John Pavlovitz enthralled IUCC listeners in a riveting and powerful 90 minute Zoom program on August 29th that stressed the importance of faith, morality, and conscience in today’s world. The well-known writer of blogs and essays proved to be a compelling speaker as he addressed the challenges of being an activist in today’s complicated world.

Pavlovitz began by saying he was surprised to hear that the causes he believes in and advocates for are dismissed as “radical left” by some. He prefers to think of himself as the “humane middle.” “It’s a sign of how upside-down we are that compassion, equity, and justice have become adversarial positions for some people,” he said. “Some people have embraced all or nothing extremes to hold onto power and leverage fear. How have so many been pulled into something so anti-faith and anti-humanity?”

He spoke of his evolving sense of empathy. “Because I was born with a privileged ‘bundle’ of the right skin color, gender, and faith, it shielded me from many forms of suffering and injustice. Even though I was a beneficiary of inequity at times, I was taught growing up that if I followed the rules and obeyed the laws, I’d be fine. I told myself that there was equity in the world. I held on tight to that because I needed that story to be true. ‘This often happens when you benefit from a system. That’s where undiscovered privilege comes into play.’

Pavlovitz pointed out that few entities are more powerful agents of inequity than the church. “Unacknowledged privilege is how good people and churches get morally upside-down. It’s a separator – a fracture-making thing. We’ve gotten to the point where decency is considered radical.”

He sees himself as a “collector of stories – a war correspondent.” When he’s asked to speak, he likes to ask others what’s happening in their lives. “They tell me their stories and I listen to their anger. My writing is a report from the road – telling those war stories. Their words bring turbulence because things are upside-down. There’s a pattern to what marginalized and vulnerable people share with me. They show me how our faith and morality should propel us to act in this world.”

“The divide isn’t what we think it is,” he continued. “It’s a vision divide – how we see the world, how we see other people, how we see our role in the world. There’s a group of people who lack empathy – they live with a closed fist. Some live with a sense of lack, while others live with a sense of abundance. Some see that we are all interdependent, while others want America first. Some people are motivated by faith in love, while others are based in fear. If we aspire to be people of compassion, how do we express that? I think it’s in the small places – what we do individually. Our obligation is to step into the world and give people a better story – be stewards of the humane. As people of faith, loving the least of us is not a radical position. If that’s a problem for people, their world is upside-down.”

He addressed the concept of anger, saying “Anger gets a bad rap these days. Jesus warned us against it – this toxic thing. Anybody can become angry – that’s easy. But to become angry to the right degree, at the right time, for the right reason, towards the right person – all of it can be turned into something that transforms humanity. It can be a sacred alarm that tells us when something is not right. Sometimes anger is perfectly aligned to the situation …. We can be fueled by ferocity – the anger of good people.”

The “humane middle” is a concept Pavlovitz embraces, and its hallmark is what he describes as “an intolerance to injustice.” “We have to free people from the boxes they’re trapped in. It’s not about convincing people – it’s more about showing them an alternative …. I can’t preach
It has been my great pleasure to serve as your interim pastor since June 2019. I feel satisfaction in the challenges you have leaned into as a community, and how you have learned and grown. I feel pride in being a part of what you have accomplished. I feel gratitude for the staff colleagues and lay leaders who have collaborated with me over the last year. And I feel confidence and excitement for what lies ahead as Sarah Halverson-Cano comes to serve as your new settled senior pastor.

Sarah and I will overlap for one day, September 24, my last in the office and her first as leader of the staff. September 27 will be my last Sunday worship service with you, and then Sarah will take the lead as preacher and celebrant for World Communion Sunday, October 4. I can't yet say where I'm going next, but I'm pretty sure it will get settled before I finish with IUCC. I'll hope to leave fuller information for sharing in the next newsletter.

The older I get, the more I think I understand that one of the most important disciplines in holding on to the best of life is to not hold too tightly, to follow the spirit of truth, but not try to beat it into submission, to allow ebb and flow, coming and going, recognizing that the fullness of some things brings them to an end so that what is new might begin and grow. I believe this is the way of Christ's love, a way for all of us to live in love.

Wishing you joy in the journey,

Pastor Dave
Welcoming Pastor Sarah Halverson-Cano

With coronavirus restrictions still in effect, we can't have the sort of “welcome party” for our new senior pastor that IUCC has always done so well - food and drink on the patio after worship, lots of hugs and smiles.

But we can welcome Pastor Sarah to IUCC nevertheless, in the virtual way we're getting used to. We invite all IUCC folks to send in a SHORT video welcome, that will be added to the Sunday worship service for Sept. 27.

In order to make it easy to combine lots of brief video clips into the service, here are some guidelines:

• Keep it to about 10 seconds
• Record the video on your smartphone or the camera on your computer
• If using your phone, hold it sideways for a “wide” shot
• Start the video, count silently to 3, then speak (this gives us room for transitions)
• Count silently to 3 when you're done, before you stop the video
• Email the video to iucc@iucc.org BY SEPT. 17, please!

