

A Lenten Labyrinth at IUCC



Labyrinth creator Robinmarie McClement wrote: "I really enjoyed creating a new heart pattern Labyrinth for IUCC. It's a sacred thing to create sacred space for journey inward. Lent offers us a time for clearing. A Labyrinth offers us time to quiet our mind and is a walking prayer toward our very center."



From the Pastor

by the Rev. Dr. Sarah Halverson-Cano, Senior Pastor



“The longest journey
Is the journey inwards.
Of him who has chosen his destiny,
Who has started upon his quest
For the source of his being.”- Dag Hammarskjold

We are well into our Lenten journey, The Journey Inside, and we have much to contemplate. Our Lenten journey is literally and metaphorically inside as we come upon a year of “sheltering in place” where we pretty much stay inside all the time. And yet, as Dag Hammarskjold reminds us, “the longest journey is inward” and so it is this journey that ultimately calls us to wander the labyrinth of our souls and discover who we are and what lies within.

Throughout our journey we’ve invited you to create a physical holy space in your home, an altar, where you can carve out sacred time to allow your mind, your heart, and your soul to connect with God. By using objects as symbols you can center your mind on the tangible, by holding them or by focusing your eyes upon them as aids to help you journey deeper, meditating on their significance in your life. My prayer is that this sacred space and these intentional practices will help you experience the fullness of Lent and ultimately help you feel more connected to God and one another throughout this continually isolating time. And as you walk this Journey Inside, as you create your sanctuary at home while discovering your sanctuary within, I want to invite you into our shared sanctuary to walk the labyrinth made by Robinmarie McClement. One household at a time may be present in the sanctuary. Just call or email us to stop by!

I am hosting a new gathering that coincides with Lent: “Caring Connections.” We are meeting on Wednesdays at 4 p.m. to offer us an opportunity to connect with one another as we recognize the disconnect that so many of

us have been feeling during the pandemic. Anyone can drop in. Our conversation will be prompted by our Sunday service, but where we go from there no one knows! The idea is that we’ll be able to practice our active listening skills, offering each person an opportunity to share our stories, and in doing so we hope to deepen our connection with one another and enrich our Lenten journey.

Holy Week begins on the last Sunday of this month with Palm Sunday, and April begins on Maundy Thursday. I hope you’ll be intentional in joining us online throughout the season of Lent and then celebrate with us on Easter Sunday. I’m especially excited because we’re planning an Easter Sunday in-person service outside at 8:30 a.m. You’ll need to sign up ahead of time, so please look for the sign-up links or call in to add your name and number in party. It seems so fitting that after a year without any in person worship, we’ll finally gather on Easter morn! Of course, we’ll continue our 9:30 and 11 a.m. worship services online and you definitely don’t want to miss them! But if you’re inclined to join us for our first in-person worship experience, I would so love to see you!

With the celebration of Easter comes a celebration of ministry. David Perez has been working with our Ministry with Young People for one year. Just a couple weeks into his time with us, the pandemic hit and everything went online. As we all know, it brought us a myriad of challenges, but certainly as I well know, starting a ministry amidst it is hard. David has given us so much of his heart, he’s shared his thoughts, his prayers, and his family with us. He learned incredible new digital skills - with our fun and heartwarming Christmas Pageant he took a Fresh Word to new levels. Sadly, he’s feeling a call to transition out of ministry now to focus his care on his family. We will miss his creativity, his kind heart, his reflective and thoughtful mindfulness and his song! I extend my personal gratitude to him and share our collective congregational thanks for all that he has done to offer us a fresh word of God’s love for all of us! Join us in celebrating David at 3 p.m. on Palm Sunday!

I look forward to this new month of ministry as we continue along the Lenten road together while apart.

Along the Journey,
Pastor Sarah

From the Administrative Pastor

by the Rev. Steve Swope

Dangerous Religious Ideas

Co-Sponsored with University Synagogue

Wow, February just zipped past us! But we've still managed to include a lot into this short month.



