Hello IUCC Family,

I say family, because that is what IUCC always was to me, and I hope it is to you too! Very few of you will remember the nine year old girl who arrived at IUCC 34+ years ago, though some might remember the young woman who worked with children and youth some 20 years ago, and maybe some remember my ordination 15 years ago. Others of you might remember my visits as a neighboring pastor (or often times as a pregnant mother on leave awaiting the arrival of a baby). IUCC was my home and this is a homecoming.

I’ll admit, though, it’s a strange one! I’m beginning to settle in on campus, and while it’s incredible (I love the new additions!), it feels empty without you. This is a strange time to begin a ministry, but what I learned as I left my ministry at Fairview Community Church is that, most particularly when times are difficult, intentionality goes a long way. How can we begin our ministry together with intention? And how can we actually grow and benefit from this strange difficult time and forge strong bonds in the midst of new dimensions?

So, I want to be intentional with you. There are a lot of you, and it’s going to take a while to get to each and every one of you, but my intention is to make a personal connection with you. I think we can do this in different ways. Most of us have become very accustomed to Zoom, and IUCC has done an incredible job of continuing, and even strengthening ministry online, so I’d love to come to your meetings, groups, book studies, and gatherings. I’m interested in what you’re interested in and am eager to hear what areas of IUCC ministries speak to you. I love pastoral porch visits and have found that even just a few moments chatting outside can foster a connection (and sometimes I have ice cream!). And there’s always the good ol’ telephone!

I’d love to chat with you in any way possible to begin or strengthen our relationship as we embrace what it means to be pastor and church together!

Connect with me at PastorSarah@iucc.org or find me on Facebook where you’re bound to encounter lots of cute photos of my family! My two kids Mollie and Micah often light up my page with silly smiles along with their adorable antics. Mollie, 5, loves to make videos on her monkey bars, display her singing and dancing skills, or wax philosophical on the topic of God, s’mores and the occasional cooking lesson! Micah (yes - he’s named after our favorite scripture) is two and a half and just began his first few days at IUCC’s Early Childhood Center. He’s one mischievous little boy and loves to keep us on our toes. My husband Markyce is in his final semester in nursing school and I’m counting the days! He’s the sweetest guy I’ve ever met and, while he’s the quiet type, if you strike up a conversation on football you won’t be able to shut him up!

Seven months of quarantine has definitely brought us all closer together, but sometimes it’s been a little too close! I’ve learned how to write sermons with Blue’s Clues, Dora the Explorer and the soundtrack to Frozen I and II singing in the background!

Whenever we’d come to IUCC for an event I would explain to Mollie that we were going to Mama’s church; what a gift it is to be able to share my childhood church experience with my daughter at her new church! Thank you for welcoming all of us home! With love, excitement and big virtual hugs,

Your Pastor,

Sarah
September was a great month for Adult Programs! Our Tuesday and Wednesday study groups continued to meet, and the Diversity & Inclusion Task Force started a book study on Thursdays.

Women's book groups and Comma Groups finished sign-ups and will begin in October. And we ended the month with a three-day Forum-fest, with presentations from Green Faith, Diversity & Inclusion, and Advocates for Peace & Justice!

Our Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday study groups will continue in October. Ken Wyant leads Bible Study on Tuesday, studying the stories of King David in 1 & 2 Samuel (and a tiny bit of 1 Kings).

My Wednesday survey of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) will continue into November, with a break during the holidays. We're in the book of Deuteronomy right now.

And Diversity & Inclusion’s 9-week study is on Ijeoma Oluo’s book So You Want to Talk about Race. Thanks to Mary & Craig Repp and Terry LePage for their leadership! Diversity & Inclusion also has an Adult Forum planned for Saturday, Oct. 17, at 10:30 a.m. Lesli Mitchell will explore “Tracing Racism through Black Hair: Past to Present.” You can read more about both of these programs on page 6.

Eduardo Arismendi-Pardi and Sarah Wall will also begin facilitating an adult group called Talking about Work with the first (Zoom) meeting on Saturday, October 10 at 10:30 am. Email Eduardo or the church office to get connected. You can read more about this group on page 8.

Since all of our groups and events are on Zoom right now, you’ll obviously need a link to the Zoom meeting you want to join. You can find them in our email updates that appear on Tuesday morning and Friday evening – make sure you’re on the emailing list!