One Great Hour of Sharing

The United Church of Christ OGHS offering was originally scheduled for March 22nd. Since we were not holding services in our beautiful sanctuary at that time, Mission & Service decided to postpone our annual appeal for donations. We are now designating September as the month for highlighting the powerful and effective work that is done with our OGHS donations. If you are able, consider mailing your donation to the church office by check. Make it payable to IUCC with OGHS in the memo line. If you would like to donate online through the IUCC website, indicate the amount of your donation and then click right below that to add a note.

Through the One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) offering, we are planting seeds of new life.

Together, we are investing in communities worldwide: providing education to girls and boys, empowering communities through vocational training, supporting microcredit lending and seeing people through to self-sufficiency, empowering families with skills to support themselves and their neighbors, and participating in sustainable solutions that offer dignity to all.

These are just a few ways the OGHS offering touches God's children, in addition to disaster relief and refugee initiatives.

Through your generosity, the world is a better place. But more is needed. Today, you have an opportunity to plant seeds into the lives of others. Be a co-worker with God. Building, planting, watering…and trusting that God gives growth to all good gifts shared in faith. Thank you for your partnership. Thank you for your generosity.
She'll be here soon! After a flurry of phone calls, emails, and discussions behind the scenes, we've arrived at some firm dates to ensure a seamless transition of pastoral leadership in late September.

Pastor Sarah will start work at IUCC on Sept. 24. This will give her time to interact with everyone involved in setting the right tone for her first full service that will premiere on October 4 (World Communion Sunday). She wants to make it a truly collaborative service that includes ideas from a variety of people. She will make a “cameo appearance” via tape when she starts work on Sept. 24 - something that is not a full sermon, but more of a welcome/introduction that will be included in the service that will air on Sept. 27.

Pastor Dave’s end date will be the same day as Pastor Sarah’s start date: Sept. 24. This will allow for a one-day overlap of his time and Pastor Sarah’s so that they can prepare worship for Sunday, Sept. 27, with Sarah’s “cameo appearance” probably included during the Welcome. That way there won’t be any worship-leader gaps to fill.

As we near this time of change, let me say a few words about the Rev. Dave Pattee, our Interim Pastor. An interim’s responsibility is to guide the congregation on a journey that starts with the sad parting from their former pastor, extends through the search and call process, and finishes with preparing them to welcome the new pastor. It’s a specialized ministry that requires an ability to ease the way between the established and the new. The nature of the interim’s job is to enter fully into the life of the congregation while not getting so close that parting causes additional pain. It is a position of limited duration.

What the job does not usually require is the ability to pivot from the usual responsibilities of pastoring to the extraordinary challenges of pastoring during a pandemic! None of us could have anticipated that a virus would force us to close our sanctuary to in-person services and require a complete revision to the ways we’ve always done things. Just when Pastor Dave was getting a handle on the job, he was called upon to switch gears entirely and figure out how to do online worship and how to minister remotely. It can’t have been easy. His ability to do so is a testament to his flexible and resilient spirit.

Please join me in thanking Pastor Dave for his pastoral guidance during these crazy times. Through it all, he remained warm and approachable, and he provided gentle guidance at a time of tremendous upheaval. He rose to the occasion and made our transition to online worship much easier, and he did it with grace and humility. We are grateful for his perseverance, care, and leadership.

We’re about to welcome the Rev. Dr. Sarah Halverson-Cano, a vibrant and enthusiastic powerhouse who is coming home to the church that raised her. She is one of our own: a Progressive Christian, a believer in the causes we hold dear, an impassioned speaker, a biblical scholar, an activist, a wife, and a mother. She is eager to get acquainted and to get to work. I’m excited to see her in action!

Until then, let’s simply “be in the moment” of waiting and preparing for the future of IUCC. It’s a moment of exquisite tension, to be sure - but it’s also a moment of joyful anticipation where we are on the brink of a bright new beginning.

Let’s all pray for our new pastor, our devoted staff, our fellow members, our country, and our world - that we’ll soon see a fresh new wave of hope and outreach that unites people and brings them together. Let’s keep the faith that we’ll emerge on the other side of this pandemic with renewed purpose and strength to share our mission:

“IUCC provides a radically inclusive community, declaring to neighbors and strangers alike, no matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here. We celebrate the Creator’s diversity as we worship God and grow in our faith. Guided by God’s unconditional love as taught by Jesus Christ, we see ourselves are children of one God, brothers and sisters of all people. As servants of God, we take responsibility to act with compassion, to work for peace and justice, and to share the joy of Christian community.”