Thanks are due to:

- Ken Wyant, keeping Tuesday Bible Study (4 p.m.) lively and informative,
- Diversity & Inclusion, with several speakers and midway through their latest book study,
- Women's book groupers, who are also midway through their latest selections,
- Comma Group leaders and participants, studying and sharing together,
- Eduardo Arismendi-Pardi & Sarah Wall, helping people Talk About Work,
- Our friends at University Synagogue, co-sponsoring this month's speaker,
- The Seekers, who have entered the world of online meetings,
- IUCC's leaders, keeping adult education as a priority, and
- All of you who have supported these programs in any way!

Three big events this month:

- **March 7** – Rabbi Rachel Mikva talking about themes from her new book *Dangerous Religious Ideas* at 1 pm on Zoom. You'll need to register online (www.iucc.org/register)
- **March 13** – Chapman University's Founders Day Online beginning at 9:30 a.m. – “decolonizing Christianity” with Dr. Miguel A. De La Torre. Register online at www.chapman.edu/founders-day
- **March 14** – Charmel Catrell on addressing depression in the Black community, during the regular Diversity & Inclusion meeting at 12:30 p.m.

So many have started to get COVID vaccines; I think I can see light at the end of this pandemic tunnel. Let's be hopeful together, and continue to explore new ideas while we're waiting!

Sunday, March 7 at 1:00 p.m. on Zoom

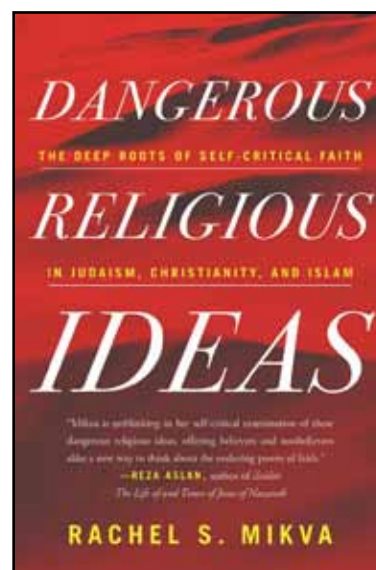
\$10 cost for online participants

Irvine United Congregational Church and co-sponsor University Synagogue of Irvine, CA., will host Rabbi Rachel S. Mikva, author of *Dangerous Religious Ideas: The Deep Roots of Self-Critical Faith in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, for a 90-minute talk with questions. The event will take place via Zoom, with sign-ups at www.iucc.org/register. The first 45 households will receive a free copy of the book!

Scripture's abiding relevance can inspire great goodness, such as welcoming the stranger and extending compassion for the poor. But its authority has also been wielded to defend slavery, marginalize LGBTQ individuals, ignore science, and justify violence.

Grounded in close readings of scripture and tradition in Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, religious scholar Rachel Mikva demonstrates that the Abrahamic religions have always been aware of their tremendous power both to harm and to heal. And so they have transmitted their sacred stories along with built-in tools—interpretive traditions—to do the necessary work of taking on dangerous religious ideas and fostering self-critical faith.

Rabbi Mikva serves as the Rabbi Herman E. Schaalman Chair in Jewish Studies and the Senior Faculty Fellow of the InterReligious Institute at Chicago Theological Seminary.



From the Moderator

by Tricia Aynes



My family lost an important in-law to COVID recently: not someone I was close to, but a person who might have loomed large in my grandson's life if his own hadn't been cut short. It is for my grandson's sake that my heart is heavy today. He lost someone who loved him unconditionally, someone he will barely remember now. That is sad beyond measure. The death hit closer to home than I care to admit, and it was sobering.

He died back in January, but the cemetery couldn't bury him until March 1. The family was finally allowed to hold a small, brief graveside service at Rose Hills Memorial Park this morning on a grassy hillside overlooking a beautiful view of downtown LA. It was windy and cold, and everyone was shivering. We all wore masks, kept more than six feet apart, and didn't hug or touch. It was a strange experience to be with a group of people, yet feel so very separate and alone.

This month marks roughly the one year anniversary since our country began recording deaths from the pandemic. Our nation has reached a terrible milestone with the loss of over 500,000, each of whom left loved ones behind. That's more than we lost in World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War combined.

This pandemic has affected all of us in one way or another. By this point, most of us have at least one friend or relative who has been very ill or died. It's gotten very real.

