Pastor Sarah Halverson-Cano signs Call Agreement with IUCC

It’s official! The Rev. Dr. Sarah Halverson-Cano, Administration Board Chair Daniel Blackburn, and Moderator Tricia Aynes met outdoors on the Pastor’s Patio on July 15 to sign the Call Agreement. While you can’t tell behind the masks, everyone was beaming with joy! We look forward to a long and happy partnership with Pastor Sarah.

Photos courtesy of Jim Aynes
DEPosition from Pastor Dave  
by the Rev. David Pattee, Interim Senior Pastor

July 31, 2020

Dear IUCC Family,

Five years ago I, a recent graduate of both our youth group and high school, was hired to work with the young children of IUCC. Not long after, I was then offered the Youth Coordinator position and that opportunity has changed my life forever.

For the past five years, I have been graced with the ability to guide and teach the children and youth of our congregation. I have been able to nurture a space of unconditional love, acceptance, peace, justice, and faith that I myself experienced while a member of the IUCC youth group. I have been able to see your children grow and in turn, grow myself as a teacher and mentor.

This past year has been full of change for our church. While change can be uncomfortable and sometimes scary, life in itself is change. This is something that I have come to understand through my work with the young people of the congregation.

Unfortunately, it is time for more change. I will soon be entering a new season of my life as I am applying for transfer to University this Fall. The demands of my schooling will make it impossible to give the youth the time and attention that they deserve. As such, I have come to a difficult decision that it is time for me to step away from my role as the Youth Coordinator of IUCC. However, I am leaving confident that with David’s leadership and the wonderful support of Lauren and Shanthi, the Ministries with Young People will flourish and in turn, continue to hold a space of kindness, justice, and a place to walk humbly with God.

My last Sunday with IUCC will be September 6th and I hope to be in community with you all, as best we can in these times, until then. I love you all and will miss you dearly. I don’t want you to think of this as a goodbye, but more of a “see you later.” I am sure our paths will cross again in the future.

Blessings,

Aidan

Pastor Dave

After several years serving in various roles in our Ministry with Young People, Aidan Mitchell, IUCC’s Youth Coordinator, has resigned, effective September 6. This fall, she enters a stage of her education where school must be her top priority. She just won’t have enough time for the work she was doing with us.

Especially in a community like IUCC, Aidan’s focus on her schooling is something we understand and respect and, certainly, we wish her well.

David Perez, Director of Ministries with Young People, along with lay leaders Lauren Louie and Shanthi Nataraj will assure the continuity of our youth ministry.

Aidan’s ministry with IUCC has been a blessing. The good she has done and her own growth through the years are cause for gratitude and rejoicing. And even as she leaves her staff role, Aidan continues as a member of this church, where she is beloved.

Please see, at right, her letter to the congregation.
How quickly the days fly, even in relative isolation! Fortunately, there’s a lot to keep us busy and involved, even at IUCC-virtual. Since everything happens online, you can participate no matter where you are!

Ken Wyant keeps Tuesday afternoons lively as he leads us through the stories of David from 1 & 2 Samuel (and a bit of 1 Kings). You can join him at 4:00 p.m. each week.

I’m providing an overview of the narrative running through the Hebrew scriptures, with an occasional digression into deep exegetical waters. We’ve covered Genesis and most of Exodus since May! Join us at 6:30 p.m. every Wednesday.

August features three Saturday-Morning Forums. Many thanks to Sofia Portillo for leading the first one on Factory Farming, based on her summer internship with an advocacy group. Our young people restore hope that the future is in good hands! Thanks also to the Green Faith Committee for sponsoring this event.

On August 15, William Rogers, community and business leader and Lesli Mitchell’s brother, will share his experiences living at the intersection of racism and homophobia. Join the Diversity & Inclusion Task Force for this important conversation at 10:00 a.m.

And on August 29, renowned author and pastor John Pavlovitz will finally be with us – on Zoom, of course – for “When the World Is Upside-Down (or Blessed Are the Damn-Givers)” at 10:00 am.

Postponed in March because of the growing pandemic, this is a Don’t-Miss Event! An updated edition of his first book, A Bigger Table, will be used by Comma Groups this fall. Please register for this event in advance, which you can do at www.iucc.org/register.

And we have new options for women's book groups, now forming for September! Check out the details on Page 9 and sign up at www.iucc.org/new-womens-fellowship-book-groups-forming.

And late this month we’ll start sign-ups for Comma Groups. What a great way to stay in touch and support each other while staying appropriately distant (physically)! We’d be glad to have volunteer leaders who are comfortable with Zoom!

John Pavlovitz’s updated A Bigger Table will be available for purchase in October, and many online sites allow you to pre-order a copy. If you use Amazon Smile – of course you do! – IUCC receives a contribution from each purchase.
Hi everyone,

Pastor Sarah let me know how much she appreciated the invitations to participate in our recent finance committee discussions and our Leadership Retreat – it helped her get a better idea of what our financial situation is as well as what all our ministries are doing. She is excited about starting work with us in mid-September, and she knows we are excited about working with her too.

She was generous and gracious enough to participate in these activities, and it was great to have her “at the table” for these important discussions. However, in our eagerness, we may have gotten a little ahead of ourselves by asking her to attend even more meetings. That presents a problem. She has asked if we could possibly give her a little breathing room for now and push “pause” on any further interactions until she officially comes on board with us in mid-September.

