in the Conference office. The Search Committee eventually reviewed the credentials of 29 serious candidates for our Senior Pastor position. Among these, we informally contacted two candidates on our own initiative, and another candidate reached out to us with questions and apparent interest, but later withdrew. Some 26 candidates, then, asked that our Southern California-Nevada Conference of the UCC make their Pastoral Profiles available to us, expressing their interest in being considered. Candidates had found the IUCC search on the UCC website, and had reviewed our brief job description posted there. We had reviewed that job description with the congregation at the forum in October, 2019. You can see it, together with three photos that we also posted, at this URL: http://oppsearch.uc.org/web/fastdetails.aspx?id=3902&KeepThis=false&TB_iframe=true&height=&width=

Pastoral Profiles typically take up 17 pages, using a standard format, and must not exceed a stated word limit. Each of our seven Search Committee members read all 26 profiles, across January, February and March, and awarded a numeric rating to each candidate according to a rubric that we developed. A total number of points per candidate gave us a useful approach to initial winnowing. A key part of our duty was, of course, to discard capable people but who did not appear to match our needs, and our record show that across these months, in not-quite weekly Search Committee meetings, our team asked the chair to let them know that we would no longer remain “in discernment” with them. Interestingly: the candidate whom we will recommend to the congregation was apparently the first to ask that a

The Covid-19 pandemic has complicated the process of moving forward. In a normal world, the congregation greets the candidate and their family, hears them preach, and shares a meal without the confines of social-distancing. Discussions with the administrative board and church leadership are ongoing. All recognize the importance of meeting the candidate personally and professionally. This month you can expect adaptive and innovative ways to safely introduce our selection for the next settled pastor. We recognize the situation is not ideal, but we also strongly believe that our community is best served with a senior pastor in place to help navigate the current crisis rather than waiting until it’s subsided. Information will soon follow.

Finally, our committee is a collaboration of gifted voices. Aidan Mitchell and her strong commitment for youth programming led us each meeting with a check-in to strengthen our group. Our elected chaplain, Ken Wyant, enlightened our group with the story of Israel’s first “hiring committee.” Every meeting we insightfully travelled the book of Samuel as Israel journeyed towards David as their king. Keith Boyum, always ready with an appropriate pun, provided unparalleled expertise and leadership as chair of the committee, providing a master class of how to manage a hiring committee. Connie Jones never failed in her advocacy of our music ministry and worship. Eduardo Arismendi-Pardi, with a heart of compassion and commitment to diversity, brought logic and mathematics to problem solving. Craig Tyrl managed to provide a theatre analogy almost at every step of the process, reminding us that we are an ensemble. Tricia Aynes, the workhorse of our group, provided an awe-inspiring level of dedication, intellect, and uncanny work ethic. Together our voices constitute your voice.

In closing, a new chapter begins. Our work will continue as your liaison to the candidate as the next steps unfold. You will soon know the details. For now, we say with honor and humility, this is an amazing candidate, and we take pride in our selection.

In loving kindness,

Craig Tyrl
for the Pastoral Search Committee
Pastoral Profile be made available to IUCC and, remarkably, achieved the highest number of initial total points. Others came close; none surpassed.

From among the 26, we identified a small group to whom we then sent our Congregational Profile, together with a request for written answers to questions that we developed for each of them. The questions were directly from the elements of the brief job description. Thus, for example, we asked about their commitments to Progressive Christianity, to Open and Affirming embrace, to diversity and inclusion, and to social justice including climate change. We asked for a showing of capacity to preach with power and eloquence, to lead a congregation of our size in a collaborative approach, and to join with others in creating programs that would be attractive to youth and young families.

Each Pastoral Profile includes three references, with contact information. For four of the candidates, we dialed the references in teams of two, and reported results. We then interviewed, via Zoom, the same four individuals, sharing pre-set questions among each member of the team. We had subsequent Zoom, e-mail, and occasional telephone interactions with the four candidates, pursuing details, probing strengths, understanding possible weaknesses.

Among the four, one individual eventually let us know that IUCC’s timing was not going to work for that candidacy; and after lengthy discussion, discernment and prayer, we advised another candidate that we were discontinuing discernment.

Two very attractive candidates, each with many strengths, remained. In a metaphor, we had two bags of groceries with different items in each bag. All of the items were things we might want and cherish, but the mixtures of items were not the same. In the end, on Sunday, May 24, at 3:54 p.m., we opted for the set of strengths, for the bag of groceries, that, led by the Spirit, we thought would serve IUCC best in this time of pandemic and stress, and for years beyond. We received the candidate’s warm and enthusiastic affirmation – yes, you may take my name forward to the congregation – in a Zoom meeting on May 27.