For those of us fortunate and privileged enough to stay home, we've done our best to stay sane and cheerful while dealing with the sameness of our days. We've learned the art of ordering groceries online and working from home. We've learned how to stay in touch via Zoom and FaceTime. We've coped as best we can with the loneliness, the boredom, and the cabin fever. We've missed interacting with loved ones on holidays and special occasions. We've missed hugs.

I'm grateful that Pastor Sarah has been on such a crusade to get the senior members of our congregation vaccinated. She's been a one-woman dynamo, working all her connections to find available appointments at vaccine super sites around Southern California. I think that by the time this newsletter is published, most IUCCers over 65 will have received both vaccines - a fantastic piece of news indeed.

Now that two weeks have elapsed since I got my second Moderna shot, I'm excited to get back into the world. It feels a bit like coming out of hibernation: everything looks brighter and clearer than before. There's a sense of wonder to it all. I know many of you feel the same way. With

any luck, the rest of our congregation will be vaccinated before too long. I am really looking forward to that day!

But wait - just when we thought it was safe to rejoin the world, we discover that there are variants of the virus that may be resistant to the vaccines. Noooo! No one seems able to answer the question of whether or not the shots will give us the level of protection we were hoping for. Plus experts are not sure if vaccinated people can still transmit the virus to others. The implication is that it's probably not a good idea to go too hog-wild in our newly discovered freedom. We need to stay cautious.

While I'm still painfully aware of a great sense of sadness for all the lives lost to COVID (especially my in-law), it's gradually giving way to a growing sense of optimism. I can't wait to go out and do all the ordinary things I've dreamed of doing while in quarantine. The two emotions seesaw back and forth in my head.

Through it all, my church family has sustained and strengthened me. I hope you feel the same. I don't pretend to know what the future holds, but I do have faith that the members of our beloved congregation will face it with our usual brand of hope, courage, and optimism. We have a wonderful message to share (Progressive Christianity!) and a loving and generous congregation. We'll make it through, and we'll do it together.





FRIENDSHIP SHELTER BIN DRIVE **MARCH 1-31, 2021**

A big thank you to all who participated in the Mission and Service Ministry January collection for the homeless. Through a contact via Isaiah House, this was the first time that we had designated an entire month for a focused collection and were overwhelmed with the congregation's gracious support. Friends also got involved. And neighbors assembled kits with their kids....each kit had a little note with scripture from the children...what a beautiful teaching moment for the young ones!

We received a total of 680 jackets & sweaters, 55 new jeans, 15 blankets, 76 hygiene kits, 75 hand-knit wool caps, 10 commercial boxes of trail bars, and \$400 in donations! We are filled with joy and appreciation. Our friends on the street are very grateful for your kindness and generosity.

Future collections (subject to change):

March -

One Great Hour of Sharing
Friendship Shelter Collection

April -

Family Promise offering
Second Harvest Market Gift Card Collection

May -

Food Pantry Collection for Radiant Health Services
Strengthen the Church Offering (Pentecost Sunday)

June -

Friendship Shelter Collection

July -

Families Forward School Supplies Collection

September -

Family Promise Hosting (TBA and subject to change)

October -

Neighbors in Need Offering (1st Sunday in October)
OC Human Trafficking Task Force Collection

November -

Families Forward Christmas Gift Collection
Families Forward Food Collection

December -

Concern America Craft-Artisan Sale

Thank you for promoting the value of love, caring, and kindness for others who are less fortunate.

Mission and Service Ministry is honored to place bins on the patio and give the congregation an opportunity to support worthwhile local non-profits.

Friendship Shelter helps homeless adults achieve self-sufficiency and become more productive members of our community. Since its inception, it has worked with more than 10,000 people to end their homelessness.

Many of you know its director Dawn Price, who was a valued IUCC member and Chair of the Ministry Board. One of Friendship Shelter's programs is their Residential Shelter Program. This program provides housing, meals, and a variety of supportive services for 32 homeless adult men and women, for roughly 90 days, at no charge.

While they accept all kinds of donations – food, hygiene items, warm clothing, etc. - these are their most needed items:

Reusable water bottles, large bath towels, blankets, comforters, shampoo, socks, & razors.