In hope and optimism,

Tricia
Diversity & Inclusion Task Force Special Programs

Sunday, Sept. 27 - 12:30-2:00 p.m.
The Stigma of Addiction, Systemic Racism, and the War on Drugs: The Need for a New National Drug Policy
with special guests:
Gretchen Bergman
Caroline Stewart, LCSW
The Rev. Mary Moreno-Zermeno Richardson

For 50 years, the U.S. has fought the “War on Drugs.” A lot of the bipartisan rhetoric of our Drug War propaganda has stigmatized a treatable medical condition like Substance Use Disorder (SUD) as a moral failing. The real life consequences of these 50 year policies of the War on Drugs have resulted in increased overdose deaths, deaths from drug, gang and cartel violence, and mass incarceration of people for non-violent drug offenses. A lot of these deaths and incarcerations have also disparately impacted communities of color.

Join IUCC’s D&I Task Force on September 27th for a virtual panel discussion and Q&A on this national public health problem and how we can reform our national drug policy to help people with a treatable medical condition like SUD.

This program is being held in recognition of National Recovery Month, a national observance held every September to educate Americans that substance use treatment and mental health services can enable those with mental and substance use disorders to live healthy and rewarding lives.

Start Date: September 24, 2020
End date: Before Thanksgiving
Book discussion: So You Want to Talk About Race
Time: Thursdays from 7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Duration: 9 weeks/2 chapters per week (20 pages)

Are you looking for a way to become with familiar with the basics in discussing race? We are offering a nine week book study based on Ijeoma Oluo’s book So You Want to Talk About Race this Fall. The book is a very accessible one for learning about such ideas as race, micro-aggressions, intersectionality, language around race, and many others that you hear in the news and in your day-to-day life. We plan to cover about two chapters per week. We’ll be providing discussion questions and other food for thought in advance each week so that people can join in each session with their insights and questions. The discussion will be facilitated by Mary Repp, Craig Repp, and the Rev. Dr. Terry LePage in a way that helps people to engage in the discussion bravely while listening graciously to the other participants.

Saturday, Oct. 17 - 10:30 a.m.-12:00 noon
Tracing Racism Through Black Hair: Past to Present

Lesli Mitchell, LCSW, will give a PowerPoint presentation about racism’s past and present impact on the perception of Black hair in American society. Black hair continues to be “policed” by American institutional policies and cultural norms. Though there have been some recent policy gains regarding discrimination against Black hair, awareness and further change is necessary.
HERE IS A RIDDLE:
What makes the IUCC Early Childhood Center (the preschool) similar to the Los Angeles Angels?

ANSWER:
The preschool could benefit from a good pitch; the Angels could benefit from a good pitcher.

SO HERE IS THE ASK:
If in your everyday comings and goings you come across somebody who may be interested in child care, please mention our preschool. Find our preschool contact info at the IUCC web site: www.iucc.org Irma Rosales, our Director, will answer all questions!

AND HERE IS THE 'ELEVATOR PITCH' (the three minute take on the subject):
- We are open; we have spaces available; we follow every health guideline. For about two months now, since we reopened on July 6, we have had no incidences of Covid-19 illness.
- We have caring staff who are trained and experienced professionals.
- In the Irvine area, we believe we have lower tuitions than comparable preschools. And for our (lower) price, we offer more than others:
  - We serve lunches to all children, included in our low price. Others don’t. Serving lunches prepared onsite is a best practice. No lunches brought from home = less potential virus exposure.
  - We will potty train two year olds. Others won’t.
  - We maintain longer hours than other preschools: that’s a big convenience for working families.

How can you remember all of that? Just use this acronym: HC for healthy and careful; CS for caring staff; LT, for lower tuitions; PR for prepared lunch; P for potty training; and L for longer hours: HCCSLTPRPL! (grin: wear a mask if you try to pronounce it) If you know a good, available major league pitcher, dial the Angels – not Irma!

-Keith Boyum, Chair of the Child Care Committee

Important change: the OCROV will receive ballots postmarked on election day, and received up to 17 days after the election.

HOW VOTING WORKS FOR THE NOV. 3 GENERAL ELECTION

This information is from Rev. Terry LePage, who has supported voter education with the League of Women Voters and the OC Registrar of Voters. It applies to Orange County, where our voting system is very secure and robust.

Every registered voter in Orange County will get a ballot mailed to them on October 5. You can return that ballot in one of three ways:
1. By US mail, no stamps needed, postmarked by Election day.
2. Or you can drop your ballot off at one of over 100 ballot drop boxes up until 8 p.m. on Election day.
3. Or you can hand your ballot in at any of over 100 Vote Centers in Orange County. Vote centers will be open for five days from Friday, Oct 30, through Election Day November 3. Do not give your ballot to a person you don’t know to deliver.

You can follow the processing of your ballot online. Be sure to sign the outside of your ballot. A missing signature is the most common cause of spoiled mail-in ballots. If you misplace your ballot, or like to vote in person, or if you are registering to vote at the last minute, you can vote in person at any Vote Center in the county.

Vote Centers will be as COVID-safe as possible. Vote Centers are replacing a larger number of traditional polling places, so some may have long lines on election day. So if you want to vote in person, vote up to four days BEFORE election day!