Just because we can’t BE together right now, it doesn’t mean we can’t learn together. Get involved, stretch your mind, and see new and familiar faces when you participate in adult education at IUCC!

Ministry With Young People remote programming for fall begins the week of Sunday October 4:

Sundays at 10:30 am Zoom Sunday School for K-5th grade
Sundays at 1:00 pm Zoom Youth Group for 6th - 12th grade
Sundays at 2:00 pm Zoom Young Adult Hangout for 18-25
Tuesdays at 7:00 pm Zoom Pre-teen group for 4th & 5th grade

For more information, contact MYP Director David Perez (davidp@iucc.org).
In the midst of all the national tumult, we have much to be thankful for at IUCC. First and foremost, we have a spirited and energetic new pastor! She was quick to get started, and I’ve already “seen” her at numerous Zoom meetings already. She is bringing a new spirit of activism into our midst, and I can’t wait to see what positive changes she brings. She will strengthen and enhance our ability to reach out into the community and spread the word about our warm and welcoming message of Progressive Christianity.

Speaking of Zoom, we’re awash in online meetings and events. We may not be able to meet in person, but we’re sure meeting a lot virtually! Our Sunday morning worship service is filled with exquisite music and uplifting messages. Our women’s book clubs are active, keeping us engaged and nurtured. Our Adult Education classes continue to thrive and grow – a new class for working folks has begun, and Comma Groups will be starting soon. The Diversity & Inclusion Task Force is fired up and providing new programs and panel presentations (see a synopsis of the most recent one on page 7 as well as their upcoming ones on page 6). Advocates for Peace & Justice just presented their much-anticipated ballot forum with several rousing discussions about various propositions. Our boards and committees are filled with people who really care about the welfare of our church. Members have been generous in sharing their talents and skills to make sure IUCC has a strong and vibrant presence online.

To keep doing all this, IUCC needs your help. We were doing fine before the pandemic hit, but our current financial position is far from rosy. While our stewardship giving is up from last year (thank you!), we suffered a big hit when we shuttered our preschool back in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. That suspended one of our primary sources of income.

Even though we’ve recently re-opened the preschool, we’ve had to reduce the number of children we serve to comply with new social distancing rules. It is taking some time to ramp up attendance, and we are increasing our marketing efforts to recruit new children. However, it will be some time before the preschool can provide the church with the kind of income that it did before the pandemic hit, and we need to ensure that it stays solvent in the meantime.

What’s your IUCC story? What brought you to our doors for the very first time? If you’re like many of us, your story is one of not fitting in at other churches - of not being accepted for who you are or what you believe. Most of our stories involve “coming home” to a place where we feel welcome and accepted.

Please take a few moments to reflect on your own IUCC story as well as those of your fellow members. Renae Boyum and I shared our stories in last month’s issue, and there are three more stories in this issue (see pages 4 and 5 for the stories of Lorraine Fox, Penny Portillo, and the Blackburn/Louie family. It’s clear that all of us feel so blessed to have found a haven here at IUCC: a place where we can be accepted for who we are and what we believe. Our members could tell a hundred stories about how this congregation became a refuge after they found themselves unable to “fit into the box” of expectations or beliefs required by other churches before full acceptance could be given.

IUCC has something unique to offer Orange County, something most churches can’t provide. It is essential that we continue this outreach to those who feel disillusioned with Christianity and left out of traditional churches. We are poised to get the word out about the wonderful Progressive Christian message we can offer.

Our beloved church will need all the love and generosity we can muster to get through these troubled times, my friends. Your help is needed. Please consider a significant increase in your pledge this coming year. With God’s help, we will weather this storm and come out stronger on the other side. Thank you!

In hope and optimism,

Tricia
Don't laugh, but when we first started looking for a church, we didn't realize that "liberal" progressive churches existed at first and, even stranger, we never considered that it was something we could search for online! Instead, we found IUCC in a decidedly old school way - through an ad in UCI's campus newspaper. We were looking for a church because we wanted somewhere we would feel safe letting our future kids learn and grow. We didn't realize how much we would like having a church community to learn, grow, and have fun with!