We need to be mindful that she’s still the pastor at Fairview Community Church, and they are her congregation right now. As she explained to me, “I need to be present to Fairview and work for them and be the best pastor I can be during this transition so I can be the best pastor I can be for IUCC.” Of course, she is also balancing the needs of her two small children who are at home during the pandemic, and that presents its own unique set of challenges right now.

So, while she’s very thankful that we want to get right to work and she’s eager to begin too, she needs to wait on that until she’s officially on board at IUCC. It’s the fair and right thing to do for all concerned, and I’m sure you agree that we need to provide her with this space. It’s important for us to respect this reasonable and healthy boundary she is setting and wait as patiently as we can to allow her to complete her current obligations before changing her focus to us.

What we can do in the meantime is to provide you with an “in house” email for you to use with any questions or concerns you’d like directed to her: PastorSarah@iucc.org. Consider it a “parking lot” of sorts to communicate your thoughts and ideas to her so as not to lose momentum. She has promised to check it from time to time during this “in between” time and respond briefly if indicated. But please honor her request until she starts in mid-September. Thank you for your understanding!

Tricia Aynes,
Moderator
There are a lot of good things happening at IUCC! We’ve called a wonderful new pastor, and she’s signed the Call Agreement. I’m so thrilled and excited that Pastor Sarah Halverson-Cano will join our staff in mid-September! She’s sure to bring a lot of vitality and energy to IUCC.

Our first-ever Leadership Retreat via Zoom was information-packed and enlightening. Highlights included: reports from all our ministry chairs; an overview of what reopening the church could look like; a presentation from Pastor Sarah on attracting youth and young families; and a very timely presentation from the leaders of our Diversity & Inclusion Task Force (D & I). Their words were positive and helpful, and they served to open our minds to the ways in which we can address systemic racism in our society.

Our online Sunday worship services via Facebook keep us connected and in touch, enabling us to extend our reach far beyond the walls of our sanctuary. I find it similar to loved ones separated by time and space who look into the night sky and wish upon the same star. I feel that same kind of connection when I see your comments and add mine: we are worshipping together even though we’re apart.

While our live-streaming participants on Facebook average about 75-90 people on Sundays, our virtual services reach an astonishing number of viewers over the ensuing weeks as folks tune in to watch at their convenience. Here are the most recent numbers:

- June 14: 522 views
- June 21: 476 views
- June 28: 800 views
- July 5: 448 views
- July 12: 781 views
- July 19: 670 views
- July 26: 650 views

Isn’t that extraordinary? That means a LOT of people are hearing our message of Progressive Christianity! You’ll note that our June 28 service featuring Pastor Sarah drew the most views of all - 800! That should warm all our hearts and give us hope for the future of our beloved church.

I suspect that a major source of the online services’ popularity is the heart and talent of Chris Peterson, Josh Chandra, and our choral interns. Week after week, they provide us with gorgeous musical interludes that please the ear while feeding the soul. Music is such a blessing.

Our adult education classes on Zoom continue to grow and thrive. Many superb choices await those who seek intellectual stimulation and great conversation: Bible study; Old Testament review; and “The Excellence of Love” (with more topics to come!). We owe a huge debt of thanks to Steve Swope, Ken Wyant, and volunteers from the Adult Programs Ministry for making these classes possible. On August 29, we’ll welcome renowned author John Pavlovitz via Zoom. I’m a big fan of his insightful writing, and I hope you’ll join me in taking advantage of this opportunity to “meet” him. Learn about how to sign up on page 3.

Sign-ups are also underway for new women’s book discussion groups featuring three new books: The Book of Joy, Men Explain Things to Me, and Letter to My Daughter. Discussions will be via Zoom and will start in September. The initial book group started by Marilyn Smith was so popular that it blossomed into more. The groups have filled a vital need for human connection during these uncertain times.

Our D & I Task Force offers a weekly discussion forum on Sunday afternoons via Zoom to share stories of various kinds of discrimination and how we can work to become more inclusive. To participate, look for Zoom ID and pass-word information in our biweekly e-blasts. Stay tuned for future D & I forums that will address specific issues.

Our congregation is blessed with the ability to adapt to change. We’ve embraced technology to create new ways of engaging in social interaction while continuing traditional programs that provide warm and caring support to those in need. We’ve complied with state directives and followed guidelines to keep our members out of harm’s way. We’ve found new ways to retain our sense of loving community in a safe and healthy way.

Thank you for your resilience and your support during these crazy times. Hang in there, my friends. We will continue to find ways to connect in spite of the pandemic.

In hope and optimism,

Tricia
The IUCC Early Childhood Center (ECC) reopened on Monday, July 6, and heading into August we have indicators of success. Here are a few:

**Our teachers are happy to be back with the kids.** Teachers have always said they’re in this line of work for the love and pleasure of the children – and sure enough, they returned to work and are feeling rewarded.

**Our children are happy to be back, as well.** The modified daily routines that the COVID-19 has required are happily now part of kids’ routines. Washing hands, taking temperatures, and even many two year olds want to wear masks! Hey, they say, *if everybody around here is wearing a mask, I want one too!* So each Monday morning, parents are bringing five disposable masks even for the youngest kids to be sure they are supplied through the week.