You can register to vote or update your address at www.registertovote.ca.gov. You can check your registration at www.ocvote.com/vlt.

Closer to the election, you will find vote centers and ballot drop boxes at www.ocvote.com/faqs, and candidate information at www.votersedge.org.

Local elections matter. Educate yourselves about local elections as you are able (ask me or one of your other politically active friends), and please personally encourage and accompany new voters in this crucial election.
Dear IUCC Preschool Staff and Teachers,

For all your outstanding effort for our children in these difficult times:

Sandy Sudweeks

IUCC greatly appreciates the efforts of our Early Childhood Center teachers, who have been working very hard to follow all the guidelines to provide a safe and healthy environment for our little ones. Here are some notes our Child Care Committee members wrote to the teachers.

Lyle Norton

Dear Preschool Teachers and Staff,

Even in the midst of a pandemic, we can fail to take the time to say THANK YOU to special people who also happen to be front-line, essential workers.

But now is a wonderful time to say these words!

Because you are the loving hands that assist families who need you, now more than ever.

more! thanks! danke!

Adam Furtado

Dear Staff and Teachers,

COVID-19 is something that you are using to build resiliency in each child. You are showing them that an extraordinary time requires extraordinary measures, and that they can be part of the solution. Your examples show children that we can overcome, they can overcome difficult situations that will come along in life.

You are the stars here, you are the brave pioneers, you are supporting those who must leave home to do their work.

What would it be like if we forgave ourselves for our confused and dark thoughts of these past months filled with difficult days? What would it be like if we just accept those dark places, and let them be, unattended? What if we just let go of those lingering thoughts? And take a deep breath in and out. Those thoughts are not us, they leave no marks, and they have no claim on our minds. Those thoughts can float out and be gone just as they arrived uninvited.

Thank you for stepping in, for sharing your courage and bravery in serving our kids and their parents. Thank you, I honor what you do. It is so important.

Tom Mason

Dear IUCC Early Childhood Center Teachers and Staff:

I know it must be really hard to work within the strict guidelines of teaching during a pandemic, and I'm sure you are stressed and concerned. You have shown great strength, courage and resilience in the face of the unknown.

I am so proud of you for taking on so much extra responsibility, and I really appreciate the loving care and patience you've shown to ensure the health and safety of the children in your care.

Thank you for all you are doing!

Tricia Aynes

Dear Staff and Teachers,

Children are special...they are like a blank slate, eager to be written on; by parents, by friends, and especially by teachers.

Teachers help with near term skills...how to hold a pencil, how to wash your hands; and teachers nurture lifelong attributes...willingness to share, a love of reading, a passion for dinosaurs!

I want you to know how much I am in awe of what you and your staff have accomplished, both in the past few years but even more so in being able to successfully restart the preschool. I think of Irma and all of the staff every day and couldn't be more impressed about what you and your team have accomplished.

Linda Heath

Dear IUCC Teachers and Staff,

Thank you for bringing your talents, your professionalism, and your caring to our IUCC Early Childhood Center!

You are most definitely among those who are most appreciated.

Linda Heath

Dear Irma, Dear Miss Marta, and Dear Teachers,

In a time of stress, you relieve stress, by helping families.

In a time of anxiety, you reassure kids and their parents.

In a time of uncertainty, you are rocks of stability.

Thank you for being there, for the kids, for the families, for the community, and for our congregation.

Keith Boyum
Additional Women's Book Discussion Group Open on Sundays! Join by September 13!

Space is available in an additional women's book discussion group which will meet at 3:30 p.m. on Sundays beginning September 20. If you would like to join, send an email to iuccbooks2020@gmail.com by Sunday September 13. All other groups are full.

The 10-week session will be held via ZOOM, and will the group will choose from one of three new titles shown above. Don't delay to get in on the fun!

Virtual Coffee Hour

Note to readers: The above photo is NOT of the aging Brady Bunch! If you recall the opening graphic of the iconic sitcom, just add yourself to the grid each Sunday to be part of IUCCs Virtual Coffee Hour! Join Zoom Coffee Hour each Sunday at 11:45, immediately following the 11:00 a.m. online service.

Just as our very missed in-person visits on the patio, subjects of conversation are varied and random, and the invitation is to chime in on any issue that is on your mind. I attended last week, and subjects flowed from politics, (of course!) to the origin of squirrels’ arrival to the US, to the sermon we had just heard.

Scott Bollens, a regular participant, says that he notices that the Zoom experience has made him a better listener. Ideas and experiences are encouraged on Zoom coffee hour, but learning comes from listening.

Zoom Coffee Hour is a great way to continue the connection to our congregation and welcome new faces. Out-of-towners and visitors to IUCC are encouraged to join. The good news is, this is a coffee hour with no boundaries! Following the mantra of IUCC, all are welcome in this place!