Daniel was raised in the Calvinist tradition within the Christian Reformed Church. I (Lauren) grew up with some exposure to the Bible but was otherwise mostly “unchurched.” Daniel had been more or less content in his church, but right around the time we got married it became apparent that we couldn't fit in anymore. First, his longtime pastor left the church and was replaced by a much more conservative one. And second, we had a disastrous experience with the church mandated pre-marital counselling (we ended up faking scheduling conflicts to get out of the last 2 sessions). In short, we beat it out of there like a frog suddenly realizing it's in a pot of hot water.

We ended up adrift for a couple years, but as we started to get serious about when to have children, we also started to feel like it was time to head back to church. Daniel in particular still liked the idea of sending our future kids to Sunday School, so we went looking for churches hoping to find one that we could at least tolerate. After all, any future kids would likely take a very dim view if they were dropped off at Sunday School while we weren't going to church ourselves!

We concocted a list of about half a dozen potential candidates. The idea was that we would go down the list, visiting a different one each week and then see how we felt about them. IUCC was the first church on that list. We never made it to the second.

What initially attracted our attention was IUCC’s ad openly welcoming LGBT visitors. What made us stay was the extravagant welcome, excellent preaching, and decidedly “free range” kids. The experience of that first Sunday has been permanently etched into our memory. The kids excitedly came up to Children's time where they showed off their pictures about “Interdependence” to build off Independence Day. They were obviously delighted to be there and to share, and you could see Pastor Elizabeth take unexpected questions and silly shares in stride. The kids felt welcomed to speak up. Then Pastor Paul spoke about Mary and Martha. He spoke with nuance on the nature of persistence and serving. The sermon honored both sisters and Jesus as a gentle teacher. Daniel found he never laughed so much during a sermon either. We kept meeting more people each time we went. There was a decided emphasis in both the preaching and from the congregation on a faith based on helping others with plenty of room for those of us who maybe weren't quite sure what we believed.

We are still thrilled to be here 10+ years later and now with the two kiddos who were the original reason we went looking for churches. Our kids have others to play with, more surrogate grandparents than they know what to do with, and space to ask questions and develop their faith on their own journey. We’ve had the joy of watching the children from that first Sunday grow into amazing young adults who are now forging their own paths and sometimes holding us to account. We are happy our kids are growing up in a church with a community that will help them grow and learn to stand up for others and help build a more loving world.
Coming Home
Lorraine Fox

I grew up an Evangelical Christian and spent my childhood and teenage years primarily involved in activities related to the church. After high school, I went to the Moody Bible Institute, the ultimate Evangelical institution. It was there that I had my first gay relationship and was summarily “thrown out” upon discovery. I was thrown out on the streets in Chicago in the middle of winter at 20 years old with nowhere to go and no concern about my well-being, as I was such a sinner that I couldn't be tolerated in what had been my home for two years. This taste of brutal hypocrisy by those who preach Christian love but disdain actual practice when it doesn't suit them broke my heart. Since it was all I had known, and due to an experience of genuine kindness by an evangelical family who took me in, I hung onto the church for a couple more years. When it was consistently made abundantly clear that the church, as I knew it, had no room for a lesbian, I could no longer tolerate the rejection. I never blamed God, but I definitely blamed the church. Over the following 25 years of alienation from church, I missed God but didn't miss having to hide or be ashamed of who I was.

When I fell in love with my beloved Life-Partner, among the numerous attractions was that she was a Christian. She went to church on Sundays and was able to “block out” the hypocrisy of those who sang of love but limited those who would receive it. Given my experience, I was unable to do that. I could not go to church with her and pretend we were not a couple, so she went alone for years. Every time I accompanied her for a special service – like Christmas – I cried during the whole service.

In 1991 we learned that IUCC had just taken a vote to become “Open and Affirming” and Lois asked if I would be willing to drive from San Clemente to Irvine to give it a try, so we could go to church together. I agreed and once again cried through the entire service, but for an entirely different reason. I couldn't believe we had found REAL Christians who actually demonstrated the love of Christ and took us into their arms. After the first Sunday we never missed another one, and once again church became a central part of my life. After a quarter century away, I had come home. I'm still here.