**Our parents and our family clients are showing remarkable loyalty and support.** On one hand, we have asked them to refer other families and friends to be our new clients, and they have been doing that. On the other hand, a number of families have donated funds to our ECC! Here is how that has worked:

Back in mid-March when we closed the ECC, parents whose children would be off to kindergarten in Fall 2020 had already paid a full month’s tuition. So the IUCC Child Care Center Committee and the IUCC Administration Board agreed to repay those dollars. But in our letter, we explained that the new rules for operating the ECC, caused by the pandemic, mean that we will be under real financial stress. This is so apparent and so widespread that the *Los Angeles Times* editorialized about it on July 16. We quoted the *LA Times* and invited parents to donate the half-month’s tuition. If they did so, parents could name their gift for their favorite teacher, and upon receiving their donations, we would send them a photo of the teacher with a special certificate recognizing her and the families’ gifts.

The payoff: 21 families received the letter, and early results are that many are making the donation!

Join me in thinking that the essential good work and reputation of our ECC is richly shown in this. No family, no client, with a “straight business” sensibility would do anything other than take the refund and carry on.

**Other good news.** We serve some children from low-income households in an arrangement with the Children’s Home Society. That agency received a grant to be distributed to child care centers to help defray the extra cleaning supplies that the pandemic has made necessary. We received $4,151 from the Society for that purpose! Learn more about the Society here: https://www.chs-ca.org/about/our-mission

**The overall outlook.** The preschool will not soon be the strong contributor to congregational finances that we anticipated in the January 2020 congregational-approved budget. There is a hole in our congregational budget because of that, and it’s large.

But although losing money in July, our ECC cared for 15 children, and the kids and everybody got used to new routines. August will bring a handful more children, but operating in the red still seems likely. September is when our ECC should make a small profit with the current expectation of serving 30 kids, and perhaps adding a few more, up to our estimated total capacity of 45. We look forward to the day when the ECC can again serve more than sixty children, allowing a resumption of strong support from a robust child care center for IUCC’s mission.

There were smiles all around (even if they were hidden by masks)!
Let’s get together on social media!
Did you know? You can check for updates on our website (www.iucc.org) and look for pictures and videos on our Facebook page and on Instagram!

Diversity & Inclusion Task Force
The Diversity & Inclusion Task Force hosts Zoom meetings nearly 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.

In spite of us not being together on Sunday mornings, Mission & Service Ministry wishes to thank you for your contributions to the bin collection during July to support the food drive for Families Forward. Over four large bins have been collected, so we now wish to extend this through early August.

Food donations are needed now more than ever. Families without housing are particularly at-risk during the COVID-19 outbreak. Let’s continue to help fill their shelves with the basic necessities.

The collection bins will be on the patio Monday – Thursday from 9:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. If you drive by on a different day or time, just leave your bag at the sanctuary door and it will be put in the bin. All collections will then be delivered to Families Forward as the bins get full.

**Most Needed Food Pantry Items:**

- Cereal
- Peanut Butter
- Canned Beans
- Pasta Sauce & Dried Pasta
- Canned Fruits & Vegetables
- Canned Chicken & Canned Tuna
- Canned & Dried Soup
- Diapers (Size 1, 2 & 3)
- Baby Wipes
- Gloves, Masks & Disinfecting Cleaning Supplies

Thank you - Mission & Service Ministry
Family Promise Update

Family Promise's Emergency Shelter Program continues to remain suspended until probably 2021. Obviously, IUCC will not be hosting in September. All families in the program prior to the pandemic were eventually safely housed at FP Transitional Housing in Fullerton. Even in the middle of a global health crisis, there is good news!

Two of the families in Transitional Housing will graduate to their own housing in the next few weeks! Amazingly, these families have found a way to not only survive, but thrive, during the pandemic. You may wish to help them furnish their new homes by checking out their Housewarming Wish Lists here: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gLzYM9Sz9-WOxgBhhQcpE41bGwL5dMtuF4HbrdZwg/edit

Up to three new families who qualify will be able to move into the Transitional Housing program soon.

Family Promise also continues to support on a weekly or bi-weekly basis ten graduate families with USDA produce, meat donations, and paper goods/household supplies. If you would like to donate gas or grocery gift cards, paper goods or other supplies, contact Malia at Malia@familypromiseoc.org.

Family Promise staff are most grateful for the support they have had from their host congregations and the community. “Donors, volunteers, and friends have come together, and we have seen great kindness as we navigate the unique challenges this pandemic has presented. We look forward to our host congregations reopening their doors and once again being able to welcome families into their care. Until then, we hold steadfast in our commitment to helping the families in our program in any way we can!”

Staff is also working on preparations for the Family Promise Annual Gala, which has gone VIRTUAL this year! Read all about it at right!

Exciting Things are on the Horizon!

Annual Gala Details

Registration is NOW OPEN for our first ever Virtual Gala Event:

**Boots and Bling Virtual Fling!**

Join us for our Silent Auction and Live Stream Event!

**Live Stream Event on YouTube Live - August 22nd @ 6:30 p.m.**

with Entertainment, Raffle Prizes, Fun Trivia, and more surprises!

Silent Auction Opens - **August 17th @ 4:00 p.m.**
Silent Auction Closes - **August 22nd @ 4:00 p.m.**

REGISTER NOW to be entered into our Early Bird Raffle Drawing!

Early Bird Registration cutoff is Saturday, August 22nd @ 4:30 p.m.

Registration is FREE!

**TO REGISTER NOW, CLICK HERE:**
https://events.handbid.com/auctions/family-promise-of-orange-county-boots-bling-2020/registration
Inviting all women! New books, new groups, new discussions! Join the fun!

Sign-ups begin August 1 for new women’s book discussion groups, featuring three new titles to choose from.

The 10-week session will begin in September via ZOOM. All women are invited to join—there will be ample room for all. Come and join the fun with great discussions among new and old women friends, near and far.