To join Virtual Coffee hour, simply follow the instructions included in Friday’s eblast. Until we exit the sanctuary and head to the coffee urns to klatsch with old friends and new faces, join us Sundays on Zoom! See you there!

Alex Ingal and Teri Olson, Coffee Hour Co-Chairs

Happy Birthday

9/17 Kiana Austin 9/14 Laura Long
9/17 Maya Austin 9/16 JoAnne Mansell
9/17 Scott Bollens 9/29 Iris Mecartney
9/16 Lavinia Cooper 9/25 Don Mineo
9/14 Alyssa Cornett 9/12 Aidan Mitchell
9/14 Judy Curry 9/22 Ava Mitchell
9/26 Ruby Fulton 9/11 Jeff Oleson
9/26 Greg Furtado 9/20 Sofia Portillo
9/08 Peggy Goetz 9/09 Suellen Rowe
9/20 George Johnson 9/20 Stephanie Sanders
9/19 Vivian Johnson 9/18 Mary Swope
9/06 Cristina Jones 9/10 Paul Thornton
9/23 Lizabeth Kerr 9/17 Alyssa Wilkens
9/26 Susie Lang

Happy Anniversary!

Bill & Jean Dietrich recently celebrated their 64th wedding anniversary. They were each 21 when they married.
From Renae Boyum: “I taught history for many years in Garden Grove, and I loved sharing with my students stories about people who made history. That love of telling stories is now part of my latest “job” with IUCC - Fund Development chair (think Stewardship and raising monies for the mission of our beloved church). In October, we’ll begin our annual stewardship campaign, and an important part of that will be the telling of stories about what makes IUCC so special and why the programs we offer are worth your support. We’d love to hear your story!”

Renae’s Story

Keith and I both grew up as Lutherans, but different “kinds” of Lutheran. I was raised as a Missouri Synod Lutheran (think very conservative) and Keith came from the more liberal branch - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. My grandmother’s notion of a mixed marriage was if you married someone who was NOT Missouri Synod Lutheran. Nevertheless, we were married on a very hot muggy night in a Lutheran Church in Minnesota.

When we moved to California and had children, we joined the local Lutheran Church (ELCA) and quickly became involved. Our children were baptized and later confirmed in that church. We were “stalwarts” in the congregation serving on the Church Council, on the Long Range Planning Committee and contributing to the building of the new sanctuary.

So how did we end up at IUCC? Clearly, not a Lutheran church. The Lutheran church became increasingly more conservative both in its theology and worship. I would come home from church very unhappy and certainly not spiritually fulfilled. We began “church shopping.” One of the churches Keith was very interested in was IUCC. He had connected with some members over his involvement in the CROP walk and then later with IUCC’s fight against the anti-gay initiative that was on the ballot in the 1990’s. So we started coming to IUCC. The music was great, and the message from the Rev. Fred Plumer was powerful - but I was still not ready to give up being Lutheran. The journey to becoming a member of IUCC took several years but Keith and I finally agreed it was time to become full-fledged members.

I still remember the Sunday when we joined and standing up in the front of church with tears streaming down my cheeks. There was a sense of joy, yet sorrow. A sense of being proud to be part of IUCC, but anxious about the next steps on our faith journey. That was many years ago, and today I’m so very glad and thankful that we became part of this very special community of faith. It is truly my family and a community that has been with me through many joyful and challenging time. The love is unconditional - what an amazing gift!

That’s my story - I’d love to hear yours!

Renae Boyum

Two Stories

Tricia’s Story

Back in 1995. Jim and I were very involved in another church: both of us sang in the choir, I was on the church council, and our daughters were in every musical. One day, the pastor proposed that our church hold back benevolence dollars from the mother church because he wanted to stop the growing dialog on human sexuality (especially the part about same-sex relationships). He convinced other local pastors to do the same. He started a furious letter-writing campaign with an official at the mother church, maintaining that homosexuality was a sin, and sinners needed to repent and be holy. All sorts of red flags went up for me. I spoke against the plan at council meetings and distributed copies of the mother church's document on human sexuality so the council could see how mild it was. I felt we should be loving and accepting of ALL God’s people. The pastor was furious with me and called me a “troublemaker.” At a meeting of church leaders, he challenged me to tell them how I really felt. I told them I had no problem with gay people and didn't see why they did. They looked at me with such expressions of loathing and disgust that I was stunned. In that moment, I became an activist for LGBT rights.

I was very disillusioned by the experience and wondered where we could find a more loving church home. I heard that IUCC was open and affirming, so we visited. On our first Sunday here, Pastor Fred baptized the baby of a lesbian couple. He took the baby in his arms and walked her through the church while her proud moms beamed happily. Love and acceptance surrounded the family as they stood openly and proudly before God. It was so heartwarming, and I wept through the entire service. I was so thrilled that we'd found a church of people who believed and practiced God’s message of loving one another!