Your participation is simple and easy. Just bring any of these items and toss them in the bin during March. Collection bins will be put out on the patio Monday – Thursday 9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. We will then deliver the donations.

Thank you for promoting the value of love and giving hope to the future for the most vulnerable homeless people in our county.

Mission & Service Ministry



Let love flow.

Joshua Mumbi used to spend much of his time collecting water.

But thanks to your gifts through **One Great Hour of Sharing**, Joshua Mumbi and his family — and all of the other families in his village — have a safe, clean water source close to home. With a new solar-powered borehole well, they have water for cooking, water for drinking, water for bathing and keeping things clean and sanitary.

Because you let love flow, water brought new life to a whole community. Now children like Joshua Mumbi and his siblings can go to school every day, and a whole world of opportunity is open to them. Now the whole community is empowered to provide for their needs, plan for their future, and pursue new opportunities for growth.

Having clean water close by means that women in Nicaragua don't have to spend their whole day walking to the source, so they might have other opportunities for learning or vocational growth. Children in Kenya no longer spend their days carrying heavy buckets, so they can go to school instead. Improved sanitation slows the spread of disease, so there is less preventable illness. Crops thrive in Vietnam, meaning that food security and nutrition improve in the whole community. So that more communities can experience this new life, please give generously, and let love flow.

One Great Hour of Sharing supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the United Church of Christ. You may mail your check to the church office (memo OGHS) or donate online at IUCC.org. One Great Hour of Sharing Sunday is March 14.



Family Promise Update

Although Family Promise cannot yet admit new families into their Emergency Shelter program, FPOC provides Transitional Housing and Supportive Services. Supportive Services include case management and services for those families who have “graduated” from Family Promise. Many of those families have lost jobs due to Covid and have been struggling to maintain the housing that they have. FPOC helps them with food donations, rental assistance, counseling and other support.

The most exciting current news: 2 families graduated to their own apartments at the end of February!

Raegan is a single mother with a four-year-old son, and the other family is a single father with an 11-year-old son. Moving into a new apartment can be a big expense, especially when starting from scratch. Click on the link if you'd like to see both families' apartment Wish Lists. [FPOC February Grads Wish Lists](#)

In 2020, Family Promise of Orange County supported **65 families (269 people)** through Emergency Shelter, Transitional Shelter, and Supportive Services. That's **99 adults** and **170 children** who were supported during a very difficult year! AND, despite the pandemic, **11 families (43 people) graduated to permanent housing in 2020!**

Even with reduced intern and volunteer assistance, **974 calls for help** were returned in 2020, representing a minimum of **982 adults** and **1,186 children**. Return calls provide information about all direct services in the community and often provide clothing and food assistance directly from Family Promise.

Family Promise has been building new community partnerships during 2020. Through a connection with St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Tustin the **FPOC Shower Trailer** is set up at their site and available to homeless individuals on Sundays. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints provided a grant to FPOC for groceries, toiletry items, and supplies for the families.

Thanks to the skills of 2 Communication Interns, FPOC now has a Blog on their website. Go to [BLOG | Family Promise of OC \(familypromiseorangecounty.org\)](#) anytime for more updates on Family Promise.

Some words about Facebook, Instagram, and the IUCC Website

by Cindy O'Dell, Communications Ministry Chair



IUCC has several “social media” ways to stay connected to our congregation and visitors and to view the Sunday worship services.

Our **public Facebook page** (<https://www.facebook.com/irvineucc>) hosts two videos each Sunday, one at 9:25 a.m. and one at 10:55 a.m. A variety of page administrators and editors can comment as IUCC although usually Cindy O’Dell (that’s me) is acknowledging each person who comments with a “like” and posts information about how to find the coffee hour, fill out visitor information and donate. Once in a while several of us are IUCC at the same time!

The same videos can be found on our website, <https://iucc.org> without logging into Facebook.

The Facebook page is not the same as the private **Group Page for Irvine United Congregational Church** (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/123086051013>). Only a few of us can post to the IUCC public page and it is exclusively for IUCC or IUCC-related events and videos.