Coda: Soon, these details and history may be largely forgotten, as we build a relationship and a future with a new settled senior pastor. It will be appropriate to forget the details, too: it is much more important to look forward! Yet for the record, and for buffs of this kind of thing, we offer our back story to a candid congregation. The Eagle landed, all right; and space buffs now know something about the journey.

“Back Story” article continued from page 6

Nominating Committee Proposed Slate of Officers for 2020-2021

The Nominating Committee (Renae Boyum, Daniel Blackburn, Felicity Figueroa, Tommie Kozlov, Randy Romine, and Pastor Dave) has proposed the following slate of officers to be voted on at the Spring Congregational Meeting on June 28:

**Moderator**
Tricia Aynes (new)

**Administrative Board**
Admin Board Chair  Daniel Blackburn
Treasurer   Mark Allen (new)
Admin Board Clerk  Laura Palen
Congregational Reps (3)  Apoorva Ghosh
Dorothy Duncan
Penny Portillo

**Ministries Board**
Ministries Board Chair  Felicity Figueroa
Ministries Board Clerk  Karolyn Fencl (new)
Adult Programs Chair  Eduardo Arismendi-Pardi
Advocates Chair  Dave Smith
Communication Chair  Cindy O'Dell
Congregational Care Chairs  Cheryl Arismendi/ Lorraine Fox
Deacons Chair
Fellowship Chair
Hospitality Chairs  Teri Olson/Alex Ingal
Membership Chair  Randy Romine
Ministry for Young People  Lauren Louie & Chairs
Mission & Service Chairs  Steve Goetz/Sharon Lynn
Music Ministry Chair  Pat Sauter
Stephen Ministry Chairs  Janet Johnson/ Jeanne Maag
Worship Chair  Craig Tyrl

**Committee Chairs**
Building & Grounds Chair  Teri Houston
Bylaws/P & P Chair  Anne Rosse (new)
Child Care Committee Chair  Keith Boyum
Fund Development Chair  Renae Boyum (new)
Human Resources Chair  Dale Vaughan
Technology Chair

Please note that there are two vacancies that need to be filled:
- Fellowship Ministry Chair
- Technology Committee Chair

If you are interested in one of these positions, or know someone who might be a good fit, please contact one of the Nominating Committee members. Ministry and Committee chairs must be Corporate Members of IUCC.
**Isaiah House**
We will not be providing dinners to Isaiah House as usual in 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.

**The Breakfast Club** *(Revisited)*
Good news for you ladies that like having a cup of coffee/tea and your favorite breakfast with friends (and others waiting to be your friends). For many years a group of IUCC women have gathered on Thursday mornings to share breakfast. Perhaps one of the few pieces of good news you’ll hear about our current circumstance is that it will be easier than ever for you to join us! You can even keep your robe on. Rather than meeting at a coffee shop we now “gather” via Zoom every Thursday morning at 8:00 a.m., to say hello and catch up with each other. Your coffee will be your favorite, because you will make it; and your breakfast will be cooked just right, because you will cook it. If you’d like to join us any Thursday, give Barbara a call (949-350-9962) or send her a note (zurbiegirl@gmail.com) and she’ll give you the info you need to join us. Time to “wake up and smell the coffee” – your own, but with your gal pals.

~ Lorraine Fox

**Save the Date!**
Sunday, June 28, at 12:15 p.m.
Congregational Meeting via Zoom!
Ratification of 2020-21 Leadership Slate
Motion to Extend a Call to the Next Settled Pastor
Details to follow on June 10!

**Diversity & Inclusion Task Force**
The Diversity & Inclusion Task Force will host Zoom meetings every week on Sundays at 12:30 p.m., alternating between non-agenda sharing meetings and formal agenda meetings. See call-in information on this week's IUCC e-blast, or contact the office.

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Should Churches Return to Worship in Their Sanctuaries?

May 19, 2020
A Pastoral letter from the Leadership of the Wider United Church of Christ

As the country debates how, when, and under what circumstances life might return to normal, leaders in every setting of the church are deliberating about returning to their sanctuaries for worship.

As leaders in the United Church of Christ, we want to send a clear and strong message to congregations who are considering going back to meeting in person: We urge you to wait until ALL safety concerns have been addressed. We want to offer what guidance we can about issues you should consider in your deliberations.