Three different time slots are being offered. Once groups form, each group will choose from among three books.

Go to https://www.iucc.org/new-womens-fellowship-book-groups-forming/ for contact information and a more complete explanation.

“A person who never made a mistake never tried anything new.” – Albert Einstein

The Orange County Board of Supervisors controls an almost $1 billion discretionary budget funded by our tax dollars. The People's Budget OC is a new movement fueled by the people of Orange County to seek a county budget that prioritizes healthy, safe communities over law enforcement and jails.

The People's Budget OC is a grassroots group of people: Pat Davis, the head of the organization Housing Is a Human Right OC, as well as some from Transforming Justice OC and a housing advocate from the local ACLU. You can help create a truly participatory People’s Budget OC by completing this survey by August 5: https://forms.gle/XkbECs-WRt9uF1JFR7

Do the Supervisors’ budget decisions reflect YOUR priorities for the community YOU want to live in?

- Over the last 10 years, their funding for “public protection,” including law enforcement, jails and the court system, has more than doubled, even though crime rates are relatively low. It now represents more than half of the discretionary budget (56%).

- Although rents are spiraling out of control and homelessness continues to climb, last year (FY 2019/20) the Supervisors only committed $5 million (less than one-half of one percent of the discretionary budget) to affordable housing and supportive housing.

- Last year, the Supervisors spent $198 million on the Sheriff’s Department, and only $81 million on physical and mental care and public health, $50 million on social services, and $5 million on permanent supportive housing.

You are invited to help them get a cross-section of opinions by filling it out and forwarding it to those you think might be interested. (We ask that you not share on social media at this time.) The group will be building a People’s Budget based on the results. To learn more, you can check out the People’s Budget OC website at https://peoplesbudgetoc.org/about-us/. If you would like to help or if you have questions, please call Pat Davis at 714-749-2244.

-Submitted by Felicity Figueroa

Note: This information is provided as a matter of interest to our members and is not endorsed by IUCC
Even though our Scouts are unable to meet face to face because of the COVID-19 pandemic, our
sponsored Scout units at IUCCh Cub Scout Pack 697 and Scouts BSA Troop 602, are still holding vir-
tual meetings and doing a lot of fun virtual Scouting activities. This means that you can still sign up
your child for Scouting. As an extension of the Open and Affirming values of IUCCh, Pack 697 and
Troop 602 are both inclusive units and welcome all youth and families without regard to race, ethnic-
ity, gender/gender identity, and sexual orientation. We accept female youth in both of our units!

It is very easy to register your child for Pack 697 and/or Troop 602 online. Just go to Be A Scout web-
site and follow these easy instructions.

1. Go to the Be A Scout web site (https://beascout.scouting.org/)
2. Enter the Zip Code 92604
3. Select either Cub Scouts (ages 5-10) or Scouts BSA (ages 11-17) and choose the Every Unit option
4. For Cub Scout Pack 697, choose Pack 0697 Irvine United Congregation Church.
   For Scouts BSA Troop 602, choose Troop 0602 Irvine United Congregation Church
5. Click Apply Now
6. Click on the option for Youth
7. Fill out your child’s information
8. Review your information
9. Pay your fees and receive payment confirmation

That’s it! Simple, easy, and contact free.

We always need adult volunteers for our units. Please be sure to register as an adult leader when you register your child.
All adult leaders and parent volunteers will be subject to a background check by BSA National and the Orange County
Council and are required to take Youth Protection Training online before they are authorized to be a leader or a volunteer.

If you have any trouble registering your child for Scouting on the Be A Scout web site or want more information about our
sponsored Scout units at IUCCh, you can send your questions to the following leaders:

**Cub Scout Pack 697 (ages 5-10)**
Pack 697 Cubmaster Paul Main paultmain@gmail.com
Pack 697 Committee Chair Dominic Ambrosio gtowndom@gmail.com

**Scouts BSA Troop 602**
Troop 602 Scoutmaster Keith Bauer marykeith1@aol.com
Troop 602 Committee Chair Jeri Carey jeri_mms@dslextreme.com

Troop 602 and Pack 697 Chartered Organization Representative Matt Mirmak
irvinetroop602@gmail.com

We look forward to having your child be a part of Scouting in 2020-21!

Yours in Scouting,

Matt Mirmak
Chartered Organization Representative, Troop 602 and Pack 697
A few days ago I was talking with colleagues in Australia and became once again startled as I wrapped my mind around the concept of a “global pandemic.” As a Psychologist, I have always been both aware of and fascinated by “human nature” and how “humanity” is something we share with all other humans anywhere in the world. But these days we share not only the common traits of humanness, but a common, shared experience, unusual in human history. Together we are battling an invisible, but deadly, threat to both our very lives and our overall sense of well-being. Reading about the impact of the virus in countries throughout the world, communicating with people we know who live many thousands of miles away but who ask the same kinds of questions about us that our neighbors and families do, is fascinating to me. They don't kid when they say “We're all in this together.”

Since my conversation with the Australians was about children, I once again confronted, in a more jarring way, that children there are like children everywhere. Another dramatic reality with regard to our current situation is something we’ve been talking about together – the impact of maturity and lack of maturity has not only been on global health but on global death, in every country in the world. I believe I am stating one of the few common scientific “truths” of the pandemic by quoting almost all scientists who point to the “curves,” “flattening of curves,” “spikes,” etc. and marry these to human behavior in the face of the virus.