Three Generations
Penny Portillo

Growing up, I attended Neighborhood UCC church in Palos Verdes, and felt at home there. My dad was the choir director there, and church music was a big part of our life. I was active in the youth group, and I enjoyed participating in confirmation, annual youth musicals, and camp at Pilgrim Pines. My husband Roni grew up Catholic, and after we were married and moved to Santa Cruz County, we did not attend church for some time. When I became pregnant with Sofia, we felt called to seek a church home for our family. After some visits to the local Catholic church, and the Unity Temple, we settled on Peace UCC (where Pastor Dave is going next). We loved their weekly Jazz service and their Taize services.

In 2004, when Sofia was almost 3, we decided to return to southern California to be closer to both our families. We researched UCC congregations and visited IUCC and the UCC in Laguna Beach. Though we love Laguna, it was the choir at IUCC and the larger congregation that drew us in. I quickly joined the choir, then led by Rob Istad, and have joyfully sung under him, Tina, John, and now Chris. What an accomplished and gifted group of choir directors, interns, and instrumentalists we have been blessed with for services and choir concerts!

Roni, Sofia and I have participated in many church events, committees, and mission trips over the years. We have been inspired by thought-provoking sermons by our pastors, and by a wide range of visiting speakers such as Mike Farrell, Sister Helen Prejean, Father Gregory Boyle, Jon Pavlovitz, and Matthew Fox.

After my dad passed away in 2012, my mom started attending IUCC with us. She joined the choir too, which we are fortunate to do together. We three generations appreciate IUCC’s commitment to social justice, wonderful music ministry, GreenFaith, and the growing focus on diversity.

If you would like to share your story, please send it to IUCC@IUCC.org -- attention NEW DIMENSIONS
Help our Preschool Get The Word Out!

Our IUCC Early Childhood Center (a.k.a. our preschool) could use a few more students. Enrolling more kids would allow our mission of serving the community to be fulfilled. Not incidentally, it would also help our preschool return to its posture of supporting all of the other programs that we offer at IUCC.

This is important, friends, and yes, there is something you can do. We are getting the word out via social media, and if you have a Facebook account, you can post, or re-post (share) mentions about the school.

Try this: Post a video to your own Facebook account. Here is one: a general introduction, narrated by Director Irma Rosales. https://www.facebook.com/iuccpreschool/videos/347218300028098

Or try this: Post to your own account a picture of our cook (shown below)! https://www.facebook.com/iuccpreschool/photos/a.1305425579510438/3579887542064219/

This reminds people that our preschool serves lunches – not something that most other preschools do. You can even quote our caption for the picture: “Meet Miss Martha! She cooks up delicious breakfasts, lunches and snacks for all our preschoolers and keeps a spotless kitchen. You can't see it but there's a big smile under that mask.”

Diversity & Inclusion Task Force
Special Programs

Start Date: September 24, 2020
End date: Before Thanksgiving
Book discussion: So You Want to Talk About Race
Time: Thursdays from 7:00 – 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.
On Sept. 27, in recognition of National Recovery Month, the Diversity and Inclusion Task Force presented “Systemic Racism & the War on Drugs.” Facilitator Matt Mirmak introduced this timely topic, saying “There are a lot of misconceptions when it comes to reforming drug policy.”

Panelists Gretchen Bergman, Caroline Stewart, LCSW, and the Rev. Mary Moreno-Zermeno Richardson, spoke movingly about their personal experiences. All are vocal advocates of the drug policy reform movement, which is trying to reduce the stigma of addiction and bring awareness to the issue. They support a new term that more and more medical professionals are using to refer to addiction: Substance Use Disorder (SUD). The purpose of using the term SUD is to reduce stigmatizing people who have this disorder.

Gretchen Bergman provided a PowerPoint presentation about A New PATH (Parents for Addiction, Treatment, and Healing), a group she started in 1999. Their campaign expanded globally in 2009. Both of Bergman’s sons struggled with heroin addiction, and she felt it was her duty “to learn everything I could about the disorder to help them navigate it and become healthy again.”

Bergman found that the criminal justice system only exacerbated addicts’ problems, treating them “like bad people doing bad things.” She said, “The main thing we wanted was treatment, not incarceration.” This was the beginning of her parent-driven advocacy, which “changes powerlessness to empowerment and helps them find their way to the light.”