We are sure that, like us, you have been inundated with materials about the COVID-19 virus. Some of it seems to be contradictory at times. Much of it is being and has been politicized. Discerning fact from fiction can be tricky. We would like to share with you the resources that we have found helpful in our own deliberations, as well as any wisdom we have that could be useful to you.

Among the most impactful articles we have seen is “The Risks—Know Them—Avoid Them,” by Erin Bromage. The article talks in great detail about how the virus is spread and mentions in particular how church life which we experience as normal could prove to be a threat to our worshipers. We strongly encourage you to read this as a part of your decision-making process. You can read it here: https://www.erinbromage.com/post/the-risks-know-them-avoid-them

Of all the things we could say, we lead with this principle: Please make every decision based on how it will affect the most vulnerable among you. Many of us will be able to attend services and activities as fully healthy, low-risk individuals. Others, though, will come out of a deep love for and obligation to their church, deciding to take a risk in order to be back with their church family. We urge you to keep that in mind as you process your decisions.

Conference leaders have sent guidance to their churches about the process of deciding how and when to return. We, as national and regional leaders are encouraging churches to consult their Conference website for materials relevant to their setting for ministry.

In a recent email, the Rev. Nigel Uden, Moderator of the United Reformed Church (United Kingdom), offered his prayerful support. In it, he wrote about a deacon of the church in Coventry. That deacon was trying to persuade a young pastor to serve that church in the decade that followed not only the Second World War, but the utter annihilation of the city of Coventry at the hands of the Germans. Their precious church was laid bare. What the deacon said to the young pastor convinced him to come and serve: “There is nothing in this church that cannot be changed as long as the Gospel is preached and the Kingdom of God extended.”

Those words have proven to be quite precious and prescient. They have reminded us that when the world forces change upon us, and with it the tremendous burden of grief and loss, our task remains but this: preach the Gospel and extend the Kingdom. No matter what we decide in the coming days, even if it means sheltering in place a while longer, the gospel will be preached and the realm of God will grow through our efforts.

In the words of Julian of Norwich, written from her cell at the church in Norwich that was built as her own shelter in the time of the Plague: “All shall be well. And all shall be well. And all manner of thing shall be well.”

Faithfully,
The Council of Conference Ministers United Church of Christ
The National Officers of the United Church of Christ
The Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer, The Rev. Traci Blackmon, and The Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson
A man was lynched by police in Minneapolis this week. George Floyd was lynched on the streets of Minneapolis, Minn., with the knee of an officer who needed no noose. As comrades looked on, reminiscent of the public lynchings of the past, George Floyd pleaded for breath for over 5 minutes as the callous, vigilante actions of four officers hooded in blue ignored his plea. The unrestrained white rage that stalked Colin Kaepernick "taking a knee" on AstroTurf to protest violence against black bodies escapes this country's watchful gaze as an authorized officer "takes a knee" on the throat of a black man pinned to the asphalt. Is this how white supremacy prays?

A man was lynched by vigilantes in Brunswick, Ga., on Feb. 23 this year. Ahmaud Arbery's life was choked from his body by bullets plowed through his chest, fired from the gun of white vigilantes self-deputized to guard white fragility from the threat of a black man free enough to run where he chooses, as comrades looked on. No charges were filed initially and we might never have known, except such violence is never fully satiated without public display. The taping of their triumph sealed their fate. Is this how white supremacy celebrates?

A woman was lynched by police in Louisville, Ky., on March 13 this year. Breonna Taylor's sleep was interrupted by death as officers broke into her home unannounced and riddled her body with 8 bullets in search of a black man who did not live there and was already caged. Breonna was an EMT, risking her life daily for the well-being of others. Her profession placed her at high risk for COVID-19. Her black body placed her at higher risk for the death she endured. Breonna's work was essential. Her life was not.

White supremacy is not simply an ideology, it is an evil. It is not simply born of ignorance but also of intention. This religion of white supremacy is so deeply seeded in the blood-drenched soil of our country that white people will do anything to protect its fragile roots. Black bodies are lynched by police in America so that white supremacy can breathe, white fragility can rage, and white entitlement can pretend not to see.