Before long, I discovered an extra joy at IUCC: the people here practiced Progressive Christianity! Finally, there was a name for what I’d secretly believed my entire life: that it was possible to follow the lessons of a gifted teacher without having to believe that he was God incarnate. It was such a relief: like having a huge rock lifted from my back.

I love it here. I love the message of acceptance and I love the quirky intellectuals that make up our congregation. Jim and I have have visited many churches, but IUCC is truly unique. We feel very blessed to be here!  - Tricia Aynes
It was midnight, dark as chocolate, when I heard him. In a weak, raspy voice George sang,

Be near me, Lord Jesus,
I ask you to stay
Close by me forever and love me, I pray.

A long pause, and then,
Bless all the dear children in your tender care
And fit us for heaven, to live with you there.

My face was wet with tears, just as it is now as I write. Those beautiful words, the last verse of Away in a Manger, came from George's wrinkled lips as he lay in a hospital bed, next to my bed, in our cozy apartment. His mind is wrinkled, too, with hallucinations and dementia; yet every word of the song slipped through the wrinkles in his brain, and became a midnight gift to my worn body and troubled soul.

In recent evenings, to quell George's agitation, I put my laptop near him and played music, either classical or religious. I sat by the bed and held his hand as the soothing tones took both of us into a calm space, preparing us for nighttime. Now, after hearing him sing, I think I'll use my own voice on occasion, to sing to him. I'll choose some of our favorite songs. Maybe, just maybe, he will join me.

As I listened to him sing, my mind wandered to the past: how many times did George sing this song? He most likely learned it as a child in Sunday School or in his childhood home. He must have sung it every year as a pastor while leading Christmas services. Certainly, he sang it with our own children, and me, beside our Christmas tree. Though always beautiful, to my ears it was never as exquisite as tonight.

There is a hymn that speaks of old age.* Some of the words are:  

When memory fades, and recognition falters, 
When eyes we love grow dim, and minds confused, 
Speak to our souls of love that never alters …

All of those words describe George: a faded memory, faulty recognition, dimmed eyes, and a confused mind. Yet, his spirit remains strong. Through his song in the deep of the night, George spoke to my soul. He spoke of love - his love, and the unaltering and unaltering love of God.

*When Memory Fades, Text: Mary Louise Bringle, b. 1953, Music: Jean Sibelius, 1865-1957

Family Promise Update

Family Promise's Gala brought great results! Over $109,000 was raised! It was a well-attended virtual event. Many thanks to Pastor Dave for sharing IUCC's support for the good work of Family Promise in a short video. More great news! In the months of Covid-19 stress and quarantine, IUCC members continued to express their concern and support for homeless families. In early April, when we could not house families in our facility, we sent $2,500 to Family Promise donated by our generous members and friends. In early September we will send another $3,014.35! Many, many thanks go to our congregation members from the Mission & Service Ministry and from Family Promise of Orange County.

Did you know that there's a simple way to support your church every time you shop, at no cost to you? Amazon Smile is available at www.smile.amazon.com on your web browser and can be activated in the Amazon Shopping app for iOS and Android phones. When you shop at Amazon-Smile, you'll find the exact same low prices, vast selection and convenient shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added benefit that AmazonSmile will donate 0.5% of your eligible purchases to the charitable organization of your choice. You can choose from over one million organizations to support, including IUCC!

Irvine United Congregational Church has been issued a $67.91 donation from the AmazonSmile Foundation as a result of AmazonSmile program activity between April 1 and June 30, 2020.

Thanks to those who participate in this program and help us maintain our programs and services!
On August 11, I woke up to find my entire house flooded. Silently in the night, while Oliver (my dog) and I snoozed away, the shut-off valve in my refrigerator gave out and without a sound filled the house with water. The interior of the house was ruined, and I am now living in a hotel while the house gets totally ripped apart and then put back together again.

The difference between my flood and the story of Noah’s flood in the Bible is that Noah was told well in advance to prepare for such an event. I was not.

Sitting here in my new situation helps me to think about the world’s experience with the Corona virus. It snuck up on us without warning, and we went from living one way to living another way in what seems like the blink of an eye. The highways are crowded; the highways are empty. People have long commutes to work; people commute from their kitchen to their dining room with their laptops. Children meet up with their friends and teachers at school; children see their teachers on a screen and are lucky to see their friends at all. We go out to eat; we order in to eat and go nowhere. We spend time shaving and putting make up on to put on a good face for the world; we start ignoring both as we hide behind masks. Life, as we knew it, is no longer. The same was true for Noah, but he had advanced notice.

Since we’ve all been hearing a lot about “science” during the pandemic, I feel comfortable mixing a little “science” in with our deliberations. There is a scientific principle called “homeostasis”: homeo – as in same; stasis – as in static. Homeostasis is the tendency of things to stay the same. A river overflows its banks, and when the flood recedes it returns to the level it was before the flood. A fire burns down trees, and the same kinds of trees replace them. You go on a long, tedious diet and lose twenty pounds; you go on one lousy cruise and all twenty pounds return in a week.