In last month’s column I mentioned the many indicators that are revealing the “spiking” of stress symptoms in both adults and children. This stress expresses itself as anger in some, as fear in others, and in tendencies toward escapism or magical thinking – common when stress becomes overwhelming. I went to have my teeth cleaned recently and for the first time in my life was asked about whether I ground or clenched my teeth, and was examined by the actual dentist for TMJ symptoms.

My recent phone consultation brought up something I mentioned last month – the difficulty people of all ages have when they are told to do something they don't want to do. Under more ordinary circumstances, this is only “deadly” when someone drives at 100 mph without a seatbelt while intoxicated. These days, however, it can be deadly because we don't want to distance ourselves from our friends, or wear a mask that makes our face hot, or avoid singing, or refrain from hugging people we love, or miss out on having someone else cook for us and serve us.

One of the people on the phone call had a two-year-old at home. Another was working with teenagers. All of us have observed grown-ups acting like two-year-olds and teenagers.

I’ve been urging you in every column since this health crisis started to use this time to be the “commentator” while watching the news with your kids. So many wonderful, in-your-face, real examples of life “lessons” we try to teach our kids are right there for the exploiting. We’ll pick up on our general “tips” for helping kids handle stress next time, I promise. But having arrived at international consensus over the “Zoom” that banging our drums about limits, boundaries, and why we have them is urgent since the consequences of not observing them are so obvious now, I wanted to share.

Our Zoom consultation was prompted by the wording of one of the chapters in my book, written well before the current crisis. The chapter heading is “Beautiful Boundaries, Safe Structure, and Loving Limits: Giving Kids What They Deserve.” It was agreed that now is a lovely time to reinforce with our young people that we impose limits not on them, but for them. If you touch the stove you’ll burn yourself; if you pull the dog’s ear he may bite you; if you chase your ball into the street you may get hit by a car. The truth is, we are the ‘boss of you!’ The only kids who can do whatever they want whenever they want are kids who aren't loved.

Yes, it’s challenging to give instructions that someone doesn’t want to follow. But to quote our recently lost and beloved John Lewis, “It’s good trouble; necessary trouble.” Never apologize for setting limits on behavior. It may not feel like love now, but it will later, when they’ve learned how cooperating makes life easier. And safer. They’ll thank you later.
Some days my spirits fall flat. Do you know what I mean? It’s like my emotions have no highs or lows; I’m just prairie-like flat. It isn’t an appealing state, not to myself nor to those around me. Who appreciates a flat tire, or the flat notes of a singer? (I will admit, however, that I do admire a flat stomach.)

I think my blah feelings can be attributed to COVID-19 and the resulting need for isolation. The virus has thrown us for a loop, partly because of the uncertainty surrounding it. A host of questions are raised: When will all this be over? How can we help those who are suffering? And, what is the “new normal” we hear about?

Though I’m a person who enjoys time alone, this isolation is a bit much! I miss your smiles because they’re hidden behind masks. I miss your touch because we must stay a distance from each other. I miss comforting a friend with a gentle hug or kiss. Most of all, I miss my children and grandchildren. Yes, Zoom is a substitute. But, that’s it - it’s just an unsatisfying substitute.

At times like this, have you noticed how little things become important? If my favorite TV program is cancelled due to a holiday extravaganza or some breaking news, I’m in the dumps. If my favorite crossword puzzle is missing from the stack on the entrance table of our main building, you may hear me yell, “Help! Call 911.” Hey, that puzzle is important to me.

---

“Get out the yeast,” Mama said. “I’m going to make bread.” These words were music to my ears because I loved Mama’s large loaves of warm, aromatic, tasty bread. She needed yeast, a leaven that keeps bread from falling flat. We Scandinavians (and other cultures) have bread called flatbread that is made without yeast. I liked flatbread, but my favorite bread was Mama’s yeast bread.

Maybe yeast is needed when we feel flat. What might serve as yeast? I suppose it differs from person to person. Recently, I found that a yeast for me was birthed out of necessity. Because of the need for isolation, I couldn’t shop for greeting cards, so I turned to making cards. Rather than being a chore, that creative process was yeast to my psyche – it made me feel good. Another was a challenge that friend and resident Jan Wilson put to us: Make something out of the food containers we receive each day - a puppet, a collage, a flower, whatever. My creativity hummed, resulting in a self-portrait sculpture of George and me. Even though the result was amateurish, it was fun.

I never would have thought that moments of silence could be yeast. After the horrific death of George Floyd on May 25th, several residents and team members of our facility stood for five minutes of silence by the entrance fountain. We did so in solidarity with those who suffer injustice, especially focusing on our African-American brothers and sisters that day. During the silence I found myself in tears, crying over injustice, crying with joy over the folks around me, some with walkers or leaning on their spouse’s shoulder, yet standing in silence for humane treatment for all. That five minutes of silence served as yeast, reminding me that even with age and its problems, even with the isolation of COVID-19, we don’t need to focus on ourselves. Caring for others, getting beyond ourselves, can be a tremendous dose of yeast.

Turning the mundane into a celebration may be yeast: Margaritas and candlelight, sharing a joke, a vase of blossoms, tending plants, a gift of food to a neighbor. Something pleasant, a yeast, lightens the mundane.

How about you? Are you flat as a pancake? Or, full of yeast like a puffy loaf of Mama’s homemade bread?
Inside the Chrysalis

by Tricia Aynes

My older daughter Alia raises monarch butterflies. That's her in the photo, surrounded by them. She collects tiny monarch eggs on the milkweed plants growing in her yard, then places the leaves in mesh enclosures alongside her house where they get filtered morning sun. When the eggs hatch, they emerge as caterpillars (actually butterfly larva), and she provides milkweed from her garden for them to eat. She has to keep them well supplied with daily milkweed, because they eat quite voraciously.