A black man was almost lynched in Central Park this week. Amy Cooper intended to steal his breath. She knew the gravity of a white woman's plea to be saved from the throes of a Black man in America. Her words were deliberately weaponized with fragility. White women's tears are their own eyewitness. She knew exactly what she was doing, so much so that she warned the victim she was armed with whiteness and would weaponize it if he did not submit to her demands. This is what “Stand Your Ground” looks like for those who believe they actually own the ground.

Murder by law enforcement is the insidious mutation of vigilante lynchings. Both public executions are violations of the 4th and 14th amendments — violations too often upheld by the highest court in this land. But state-sanctioned murder carries the endorsement of our judicial system for America to be at war with itself. The authority to savagely murder black people and mutilate their bodies in public displays suggests the desire to stop a power beyond one's ability to kill. How many bullets does it take to stop a black body? How long must a choke hold last to make the weak feel powerful when confronted with a resilience that cannot be comprehended? Too often images flood our screens of whiteness raging out of control. Picnics and postcards with lynched bodies on display have been replaced by live-streams and private videos with the murdered on display. We can no longer suffer the luxury of looking away. We must speak truth with power for the salvation of us all.

Black people were lynched in America yesterday, and all the yesterdays before. Lynched by vigilantes who Stand Their Ground. Lynched by religious zealots that have white-washed God. Lynched by the silence of white liberals. Lynched by those sworn to serve and protect. And yet. As we enter this season of Pentecost we are reminded that the breath of God still blows where she wills, the fire of God's righteousness still burns within those who believe, the power of God still emboldens us to tear down every stronghold, and the Will of God still reigns supreme.

In the strength of that power, we must be compelled to: Speak up. Stand up. Show up. In Minneapolis, in Brunswick, in Louisville, in New York, in Ferguson, in Cleveland, in Baltimore, in Chicago, and in every city across the land. Somehow we must garner the strength to call out this evil. We must bolster the courage to face this head on and call it by name. Only when we choose to face the evil can we cast it from our collective being. This is the work of the entire church.

We are called to uproot white supremacy in all of its forms. Whiteness must no longer be our god. Justice was lynched in America yesterday. But thanks be to God, Justice refuses to die.
Feminist theology falls under liberation theology which rests in the salvific work of Jesus Christ by calling one to speak and act against socioeconomic evils of modern servitude. These evils include lack of healthcare and education; unemployment/underemployment; worker exploitation by corporations; placing the country’s economy above the sanctity of life; oppressive laws that destroy the dignity of the exploited; and limitations on freedoms of self-expression, politics, and religion.

Feminist theology challenges the male-centrism that suffocates the salvific work of Jesus Christ. Feminist theology focuses on seeking justice by standing in solidarity with the oppressed; challenging masculinity. Providing a liberatory voice for the voiceless while breaking the silence that minimizes/ignores God’s feminist voice is at the heart of feminist theology.

Women have been the object and subject of oppression in all cultures and religions. This reality yields fertile soil for a feminist theology to germinate by recognizing the importance of solidarity with oppressed women, thus converging to an ethos of liberation from masculinity.

The goals of feminist theology include finding ways to increase the role of women among the clergy, exploring reinterpretations of masculine imagery and language about God, determining the role of women in relation to career and motherhood, and developing a theology that allows women to celebrate the matriarchal side of the teachings of Jesus Christ. These goals yield impetus to reinterpret the Pauline letters through a feminist lens.

Feminist theology leads to challenging, questioning, and dismantling the masculinity created by oppressive patriarchal systems. Feminist theology is grounded in being a critic of the treatment of women in the past through alternative interpretations that support feminist understanding of the teachings of the historical Jesus. Feminist theology should cause one to question the masculinity of the Triune God (i.e., Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

The answer to “How does one challenge such masculinity and still adhere to the essence of the meaning of scriptures?” rests on Crisis, Denial, Resolution, and Integration. Crisis allows women to relive suffered traumas resulting from patriarchal domination within scriptures. Denial is part of the healing process needed to cope with masculinity, allowing scriptures to speak with a feminist voice. Resolution means not forgetting wrongs suffered, yet forgiving the action(s) of the perpetrator(s). Resolution is willingness to rest on those memories as experiences leading to challenging socioeconomic evils of modern servitude. Integration allows embracing forgiveness and seeking compassionate justice which rests on the aphorism that “silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.” (The Rev. Dr. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1906-1945).

Challenging masculinity within the Pauline letters requires a theory of solidarity—providing a voice for the voiceless. Feminist reinterpretation demands awareness about disagreement among scholars regarding the authorship of these letters. Seven of these fourteen letters are, undisputedly, linked to Paul. The misogynistic narrative in these letters negates the teachings of the historical Jesus.