She was particularly critical of the old War on Drugs, saying, “It wasn’t a war on drugs at all, but a war on families, particularly people of color, especially African-Americans.” Her group embraces all forms of harm reduction. “It’s about love,” she says. “But true love is different from tough love. There’s a whole group of us working to dispel the concept of tough love. We’re promoting the power of parental love, debunking the myths of codependency and enabling. We are building a movement to stop the stigmatization and criminalization of people who use drugs or who are addicted to drugs.”

Both of Bergman’s sons are alive, well, and in long term recovery. Both work as drug counselors.

Carolyn Stewart taught Anthropology for many years at San Diego State University and eventually became a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and a psychotherapist. Her adopted son struggled with a substance abuse disorder, and she became a board member of A New PATH. She tried tough love with her son, but it never felt right to her. In her view, “What our son needed was a shepherd – so we shepherded him like Jesus shepherded his flock. With this method, our son has had good luck…. Shepherds never give up on their flock and I never gave up on my son. I’m delighted to be a shepherd.”

Twelve years ago, she and her husband went to a laundromat and were stabbed by a man just released from treatment. They barely survived. “He did it in a psychotic state,” she says. “We didn’t blame the man, we blamed the system. We need more wrap-around services and case management, not jail.”

The Rev. Mary Moreno-Zermeno Richardson has been a chaplain at detention centers across California. “We incarcerate people of color over and over,” she said. “Families are destroyed over a joint. The racism in our jails is terrible – we set people of color against each other. What I saw was inhumane. They have to join a gang so others don’t beat up on them. Juvenile detention centers are nearly as bad – they are training grounds for gangs.”

“The War on Drugs has been an absolute disaster,” added Richardson. “It has been a war on people. It festers out into the foster care system, the juvenile detention system, and the jails. You see the insanity that’s going on – it’s breaking up our families.”

Richardson does public speaking for the cannabis industry in Santa Barbara. “There’s this whole imbalance people have bought into. Marijuana is not that bad, but the laws attached to it have ruined people’s lives.”

The panelists cited the old adage “Don’t hate the tiger (the person with the addiction).” We can’t always live with a child with problems. But we should not have contempt for them. Love the children but know that we can’t always control them. Regardless of the addiction, we can still love them. Treatment needs to be more affordable. They agreed that there’s a huge need for regulation and treatment facilities instead of incarceration.”
News & Events

Start Date: October 10, 2020
Second Saturdays at 10:30 a.m.


Facilitated by Eduardo Arismendi-Pardi and Sarah Wall, “Talking about Work” aims to explore the opportunities and challenges of our work lives through the lens of a progressive faith. Participants will have a chance to introduce issues. Some already under consideration are:

- Leadership, conflict resolution, coworker interactions, and management styles in the workplace from the perspective of an IUCC member and as a follower of Jesus.
- How our “Sunday” life and faith journey—what we learn in Sunday service and from our participation in the IUCC community and ministries (Comma groups, Bible studies, Green Faith, Advocates for Peace and Justice, etc.)—apply to our Monday–Friday secular work life.
- Balancing work, home, and faith community life.
- How to be an advocate for inclusion and justice in the workplace

Email the church office (iucc@iucc.org) if you would like to be part of “Talking about Work”!

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

10/25 Jean Arce 10/28 Penny Portillo
10/28 Bil Aulenbach 10/19 Becky Roach
10/8 Judy Bateman 10/27 Susan Sayre
10/8 Renae Boyum 10/21 David Schofield
10/28 Torrey Capobianco 10/20 Dave Smith
10/17 Lauren Dobbert 10/24 Craig Tyrl
10/22 Adam Furtado 10/17 Dale Vaughan
10/3 Nanna Gailiun 10/15 Tiffany Wilding
10/7 Laurie Gaskill 10/29 Heidi Willcox
10/11 Skip Gaskill 10/24 Glenda Wyant
10/10 Don Mansell 10/15 Allie Zane
10/4 Melanie McDonald
10/8 Brian Osborne
10/26 Brian Pearcy-Schofield
Bin Collection for Clients of Orange County Human Trafficking Task Force

For the past few years a representative of the Mission & Service team has been attending the Orange County Human Trafficking Task Force general meetings. If you would like more information on this organization please see their website: www.OChumantrafficking.com.

OC is one of the most impacted areas in the nation when it comes to this unthinkable act. Our Task Force is admired worldwide for being one of the most well run operations dealing with this issue. They work hand in hand with the Human Trafficking division of the Anaheim PD. Together they are making strides to rid our county/state of this human rights issue.