We’re built for same, not for change. This is all to say that there’s nothing “wrong” with people – of any age – when they have trouble dealing with change. The more sudden the change, the more unprepared we are; the more dramatic the change, the more trouble we have. **There is nothing wrong with your children for being “difficult” during the pandemic.** They are doing what we are built to do.

What is referred to as the “stress response” is built into our systems to keep us safe! Nature designed us – and all living creatures – to get an “alert” when something is out of the ordinary, so that danger does not take us by surprise. When we are surprised by something out of the ordinary, our systems become hyper-alert and we prepare to do “battle” with the potential threat. The mechanisms for battle are responses we are all familiar with: fight, flight, or freeze. But as everyone now knows very well, living with people who are coping using these devices is quite different from reading about them. Unfortunately, families now experience an entire household of individuals being “difficult” as they try to manage the unexpected changes. It’s nature at work.

For some, the Covid changes are merely inconvenient. For others, the changes are quite stressful for a variety of reasons. For still others, the changes are resulting in a “crisis” due to loss of jobs, housing, or unbearable loneliness. It is important to keep two principles in mind as we begin our series devoted to helping our children manage these very challenging circumstances:

1. **Events do not determine how someone responds!** (Memorize this)
2. **A person’s experience of an event determines how they respond!**

Let’s use my recent circumstance as an example. What if I wasn’t able to see the broken valve and understand what happened and it was all a mystery? What if my entire house flooded and I did not have home insurance? What if my entire house flooded and I did not have friends and the IUCC community to surround me with love and practical support? What if my house flooded and I didn’t know anyone who would take care of and love my dog (my best friend) while I was holed up in a hotel with a broken foot? What if I was not a Christian and did not know that I was still being held in God’s hand during this entire adventure by the God who knows when a sparrow falls?

It’s not the flood that is dictating how I am responding but a combination of who I am, what my inner and external resources are, and what past experiences have taught me.

No two people have had the same life; not even in the same household. Each of you is different as a parent, and each of your children is different. We’ll go through this wild ride together. See you next time..... from the hotel.
Life can be thought of as a circuitous journey that begins at some point that leads to a complete cycle and ends in death. But is death an end or a beginning?

Sooner or later, we will all experience the transitional process that begins with life and ends in death. Will we ever be ready? How do we prepare ourselves to transition to the after-life, regardless of what we believe or do not believe? The truth about death is that death is grounded on the following nine constructs: we will all die—sooner or later; life is a continuous bounded decreasing function with respect to time; death comes regardless of whether or not we are prepared; life is in a constant state of flux; death has a multiplicity of causes; the human body is fragile and vulnerable; nothing, not even our loved ones, can keep us from death; when death arrives our material resources are of no use; and our own body cannot help us at the time of death.

Death is the direct outcome of birth and no one has ever escaped death. Buddha, Muhammad, and Jesus did not escape death and neither will we. Our gifts—education, possessions, status, fame, gender, friends, and family—will make absolutely no difference during the time of death. The construct of death creates equality amongst all of us. Death is inevitable. and we all will die sooner or later.

Our life span decreases the moment life begins. Within the spectrum of life and death, life can be lived for better or for worse. Everything we do, every breath we take, every thought we have, every step we take, and every second that passes by will bring us ever closer to a final resting place. What comes to our mind as we contemplate our decreasing life span? What would give our life meaning?

Death is merciless and does not discriminate. How often do we think about the fact that death will come? How are we preparing ourselves for this event? How do we spend our time? What is really important for us to do with the precious gift of life? In life we conduct business, make and spend money, tend to relationships, accumulate things, but when we are dying the question “What have I done with my life?” might come to mind. I believe many of us do very little to prepare ourselves for death. Living well and to the fullest encourages us to take care of ourselves now so we can die well later. Regarding the fact that death will come whether or not we are prepared and ready, how do we want to spend our time, energy, and resources?

Life is not constant. How many people died as you are reading this article? There is a high degree of uncertainty about the time and place of death. Do we really know how much time we have left? Death can come at any moment and under any circumstances, on our way to work, while we sleep, and the timing of death is an unknown variable.

The causes of death are infinitely numerous and these causes can be disease, accident, heart disease, cancer, or even old age. Can we die of a broken heart? Even if we are diagnosed with a terminal illness our death may have nothing to do with that diagnosis. Do we think about the many causes of death? All life ends in death.

Our physical body is fragile and vulnerable. When we are young we may feel as if life is everlasting, but as we grow older and see others pass before us we begin to contemplate the finiteness of life. The simple truth is that life depends on something we take for granted—breathing. As we breathe in, life is a function of inhalation, and as we breathe out, life is a function of exhalation. The beating of our hearts and the activities in the brain give life to our life, but a heart attack, an accident, a moment of violence, a mistake can bring life to a halt. Life literally hangs by a breath.