Narratives about the teachings of Jesus in concert with Paul’s writing about the egalitarian concept of marriage contradict references about wives submitting to their husbands (cf. Ephesians 5:22-23). Dismantling misogyny in these letters is grounded on an unlikely probability that Paul wrote everything attributed to him, being able to trust Paul’s words over the words of others about him, being able to trust Paul’s actions as evidence of his commitments, and viewing Paul through a particular theological and historical lens.

Scholars view aspects of these disputed and non-disputed letters as pseudepigraphical letters. The reasons for
Is God trying to tell us anything?
by Tricia Aynes

A recent poll by the University of Chicago Divinity School and the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 31% of Americans who believe in God feel strongly that the virus is a sign of God telling humanity to change how it lives, with another 31% finding that statement to be somewhat true. Evangelical Protestants are more likely than others to believe that strongly (at 43%) compared to 28% of Catholics and mainline Protestants.

I found the poll topic very interesting but thought it fell short of the real question. I wondered if the members of IUCC might have an opinion that they’d be willing to share. I asked a small sample of our members these two questions: “(a) Do you believe that the virus is a sign of God telling humanity to change; and (b) If so, what do you think God is trying to tell us?” I found the results rather surprising, which is what I love about this congregation!

Jim A: “We’re all in this together, and we’re all vulnerable.”

Keith B: “Because I don’t think that God dictates human affairs, it would easily follow that there is no ‘sign’ to be found.”

Renae B: “I don’t think that’s the way God operates. I think faith in the power of God in our lives is about giving us strength and courage to face the challenges and opportunities ahead of us, and so as I think about the virus, I am glad that I have a God in my life that offers me support. However, I don’t think God is responsible in anyway for the virus.”

Connie J: “I come more from a metaphysical belief system. There is an energy that connects all of us. We transmit energy which affects those around us. If we hold love in our heart, we generate goodness for everyone! I have told my family (half in jest) that perhaps the inhabitants of planet earth are experiencing karmic debt for trashing our planet so disrespectfully! And for over populating our planet!”

Felicity F: “To answer your question (a): Absolutely not. I don’t believe that, whatever ‘God’ might be, that entity/spirit/universal energy doesn’t dole out punishments and/or rewards for good behavior. That is just pure anthropomorphization.”

Marilyn S: “Wow. It has NOT crossed my mind even once that God sent this virus to get our attention in any way ... I feel there are profound opportunities within the pandemic to reassess our values, priorities and behavior, both now and whenever life returns to some version of “the new normal.”

Steve S: “I don’t believe the virus - or any situation, crisis, or problem - is ‘a sign from God.’ I simply don’t believe God works that way - sending out ‘messages’ or warnings via natural phenomena, in order to direct our behavior. However, I do believe there are things we might learn from this experience - signs, if you will, in how all this is playing out which might indicate where our society falls short of offering the full, free, abundant, just life God desires for all people. For instance, who turns out to be ‘essential,’ and are they being compensated and cared for appropriately? Or, how equitably are health-care resources distributed across our society so that all people receive the care they need without financial sacrifice or hardship? If we as a society discover that we can and ought to be doing better and we take steps to remedy the shortcomings, then we will have learned something because of this crisis. And it might be said that there was a ‘sign’ for us in it, if we choose to interpret it that way. It might even be said that God would have wanted us to learn this particular lesson, for the sake of all God’s people. But to turn that into a deliberate, directed message is a step too far for me.”

Lorraine F: “Based on my early Christian education and the way the Bible is written, I think it is natural for Christians to assign responsibility to God when things happen. We do this for both good things and things that are not good. I was raised with ‘The Lord’s Will’ as a constant refrain, and my family still tends to see things that way. As I moved away from evangelical thinking and examined how many of Jesus’ teachings are completely ignored in favor of others, I lost respect for certain interpretations of Scripture. In the midst of our current situation I see how ‘The Lord’s will’ can be used to selfishly ignore whatever points of view – especially scientific ones – are not convenient, leaving room for entirely selfish interpretations of how we should be acting. If someone gets sick or dies, we can blame God, or blithely write it off as ‘God’s will,’ rather than accept any responsibility for personal actions or thoughtless behaviors. I don’t believe God is willing droves of His/Her creation to be suffering as some kind of ‘lesson.’ The Bible is full of plagues and cataclysms to display God’s wrath, and that is the God I grew up with. The God I love now is not full of wrath but..."
attributing these letters to Paul may have been to provide a convincing voice to deal with household codes grounded on hierarchy between parties (e.g., slaves being inferior to masters, children being inferior to parents, and wives being inferior to husbands, and as such should be obedient) as alluded to in the letters to both the Ephesians and Colossians. There is a probability that the authors of Ephesians and Colossians as well as the authors of the disputed letters could have been creating their letters by taking words and phrases from some of Paul's authentic letters, and recombining them to make new letters with some characteristics of the old ones. Perhaps they were doing this because they thought something needed to be said about the role of women with the authority of Paul's narrative.