To help Human Trafficking clients, Mission and Service is organizing a bin collection of items they need through the month of October as our way of further serving them. M & S will set up a bin collecting some of the items this group needs to operate their many “safe houses.” Please add an item or two to your shopping list to drop in the bin. Here is the list:

- Detergent
- Dish Liquid Soap
- Paper Towels
- Toilet Paper
- Disinfectant
- Sponges/Scrubbers
- Bleach
- Hand Soap
- Shampoo/Conditioner
- Pads/Tampons/Panty-Liners
- Body Wash
- Lotion
- Deodorant
- Toothpaste/Toothbrush Kits
- Wipes
- Hair Brush

A bin will be available Mondays through Thursdays outside the sanctuary. Feel free to drop your donations off at the church between 9:30 and 4:30 from Monday through Thursday.

We know they will appreciate any and all donations. If you want more information about OCHTTF please contact Pam Kamps, the M & S representative at pamkamps@gmail.com

Thank you in advance for supporting this collection.
Mmmm. I just finished a cup of aromatic coffee. It tasted better than any coffee I’ve had recently. I used my mother’s delicate Haviland porcelain cup with the pattern called “pink spray.” This may not be accurate if fact-checked, but I swear coffee tastes better in that cup. Of course, it is an emotional reaction, but it is true. It Tastes Better. At least to me.

Food and drink are a humongous part of our lives. Of course, we need them for nourishment. But I’m talking about the other stuff: the rituals; celebrations; habits; all the daily, weekly and monthly events. Mother’s china cup was used, along with the rest of the beautiful set of dishes, when we had any celebration around the heavy, ornate, oak dining table in her home. That cup heard conversations of depth, silly jokes and laughter, the sharing of lives. Mother is no longer here, but she returns every time I drink from that cup. Maybe that’s what makes the coffee taste so good.

Retirement was the genesis of some food rituals for George and me. One I looked forward to was morning coffee while reading the newspaper in the library of our home. We sat in our identical leather lounge chairs, feet resting on a footstool, and discussed the news of the day. Later in the day, precisely 5pm, we met in the family room for wine ‘n cheese or whatever nibbles we had on hand, and talked about the day’s activities, about our family and friends. Our five-year-old granddaughter loved to join us for that ritual - with milk, of course. When her kindergarten teacher asked the class what their favorite foods were, I suspect the teacher’s eyebrows raised to new heights when our granddaughter eagerly responded, “Wine ‘n cheese.” Other rituals were a part of all the years of our married life: celebrations of birthdays, graduations, weddings, and all the special events of a family. Notably, all of these rituals included food.

That’s why I’m disappointed now. Due to his illness, my husband is no longer able to sit in his lounge chair, no longer able to enjoy food. Even his favorite ice cream “doesn’t taste right,” he says. I yearn for the days when we had our morning coffee, our 5pm wine hour, our cake and ice cream birthdays. He no longer drinks coffee or wine and has no interest in the food of celebration. How sad for him. And me.

It is a new time in our lives. I experience stress and feelings of loss connected with George’s illness. Coffee in Mother’s cup comforts me. As I sip from that thin-rimmed exquisite cup, my thoughts return to celebration, they return to the warm feeling of sitting with family, and they return to beginning the day in my husband’s presence with a cup of coffee.

I just poured another cup. In mother’s cup, of course. Mmmm.
Greetings again from the hotel. I just woke up from a nap – in the middle of the day – during which I slept soundly. At home I don't take naps. I earned this particular nap by doing absolutely nothing strenuous. Like everyone else, it's the stress of the pandemic combined with whatever else is going on. In my case, still being out of my home as they repair the flood damage.

Last month we remembered how important it is not to “blame” children for their responses – however challenging - to their customary lives being upended. We are built for “normal,” we are not built for out-of-the-ordinary. We like ritual and routine. We definitely aren't built for the prolonged stress of the “out-of-the-ordinary” existence both adults and children have endured since school disruptions, job disruptions, health disruptions, financial disruptions, political disruptions, and social disruptions became our new daily life experience. The “stress response” and the biological, mental, and emotional components we outlined last month are designed to get us through the temporary and occasional stressful situations we may be asked to cope with, and then to recede as we return to a quieting of our systems and a return to our “normalcy.”