Nothing can keep us from death. At the time of death we, naturally, turn to our family, loved ones, and friends. These attachments can make dying much more difficult. Our family, loved ones, and friends, are powerless and helpless in the face of our dying. Death will prevail and no one can prevent it. Since our family, loved ones, and friends cannot keep us from dying, then what would really help us at the time of our death?

In the face of death our material resources are of no use. We spend our lives earning money and acquiring possessions. We have a nice car, a beautiful house, jewelry, and fine clothing, but at the point of death what good are these things? Every penny, every possession, art objects,
This month, Middle Eastern Cinema. I’m talking chiefly about films originating from Muslim countries in and around North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. The only exceptions are Indonesia and Israel.

We won’t be discussing Indian films here because the history of Indian Cinema is too long and varied to be covered in one list. African films, except those from the Muslim countries in the North, will also not be covered; there’s too much to cover there, too. Finally, the Iranian film maker Abbas Kiarostami will also be left out because his career is simply too large and varied for this list. Don’t fret, though; there’ll be plenty to see.

1) **Indonesia:** *After the Curfew* (Usmar Ismail-1954) An Indonesian revolutionary discovers that life in the new Indonesia doesn’t always live up to its promise.

Although Egypt has a rich cinematic history, if there’s one director that’s the central figure in that history, it’s Youssef Chahine. More than anyone else, Mr. Chahine defined Egyptian cinema. He also discovered Omar Sharif to boot. Netflix is currently featuring many of Chahine’s major films. Numbers 2, 3, and 4 are all from Egypt, and all are directed by Chahine.

2) **Egypt:** *Cairo Station* (1958) This is, arguably, Chahine’s masterpiece.

3) **Egypt:** *Dark Waters* (1956) One of the early Omar Sharif films.

4) **Egypt:** *The Other* (1999) A pair of “star-crossed” lovers fight to sustain their love amidst battles between Islamist terror groups and corrupt Christian business-people.

5) **Turkey:** *Dry Summer* (Metin Erksan-1964) A story of family betrayal set amidst a battle for water rights.

6) **Turkey:** *Law of the Border* (Lütfi Ö. Akad-1966) A young woman sets up a school amidst Kurds in East Turkey. A smuggler insists his son be educated there. This film was thought lost after being banned by the Turkish Government.

7) **Armenia:** *Sayat Nova* (Sergei Parajanov – 1969) Also known as *The Color of Pomegranates*, this is a colorful, dreamlike film about the life of poet Sayat Nova.

8) **Algeria:** *Chronicles of the Years of Fire* (Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina – 1975) An Algerian peasant watches on as Revolution begins. Won the Palme d’Or in 1975.

9) **Morocco:** *Trances* (Ahmed El Maanouni-1981) A concert film featuring the Moroccan band Nass El Ghiwane playing their music on traditional Moroccan instruments. Also features interviews with the band.

10) **Israel:** *The Band’s Visit* (Eran Koliran-2007) An Egyptian cover band gets lost in provincial Israel. The source of David Yasbek’s Tony-winning musical of the same name.

11) **Israel:** *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman-2008) An animated memory piece about the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

12) **Iran:** *A Separation* (Asghar Farhadi-2011) An Iranian couple tries to affect a separation in preparation for divorce. The film’s power lies in its setting, 21st Century Iran.

13) **Lebanon:** *The Insult* (Ziad Doueiri-2017) An insult between a Lebanese Christian and a Palestinian refugee leads both to criminal indictments and to riots in Beirut.
clothing, jewelry—everything must be left behind at the time of death. From dust we came and to dust we will return (cf. Ecclesiastes 3:20). The comforts we worked for will all be left behind. What is left behind will be utterly useless at the time of death. The things we leave behind can be impediments to our full surrender to death. What is a sound investment to make in this life? What will be important at the time of death?

At the conclusion of life as we enter death, our physical bodies cannot help. We spend a great deal of time beautifying our body, dressing it, undressing it, exercising it, and feeding it. We look in the mirror and try to make our body younger as we evaluate its appearance. Suddenly… what happened? Our body dies. Since conception and birth our physical body will be our companion whether as a friend or as an enemy. We have experienced pain and pleasure; at the moment of death we lose our body. Why is there so much fear, so much clinging to life? Can we feel compassion for ourselves as well as others?

Death is inevitable; life is continually decreasing as a function of time; death comes whether or not we are prepared for that certain event; life expectancy is uncertain; death has many causes; our human body is fragile and vulnerable; neither friends nor loved ones can keep us from death; at the moment of death our material resources are of no use; our bodies cannot help us at the end of the cycle of life.

Death: the beginning or the end? Perhaps the beginning, perhaps the end… One corollary about death is certainly true: to die well, we must live well. Living well means embracing life at its fullest as we face the vicissitudes as well as the joys of living. For me, personally, death is a beginning. My thinking about death has led me to contemplate the words “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7, NIV).