Inserting words into a new manuscript is an interpolation of the text. Textual interpolation is adding an author's original narrative to a new narrative to give the strength of the voice of an original author to the new text. This addition may have been needed to use the newly created text for an ulterior purpose which may have not been the original intended purpose of the text.

Paul’s writing about women (Phoebe, Prisca or Priscilla, Junia, and Chloe) is antithetical to misogyny. Paul trusted Phoebe to carry the letter(s), on his behalf, to be presented to churches in Rome. If Paul was a misogynist why would he write about his high regard for Phoebe?

Finally, misogyny doesn’t disappear by ordaining women. Christianity must reckon with its legacy of misogyny. Solidarity with women while undoing past injustices is exercising feminist theology. This means embracing T'Shuva (חזרה)—making a U-Turn and undoing past injustices.

full of love, as Jesus taught. God created Nature and asked us to care for it. If we are careless with Nature, I don't think it's fair to blame the same God who gave us the birds, and flowers, and clouds, and the thousands of other features of nature that we love so much. Yes, there are viruses and bacteria, and I don't know why they're there, but I know to be careful around them, as I am around tornados and fire. If there is a 'lesson' it is for us to respect and treat carefully what we have been given, and to seek the protection of the Creator rather than turning on the Creator with accusations or the notion that we can't treat each other kindly, as we have been told to, without a calamity to slap us in the face.”

Craig T: “I’ve been thinking about this. My agnosticism makes this difficult to answer. If God does have a point of view, it is in and through the human being. For me, the virus seems like yet another consequence of our poor stewardship of creation. When human beings accumulate wealth, exploit resources, manipulate the environment, and worship the ego, bad things happen: anxiety, climate change, disease, war, etc. I will be interested to see how history understands the origins of Covid. Thanks for the food for thought.”

Eduardo A-P: “God gave us free agency and I believe that the laws of nature govern human life as well as unexplained phenomenon. I do believe in God but I also believe that random occurrences or things such as illnesses can be considered as natural, physical, or health phenomena. The virus is a biochemical phenomenon. To believe that the virus is a sign of God telling humanity to change is, at best, laughable. This is no different than declarations about AIDS being a punishment from God to non-heterosexuals ….. These declarations are evidence of the power of human ignorance, which is more potent and contagious than the power of the virus …. I do not think God is telling me anything except to grant me an opportunity to be a person who exercises divine grace, practices kindness and compassion, and is led by faith, hope, and love.”

Cindy O: “You would think after saying, reading, hearing that ‘God is Still Speaking’ too many times to count, I would be inclined to think ‘God is telling …’ That's not what I think we mean by ‘God is Still Speaking’ because I think the point has always been that God ‘speaks’ through us and our actions as the heart and hands of God. So no, I don’t think the virus is a sign of God telling humanity to change any more than I think God ‘wants’ a certain team to win the Super Bowl, etc. I do think the virus and our various responses should be telling us that we have a lot more work to do as humans to care for each other and the world we live in. And I hope we do.”
As if there wasn't enough to do as a mom or dad, across the world parents now find that they have been also gifted with the opportunity to become their children's in-home teachers. Children are begging for another teacher next year, and parents are setting aside funds for extravagant gifts for their children's teachers once “real” school resumes. No parent excels in all subjects, and yet there is no “changing classes.” I would like to ease your burden just a little by suggesting one topic that you already know more about than your children, and that has a built-in curriculum in each home: the subject is maturity. Hopefully, all adults know something now that they didn't know then. The only lessons you need to have mastered to pass what you know on this subject along to your children are the “life lessons” you have picked up along the way. Your children are picking them up now, they’re just a little behind you.

Maturity begins building the minute we’re born and continues until the day we begin to revert back to childhood, in our so-called “golden” (really??) years. The building blocks for developing maturity are a combination of what we learn from experience, mixed with what we learn from knowledge and wisdom that is passed along by people who have learned things we don't yet know.