Here is an assignment I want everyone who is reading this to do. Do it if you are alone. If you are in a couple, do it together. If you have a family with multiple members gather together with everyone in the household and sit around the table. Have each person pick up an empty glass. Use one hand and one arm and raise the glass. Smaller children can use two hands. Raise the empty glass up high and count to ten. Put it down. Raise the glass again, hold it up and count to 20. Put it down. Raise it up again and count to 30. What do you notice in terms of how “heavy” the glass feels as you increase how long you hold it up? Remember, the glass is empty every time. Does it start to feel different? Are you starting to have more trouble holding it up?

This is what all of us have been living with! Prolonged stress. It’s not how “heavy” the stress is, but how long we have to endure it, that determines how well we can deal with it. Our bodies are built to handle temporary stress, even if it is significant. We are not built for continual stressful situations with no built-in relief. We start to have more trouble and break down – physically, mentally, emotionally, and sometimes spiritually. Having trouble coping during this time is not to be seen as a weakness, lack of moral character, or an act of willfulness. Five Star Generals come home from war with PTSD. Give yourself a break. Give your Partner a break. Most importantly, give your children a break because they've had less time to build a firm supportive internal structure to cope with disaster. They need, and deserve, our help to be strong.

So as you walk with them through their trials of not being able to get away from you each day and spend time with a different adult; not being able to hang out and play with their BFFs; not being able to participate in activities that bring them joy and build self-confidence, I’ll ask you to add one more “tutoring” assignment: help them deal with a situation they have trouble understanding, not because they don’t want to, but because it’s complicated. Help them understand their stress. Their stress is also compounded if they have friends whose parents are handling things differently than you are. Their stress is compounded if they are old enough to watch the news and witness grown-people fighting with each other about how to cope with a common problem that is not finding a common solution. Even at their worst, they are not doing anything to you, but with you.

Of course, as with the other “subjects” you’ve suddenly been put in charge of, you can’t teach a child how to play the piano if you can’t play the piano; you might be getting very frustrated when helping them with their math when math was your very worst subject; and how well you’re handling your own stress will have a lot to do with how well you’ll do helping them right now. So I guess your homework assignment is obvious. Get a small notebook – not a loose leaf binder – a small notebook where you can make a few brief notes when you become aware of what they are now learning from you about handling our situation. Sorry. I know it’s embarrassing, but one of the unfortunate side-effects of this sheltering-in-place business is how much exposure everyone has to each other! There’s nowhere to hide, so we may as well open the window, look in the mirror, and face what we’re giving them to look at. See you next month…..if there is a next month.
The purpose of this essay is to provide a brief narrative about today's relevance of the ministry of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther, King, Jr. I believe that King's ministry is relevant today from the perspective of the construct of non-violence. Today we still live in a society driven by an agenda antithetical to the teachings of the historical Jesus. This is an agenda rooted in evil which is at the root of oppression, xenophobia, racism, hate speech, physical, and non-physical violence--especially as a result of the 2016 presidential election. However, violence in modern society is not limited to only physical violence as was the case, for the most part, during the Civil Rights struggle for equality and social justice. Violence in modern society must be operationally redefined to include its various forms, that is: (a) hate speech, (b) xenophobia, and (c) laws grounded in hatred and intolerance. King's ministry is also relevant today because we still live in a society grounded in constant conflict. This conflict is rooted in a wide gamut of differences. As Christians, addressing these conflicts from a secular perspective would be out of sync with progressive open and affirming (ONA) Christian theology, but particularly out of sync with the teachings of the historical Jesus.