When a caterpillar is hatched, it's quite tiny. Its one job at this point is to eat and grow, and it grows very fast. It sheds its skin 4-5 times, and it can increase in size from a pinhead to two inches in only a couple of weeks. Once it finishes growing and has reached full size, it forms itself into a chrysalis. This is where the magic happens. Inside the chrysalis, a dramatic transformation called “metamorphosis” takes place. During this delicate, complex process, the caterpillar literally disintegrates into a soupy mixture that is used to form the wings, antennae, and eyes of a beautiful and fragile adult butterfly.

When the butterfly emerges from the chrysalis, it needs a little time to rest while its wings dry and gain strength. Within a few hours the wings are strong enough to carry it aloft, and within a day its wings harden and strengthen, allowing it to face the world and to start the process all over again. (NOTE: While technically the butterfly can fly, it is unsafe to release it within hours because the wings are not full hardened. It takes a full 24 hours of sheltering for it to be strong enough to elude predators. While many folks release the butterfly when it can fly, this is not best practice. In the wild, the butterfly would stay in a safe location before attempting open flight.)

The caterpillar’s metamorphosis into a butterfly is one of God’s great marvels. We are captivated by the furry, earthbound insect’s ability to change its entire structure and emerge as a glorious, winged creature that can bob and float in the currents of the wind.

My daughter tells me that butterfly raising is very popular right now. I suspect that’s because their ability to transform is the ideal metaphor for our current situation. Butterflies are a powerful symbol of self-transformation and rebirth.

It’s comforting to dream about a magical rebirth during these scary and uncertain times. Many people are out of work, while others are forced by economic need to toil in jobs that leave them vulnerable to infection. People of color and the elderly are disproportionately impacted. Folks are isolated, scared, and terrified of getting sick. A vaccine is months away and may be only temporarily effective. There’s no end in sight. It’s bringing out the crazy in everybody!

I know I’m one of the fortunate ones - I have a roof over my head and enough food to eat. I am grateful. But I miss the daily interactions with other people: the smiles and hugs. I feel stuck in my home, waiting until it’s safe to come out again. Maybe you feel the same. But what to do?

Perhaps this time of waiting could be used to gain new insights into what God meant us to be. Like the chrysalis, we could take an inner journey of renewal and transformation. We could consider how to stretch our boundaries and allow change to happen by evolving into more spiritually centered and mindful human beings.

One of my favorite comic strips “Pearls Before Swine” quotes Pig (a not-too-bright but always optimistic character) as saying to his friends, “I’ve been given six months to a year to focus on myself and what’s important to me, all while spending more time with my loved ones.” His friend Rat replies, “The guy even sees the bright side of a pandemic.”

Is there a bright side to it? I’ve done a quick poll of my family members to see what they think. Elder daughter Alia is curious about a lot of things, and she loves to research and contemplate. She lets me know when I’m being tone deaf. She warns me, “Mom, whatever you do, don’t tell people they need to be productive during this time. They have a lot of worries. They shouldn’t feel like they have to be accomplishing something. Some people are struggling to make it through the day, and that struggle is valid. This is no time to expect people to have ideal mental health.”

Younger daughter Mira has devoted herself to becoming a creative and innovative teacher to her 4 year old son, for whom she's created an elaborate “mommy school” currently focused on the solar system. She's combed the internet for ideas and created a wonderfully realistic and interactive space station with mission control board, planets, and stars. She says, “We’re in survival mode, just trying to get through...”
Wrestling with the concept of God’s existence or non-existence is something that cannot be fully and completely addressed in a short article. My hope in writing this article is to cause the reader to contemplate how they wrestle with understanding the nature of God’s existence or non-existence. God’s existence or non-existence, in my view, cannot be established conclusively. Theists as well as atheists, and to some degree agnostics, face the same challenge. The scientific method is not appropriate for investigating the existence or non-existence of God. The scientific method is grounded on repeatability, refutability, and confirmability leading to statistical hypothetical conclusions concerning truth under assumptions of contradictory evidence. This method fails when investigating *sui generis* events such as the mystery of the Resurrection. This mystery can be viewed metaphorically or as an actual event. On my spiritual journey of discernment, I often find myself wrestling with God. In wrestling with God’s existence or non-existence, I found mathematics to be helpful in dealing with an inconclusive dilemma—the existence or non-existence of God. The scientific method is grounded on repeatability, refutability, and confirmability leading to statistical hypothetical conclusions concerning truth under assumptions of contradictory evidence. This method fails when investigating *sui generis* events such as the mystery of the Resurrection. This mystery can be viewed metaphorically or as an actual event. On my spiritual journey of discernment, I often find myself wrestling with God. In wrestling with God’s existence or non-existence, I found mathematics to be helpful in dealing with an inconclusive dilemma—the existence or non-existence of God. The scientific method is grounded on repeatability, refutability, and confirmability leading to statistical hypothetical conclusions concerning truth under assumptions of contradictory evidence. This method fails when investigating *sui generis* events such as the mystery of the Resurrection. This mystery can be viewed metaphorically or as an actual event. On my spiritual journey of discernment, I often find myself wrestling with God.