The current pandemic provides parents with a very rich curriculum from which to draw to provide the building blocks – knowledge (book learning and life learning), skill, discernment, etc. that enable successful management of one's life circumstances. Maturity. I don't think that one is ever fully “mature” in that we learn throughout our lives, and this is important to share with children and teens. It’s not like we’ve “arrived” and they haven’t. It’s just that we're further along.

The only textbook you will need for this class is a television, radio, smartphone, newspaper, or combination thereof. The only visual/audio aids you will need are a set of eyes and ears. The “news” provides the content; you won't have to “create” anything. I suggest this be the first class of every day, as well as the last class of every day. I will also suggest it will be the most important class you teach. There's no point knowing what something is if you don't know what it's for or how to use it. There's no point learning language if there's no one to communicate with. Lessons in maturity can be used anywhere, at any time, and with anyone. The other good news is that it doesn't matter how old your children are. Maturity begins in the crib and continues from there. The 3 month old baby who no longer screams the minute s/he wakes up, but starts babbling and waits a while for someone to come in, has already “matured” from the 3-day old baby who screams the minute they wake up alone because they think they're going to die if someone doesn't get here in this minute and feed them. It can be seen in the 3-year old who asks for something in the store without a tantrum; in the six year old who lets his brother have the biggest piece.

Any day of the week, in any city or town, children are now exposed to throngs of adults acting like children. The frequently seen inability to cope maturely with our current situation is astounding. Discussing this together can be used to help your children develop into older children, teens, and adults who can learn to cope maturely with difficult and challenging life events. Sit with your children/teens and help them understand how mature people accept and accommodate “facts,” and immature people, like preschoolers, say “no” and change facts to “fake.” When watching the immature behavior of adults on television, talk with them about why it isn't safe, isn't respectful, and isn't good even for them. Talk with your children about “inconvenient truth,” and how tempting it is to make it into something else that is easier to live with. Point out how adults use “bully behavior” when you see it, and talk about why people do it.

The greatest feature of this pedagogy is that we don't have to point at them – our children – and their behavior, so their defenses won't be up. We're not “picking on them,” we're picking on the silly adults on the news. We're using them to learn.

Finally, remember to praise and reward ALL displays of more mature behavior from your kids. No point learning something if there's nothing in it for you.
Have you felt unrest, deep unrest in the soft folds of your soul? The unrest I’m feeling is due to my husband’s health: he is in stage five of kidney disease, the end stage, the final stage. Final stage – what does that really mean? To add to the problems, he also has an Alzheimer’s diagnosis.

George, the subject of my unrest, is resting - the irony of it all - in his favorite chair on the patio. He doesn't appear troubled, but warm and content in his pajamas and robe, bathed in sunshine. I watch him close his eyes, see the slight rise of his chest; I watch him nap with nary a care. I’m the one in turmoil.

I couldn’t sleep last night due to the unknowns surrounding George’s condition. At this final stage of kidney disease, should we go on as usual? Or, should we do something different? I mentally checked off a list:

- We don't need to discuss finances. We’ve done that. Unlike some women, I have a grasp of our finances since I’ve been the taking-care-of-money-person for the past thirty years.
- Burial? We’ve made arrangements to donate our bodies to the UCI medical school; they will be notified at the time of our deaths and will take care of all details.
- A memorial service? We’ve discussed this, not with great detail, but all the important decisions are in writing.

The foregoing are all details. How about things less tangible such as having deeper, poignant conversations? The reality is that Alzheimer’s impacts conversation. While George still communicates, there is something missing, not only memory, but the full personality I knew for 60 years. Perhaps that’s why I feel an absence of the understanding and depth we once enjoyed in conversing.

How about trying to do something fun or different each day? I take him out for car rides, go through photo albums, help him compose letters, but what am I missing? I keep thinking I should do more, but I don’t know what that more is. Are there ways to interact now to prevent having regrets later? A friend’s comments help me: All George needs now is your presence, your caring for him.

My questions are normal according to author Pauline Boss. In her book, Loving Someone Who Has Dementia, she helps me understand that with a dementia diagnosis the patient is both present and absent. Such duality is confusing; to make sense of a nonsensical situation becomes challenging. Boss explains how life is dramatically altered because the relationship as you knew it is ruptured. The loss is an ambiguous loss, one that is unclear with no resolution or closure. The caregiver also wrestles with not knowing what is coming next or when and how it will end. Can I let go of feeling guilty at not knowing how to handle everything? If I can become comfortable with a less than perfect solution, a less than perfect relationship, perhaps that clarity in the midst of ambiguity will give me peace.