I believe that the struggles for social justice today are no different from those struggles for social justice during the 1960s. Today, in modern society, there is still a presence of evil, and this evil is the spiritual ailment called racism. The difference between the oppressors of the 1960s, who in the eyes of God are our brothers and sisters, and modern oppressors of the 21st century is the approach used by each within their respective socio-economic historical contexts. These modern 21st century approaches of oppression include the use of technology, cyberspace, and social media. The modern violators of human rights, social equality, and social justice may no longer be the well-known hooded Klansmen, but rather the sophisticated and educated business-suit-and-tie Klansmen who have infiltrated education, business, health care, law enforcement, government, and politics. The former Klansmen akin to Klansmen of the 1960s are still in our societal midst in the public eye's view, whereas the 21st century Klansmen are the leaders who hide behind laws, government, and who come from privileged socioeconomic and political classifications. The relevancy of King's ministry is, I believe, the best antidote to combat oppression and fight for social justice and social equality. King's ministry, however, requires an enormous commitment and trust in God in addition to coming to the realization that those persons inflicting the injustices are also children of God just as much as those who are in the struggle. This realization prevents Christians in general, and me in particular, from resorting to secular strategies that in the long run will be out of sync with the teachings of Jesus Christ, which is something that King practiced on a daily basis. In fact, according to King, it is “wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends” (King, 1963).

The relevancy of King's ministry also rests upon the construct of non-violence which demands that the means used must be as pure as the ends sought. The nonviolent state of mind rests upon King's rules for daily living which are still as relevant and applicable today as they were during the struggle for Civil Rights. These ten principles as listed below are relevant today in terms of providing inner strength grounded in the teachings of Jesus, that is, to love our enemies:

1. Meditate daily on the teachings of Jesus;
2. Remember to seek justice and reconciliation–not victory;
3. Walk and talk in the name of God;
4. Pray daily;
5. Sacrifice personal wishes;
6. Refrain from violence;
7. Observe ordinary rules of courtesy;
8. Perform service for others;
9. Strive to be in good spiritual and physical health;
10. Follow the directions of the movement.

Finally, King's teachings and preaching about pursuing justice as ultimate goals rather than annihilation and humiliation of the oppressors is still as relevant today as it was during the struggle for Civil Rights under the spiritual leadership of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Jean Renoir
by Keith Dillon

There are a handful of people, chiefly directors who, I believe, are central to the history of cinema. Griffith, Chaplin, Hitchcock, Kurosawa, folks like that. Certainly, one of these figures is Jean Renoir. The son of an artist you may have heard of, Jean Renoir brought a highly visual style of storytelling to what are, essentially, satires of human life.

Born on September 15, 1894, in Montmartre, Jean Renoir was the second son of Pierre-Auguste and Aline Charigot-Renoir. Mr. Renoir was shot in the leg while serving in the French cavalry during World War One. The injury, plus a new job as a reconnaissance pilot, allowed him to spend more time in the cinema, where he encountered Griffith, Chaplin and his chief inspiration, Erich Von Stroheim. By 1924, he had made his first film, Une Vie Sans Joie or Catherine, starring his first wife, Catherine Hessling.

In 1931, he produced his first hit, La Chienne, the story of a middle-class man who befriends a prostitute to his doom. One year later, he released Boudu Saved from Drowning, the story of another middle-class man who “adopts” a homeless man after saving him from drowning, oddly enough. These films were international successes and they were followed by a string of some of the finest films in the history of European cinema. La Grande Illusion was the first non-English film to be nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards. The 1939 satire La Regle du Jeu was released one year before he left Nazi-occupied France. In 1940, Renoir came to the United States and by 1946, he was a naturalized American citizen. After the war, he returned to work in France. On February 12, 1979, he died in Beverly Hills of a heart attack.

1) La Chienne (1931)
2) Boudu saved from Drowning (1932)
3) The Lower Depths (1936) Renoir’s take on Maxim Gorky. Also see Kurosawa’s version of the same story.

4) La Grande Illusion (1937) – Stars Eric Von Stroheim as a Nazi general.
5) La Bete Humaine (1938) – Renoir’s take on a novel by Balzac. Also check out Human Desire, Fritz Lang’s Hollywood noir version of the same story.
6) La Regle du Jeu (1939) – Generally thought of as his masterpiece. Renoir also acts in this movie.
7) The Southerner (1945) – Arguably the finest of his American films. A depression-era story about a couple who starts a farm despite troubles, including sabotage.
8) Diary of a Chambermaid (1946) – A chambermaid named Celestine beats her masters through wit and cunning. Also see Luis Bunuel’s take on the same story.
9) La Carrosse D’or (1952) – One of Renoir’s great post-war fantasies in color. It’s about a woman in a commedia dell’arte troupe who beguiles a local toreador.
10) French Cancan (1997) – Renoir’s musical about a café owner in Montmartre who discovers that Can-Can can revive his business.