In wrestling with God’s existence or non-existence, I found mathematics to be helpful in dealing with an inconclusive dilemma—the existence or non-existence of God. Being in discernment has led me to ask “Who is God?” This question has allowed me to consider that Mother Nature can provide some evidence that perhaps the Creator is a mathematician and mathematics is the language that reveals its deepest secrets. Newton’s Second Law of motion \( F = ma \) gave us the mechanical age, while Einstein’s mass and energy equivalence gave us the atomic age. Through these equations, Mother Nature gave humankind the power to harness her energy for God’s purposes. Renowned Physicist Michio Kaku postulates that one day mathematicians and physicists will find an equation that will explain all of nature. Kaku argues that such a single super equation would explain all of nature, from the behavior of subatomic particles to black holes and galaxies.

We are all familiar with the mathematical concepts used in physics and in the sciences. This familiarity could lead to contemplation of the complexities of simple things such as a flower, a fern, a sea shell or a perfect wave in the ocean. Does Mother Nature reveal her creative nature through mathematics? I believe she does. For example, the equation \( Z_{n+1} = Z_n^2 + C \) formulated by the Polish mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot provided a description of order behind the chaos of complexity driven by simplicity. I am still wrestling with God. In dealing with this reality I had to—literally—converge to a point of being comfortably uncomfortable in accepting that the mind of God is revealed through the harmonious symbolism of mathematics. Mathematicians and physicists give expression to what they find in their minds through the precise language of mathematics. Physicists reveal to us how intricate, precise and beautiful Mother Nature is through the language of mathematics. As I contemplate creation, I have concluded that God—for me—is a mathematician. I hope that my declaration about who I believe God is will lead the reader to begin to also wrestle with God and ask: Who is God?

The beauty and power of mathematical truths have impressed and astounded humankind since they were first discovered. At one point, mathematics was almost revered as supreme truth until a mathematician stumbled upon a proof that pointed even higher. Ever since Adam and Eve rejected God’s authority, humankind has searched for a source of ultimate truth. This quest—to replace God with another truth—has taken many twists over the millennia. But one of the most fascinating has been the effort to replace God with “pure reason,” or logic. In my wrestling with God, I have found some comfort in the words “so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom but on the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:5, NRSV).

World renowned mathematician David Hilbert (1862-1943) claimed that mathematics is self-dependent. This declaration has allowed me to wrestle with God and to understand who God is through the language of mathematics. My view of God does not need to refer to any authority outside itself in order to prove any of its truth claims. Given that mathematics is self contained and not dependent on any outside authority provides me with a platform to begin contemplating the meaning of my struggle to wrestle with God as I accept my feelings of being comfortably uncomfortable. Another world renowned mathematician, Kurt Gödel (1906–1978) proved that no
it, stay healthy, and keep a good mental outlook. There's a lot of negative stimuli out there online and in the media. I keep my child entertained during quarantine, and I have fun where I can." Who knows? Perhaps the adult Blake will look back on these months as a special time of closeness and exploration with his mom. I'd like to think so.

If you're feeling afraid, stressed, and restless, you're not alone. I think everyone's nerves are frayed, and our patience is wearing thin. We want this pandemic to be over yesterday. We're coping as best we can, trying to adjust to this "new normal" that is anything but. We're bubbling and stewing away in the soupy mixture inside the chrysalis, and we'd really like to burst out.

There are odd new pressures on each of us to justify our socializing limits to others who may feel differently. We face challenges in navigating the wide range of COVID-related interactions that family and friends find acceptable. Some of us stay quarantined in our homes except for the occasional walk, while others are comfortable having semi-distanced social gatherings with (or without) masks in place. Some family members and friends are more willing to take risks, and it means we've had to set boundaries that result in hurt feelings. It's all new territory, and it's enough to make us all a little nuts.

Underlying personality traits are coming to the forefront, especially traits involving control. We like to think we're in control of things, and we don't like living in the limbo of the chrysalis. Because we feel powerless, we've gotten a bit obsessed with trying to impose control over small things in our environment. We've tried to create a sense of order where there's precious little "order" to be had. In the end, the only thing we can control is our own attitude. Perhaps our time in the chrysalis is an opportunity for a little attitude adjustment.

When we finally emerge from our chrysalis, what will the world look like? We know everything will be different. We'll be different, too. I hope we're different in a good way. I hope we've learned from this time of transformation to treat each other with a little more empathy and compassion. I hope we'll be more forgiving and understanding. I hope we'll show one another a little more grace.

I long for the day when we can emerge from this time of self isolation, unfold our metaphorical "wings," and fly to our beautiful sanctuary where we can see each other face-to-face and hug each other again. Until then, let's try to make the most of these strange, murky days inside the chrysalis.

---

"The Chrysalis" article continued from page 13

"Wrestling" article continued from page 14

logical systems can have all the following properties.

1. Validity . . . all conclusions are reached by valid reasoning.
2. Consistency . . . no conclusions contradict any other conclusions
3. Completeness . . . all statements made in the system are either true or false.

He concluded that “anything you can draw a circle around cannot explain itself without referring to something outside the circle—something you have to assume but cannot prove.” Gödel's assertion and proof is known as the Incompleteness Theorem.

As an ONA Christian, I am not surprised with the Incompleteness Theorem as it relates to the existence or non-existence of God. Only God fulfills the third condition of incompleteness. Only God is complete and self-dependent or autonomous. In my view, God is "all in all" (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:28), "the beginning and the end" (cf. Revelation 22:13), and the ultimate authority (cf. Hebrews 6:13), and in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (cf. Colossians 2:3).