With George’s kidney diagnosis, his remaining time is an unknown. Some people live a few weeks, others a year. Life gives us many mysteries; death being one of them. How imminent is death? Where is death? Is it waiting outside the bedroom door? Is it lurking in the corner of the bedroom? Or is it sitting on the foot of the bed? In spite of the finality of death, is it a gentle transition into a different sphere?

It’s still possible that I could die first. I’m strong, but I could have a heart attack, an accident, whatever. A startling statistic is that caregivers die at a rate 63% higher than people the same age who are not caring for someone with dementia. However, if I outlive him, what will life be like without him, without his physical presence? I know that I will greatly miss George and will need to draw upon memories to sustain me. I pray that the memories we make now will add joy to the future.

I often turn to the written word for solace and new thoughts. Today, I absorb the words of May Sarton:

I am moving  
Toward a new freedom  
Born of detachment,  
And a sweeter grace –  
Learning to let go.

Yes, I am trying to let go of the unknowns, to live in the moment. When I do so, it is sweet grace to my restless soul.
In a normal year, the Tony Awards are broadcast on the first Sunday in June. This year, however, the Tonys have been indefinitely postponed due to COVID-19. So, in their place, I offer a list of my favorite stage musicals from the second decade of the 21st Century. This list, I hope, will serve as a reminder that, eventually, live theatre will return. The cast albums for most of these shows can be found on all the major music streaming services. If you can’t find one, let me know. I’ll be glad to help you.

1) **Hamilton** (Lin-Manuel Miranda - 2015) – Some say it’s a little dated (really, you’re kidding!). For me, however, *Hamilton* may well be Mr. Miranda’s finest example of how he uses Hip-Hop to tell long form stories. By comparison, *In the Heights* was merely a warm-up, and *21 Chump Street* was merely an exercise.

2) **Hadestown** (Anais Mitchell - 2019) - Ms. Mitchell mixes Delta Blues with the oldest metaphor in American culture, the train, to retell the Orpheus and Eurydice story for the Trump era. My favorite number allows Hades to explain why he builds his wall.

3) **Dear Evan Hansen** (Justin Paul & Benj Pasek - 2016) – A high-tech, high-octane piece by the co-authors of *La La Land*. *Dear Evan Hansen* reminds us that, all too often, loneliness and confusion lay at the heart of our social media.

4) **The Band’s Visit** (David Yazbek - 2017) - Based on Eran Kolirin’s 2007 film of the same name. This is Mr. Yazbek at his finest (although *Women on the Verge* has its moments).

5) **A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder** (Steven Lutvak - 1964) – This little story about lust for power is set in a British country estate. It’s tailor made for the *Downton Abbey* freak in all of us. One actor, Jefferson Mays, even plays eight roles.

6) **Kinky Boots** (Cindy Lauper – 2013) – An endearing firecracker of a musical based on Julian Jarrold’s 2005 film about a middle-class British cobbler who revives his family’s business by making custom boots for drag queens.

7) **Far from Heaven** (Scott Frankel - 2013) – A superb musical rendering of Todd Haynes’ film by basically the same team that gave us *Grey Gardens*; the book this time was written by Richard Greenberg. Kelli O’Hara, as always, is superb.

8) **Book of Mormon** (Matt Stone, Trey Parker & Robert Lopez – 2011) – The South Park boys and *Avenue Q* Bobby savage the church in which I began my spiritual life. Okay, sure, it is hilarious.

9) **Fela!** (Bill T. Jones – 2011) – Choreographer Bill T. Jones’ biographical review about the Nigerian Afrobeat master Fela Anikulapo (Ransome) Kuti. I saw it twice and loved it both times.

10) **Fun Home** (Jeanine Tesori - 2015) – Taken from Alison Bechdel’s 2006 graphic novel about a young teenager growing up lesbian in a funeral home run by her closeted gay father. Jeanine Tesori is at her best in this one.

11) **Scottsboro Boys** (Kander and Ebb - 2010) – Kander & Ebbs’ last musical. They retell the tale of the Scottsboro Nine as only Kander and Ebb could do, using minstrelsy. First, they satire the form, then they use the form to help us understand how this story has affected U.S. history.