There will always be statements and claims in any system that can't be shown to be conclusively true or conclusively false. From a Christian perspective, Gödel proved that complete knowledge is unattainable. There will always be a question to confound the greatest minds; there will always be an unsolvable problem.

My philosophy of Christianity in its link to mathematics begins with God, who numbered the days of creation as recorded in Genesis 1. The founder of the true philosophy of mathematics—as a function of my discernment journey of contemplating the existence or non-existence of God—is Jesus Christ, the source of mathematics is the Bible, and the purpose of mathematics, in my opinion, is the glory of God: The source of creation. “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11, NRSV). How do you wrestle with the existence or non-existence of God? Who is God for you?
You may be aware that Eduardo Jesús Arismendi-Pardi and I are teaching a Sunday School series on the subject of Love. So this month, as an appendix to those classes, I offer this list of films that illustrate aspects of love we will be talking about in our classes.

1) **Agape, or love of Humankind**: *The Kid* (Charlie Chaplin-1921) – The Tramp parents a boy he finds on the streets from diapers to small childhood.

2) **Agape, or love of Humankind**: *City Lights* (Charlie Chaplin-1931) – The Tramp secretly raises money to help a blind girl regain her sight.

3) **Eros, or Romantic Love**: *Love in the Afternoon* (Eric Rohmer-1972) – Even after developing a love for another woman, a married lawyer chooses to be faithful, both physically and emotionally, to his wife. The last of Rohmer’s Six Moral Tales.

4) **Familial Love**: *Sansho the Bailiff* (Kenji Mizoguchi-1954) – An allegory about how the love between a brother and sister can overcome great evils, like slavery.

5) **Familial Love**: *Paris, Texas* (Wim Wenders-1984) – A father puts the happiness of his long-lost son over his own.

6) **Faithfulness**: *Chico and Rita* (Tono Errando & Javier Mariscal-2010) – An animated tale about young lovers who maintain their love, despite bad early choices. Not for the kids.


8) **Sophia, or Love of Wisdom**: *Diary of a Country Priest* (Robert Bresson-1951) – A young priest strives to serve his parish despite his own ill health and misunderstandings between himself and the people of that parish.


10) **Lust**: *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne-1987) - A horror story set amidst the AIDS epidemic. A reminder that one-night stands can lead to disasters of many kinds.

11) **Jealousy**: *La Bete Humaine* (Jean Renoir-1938) – Renoir’s take on Balzac’s novel of the same name. A parable about insane jealousy and the destruction it can give rise to.

12) **Jealousy**: *Human Desire* (Fritz Lang-1954) - Fritz Lang reworks Balzac and Renoir for an American audience.

13) **Greed**: *It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* (Stanley Kramer-1963) – Sure, I could’ve come up with something a little more serious, but we all need a good laugh these days.

14) **Megalomania, or the Lust for Power**: *General Idi Amin: A Self-Portrait* (Barbet Schroeder-1974) - A documentary about the daily life of Ugandan dictator Idi Amin.

15) **Indifference**: *Brubaker* (Stuart Rosenberg-1980) - A young warden strives to change the harsh conditions in a Louisiana prison despite the indifference of the state prison board.


17) “To love another suggests that we should seek to understand”: in other words, you can’t judge a book by its cover: *Moonlight* (Barry Jenkins-2016) - An O.G. in Miami mentors a young gay man, helping him to survive the mean streets of Florida.
“God is always bigger than the boxes we build for God, so we should not waste too much time protecting the boxes.”

– Richard Rohr

How do you imagine God? What is most important to you about God and your relationship with God? Is God of a human form and if so, is God male or female? Or is God more of a presence to you? Have you ever been frightened of God? Why and what changed? What is the character of God like for you? Marcus Borg talks about this in his book, “The Heart of Christianity” and asks a series of questions along with: “What is your God most basically like?”

Having been a Spiritual Director in private practice for many years, I don’t bring on new clients very often. I have a core of about a dozen and many of them have been with me for several years. Recently I had an opening for someone in need of deepening their God relationship, and it didn’t take long before someone came knocking. After an initial conversation we agreed to begin to meet for an hour once a month to explore that relationship.

The first few sessions are usually filled with a lot of conversation about these very questions. How has your image of God changed and developed over your lifetime? What is your first remembrance of God? How old were you? Where were you? I feel until we can answer these questions and sit with the discovery of their relevance, we can’t really begin to develop a deeper relationship with God. I mean honestly, who do you pray to and what does that mean for you? Shouldn’t we want to know and understand, even if not fully, who God is to us (individually) today?

Isn’t that imagery important in sustaining faith? Does how you imagine God personally matter in the very idea of your relationship with God? There are no wrong answers here; we each have our own personal definition and understanding of God; whether we share it with others or not.

Most of my feedback is reflective of what I am hearing. My call is to sit in the third chair and to listen and invite my clients to dig deeper and tell their stories as they begin to reveal themselves and invite them to see where God is present. While I encourage quiet and sitting with these questions in silence with God for a time, I also realize that for some clients it is seriously the first time someone has sat with them in this sacred space we work to provide and asked these questions and given them the time to explore the answers without judgement. It is fascinating and humbling to witness the process. Sometimes I realize that I have forgotten the serendipity of these discoveries.

As we continue to be alone “together” during the COVID-19 crisis, I wonder how people are doing without the physical ability to be at church and how that has affected your own spirituality? I want to encourage you to consider what you are doing to nurture your relationship with God. How are you and God getting along right now? Do you have a spiritual practice that brings you comfort and closer to God? What does that look like? How do you imagine God?