Anyone who has requested to be part of the Group Page for IUCC can post to that group, and posts are only seen by other members of the group. How often they might show up in your Facebook news feed is a Facebook mystery. There are 440 group members, so if you’re posting personal information, keep that in mind. And if you don’t belong to the group but want to join, follow the link above and be sure to answer the questions! The group page is monitored, and each member has the ability to report

posts and comments they find offensive for our review. We urge everyone to post and comment with kindness and to consider the goal of the group, which is to foster dialogue and share ideas.

Other IUCC-related Facebook pages are:

- IUCC Early Childhood Center page (<https://www.facebook.com/iuccpreschool>) – feel free to like it and share it with anyone in need of childcare.
- The Ministry with Young People at Irvine United Congregational Church (<https://www.facebook.com/IUCCMYP>) has it’s own public page, administered by MYP.
- IUCC Diversity & Inclusion (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/822387578280118>) also has a private group page for information and discussions. It’s monitored by members of that group.
- There is also an IUCC (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/41777961596673>) private group with 45 members although it is not administered by IUCC.
- There is also an IUCC Advocate for Peace & Justice (<https://www.facebook.com/roups/284057731654029>) private group, with various members of that group moderating and administering it.

IUCC and the IUCC Child Care Center also have Instagram Accounts. Find them at @irvineucc and @iucc_ecc. And there’s a YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCqgVAUCLqS1SOqL6L8R_kQ you can subscribe to although not everything is up to date.

Update on 2021 Stewardship Campaign

Update on 2021 Stewardship Campaign - NEW DIMENSIONS

In October of 2020, members and friends of IUCC received an invitation to make a financial commitment to this beloved community of faith. We asked you to step forward and increase your pledges so that we could continue to be a beacon of faith in this community and beyond. We asked you to embrace this powerful refrain from the hymn, *IN THE MIDST OF NEW DIMENSIONS*:

***God of rainbow, fiery pillar, leading where the eagles
soar, We your people, ours the journey, now and ever,
now and ever, now and evermore***

Members and friends did embrace the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead of us during these *NEW DIMENSIONS*. As of today, we have **\$428,460 in pledges from 128 individuals/families**. To put that in context, in 2020 we had pledges of \$376,000 from 118 individuals/families. **This is an increase of almost 14%.**

Thank you (as Pastor Sarah says) siblings in Christ for your generous financial gifts. Together we will continue to strive to be the church God is calling us to be!

IUCC Fund Development Committee
Tricia Aynes, Renae Boyum, Linda Haghi,
Chuck Heath, Connie Jones, Penny Portillo,
Cesar Sangalang, Duane Vajgrt, and
Pastor Sarah Halverson-Cano



Southern California Nevada Conference UCC Events

Sacred Conversations
Racism from the Asian / Pacific Islander Perspective

Saturday, March 13th @ 10 am
Register for Zoom event at www.SCNCucc.org

Featuring

Misi Tagaloa
Jessea Young
Marita Etcubañez,
Mel Niere
Rev. Dr. Art Cribbs—Moderator

Sponsored by the Southern California Nevada Pacific Islander and Asian American Ministries (PAAM) through a generous grant from the United Church of Christ.

Embracing Identities

**Understanding & Supporting
LGBTQ+ Community**

Continuing Ed Credits through our partner,
Penny Lane Center

March 20, 2021
9:30 am - 3:30 pm

Register online at:
www.SCNCucc.org

Virtual Founders Day

Virtual Founders Day

Saturday March 13, 9:30 a.m. to noon (PST)



Founders Day is an annual celebration of the heritage of Chapman University in Orange, CA. The event is sponsored by the Office of Church Relations and connects students, faculty, staff and community members with an outstanding scholar in the area of religion. The event

highlights Disciples on Campus students and provides an opportunity to support Disciples on Campus scholarships.

This year's speaker is Dr. Miguel A. De La Torre and his topic is decolonizing Christianity, helping us see and understand the unholy linking of racist white supremacist ideas and American Christianity. Dr. De La Torre is a professor of social ethics and Latinx Studies at Iliff School of Theology in Denver.

All are welcome to attend and attendance is free this year. You must register in advance to receive the virtual event link and the link will be emailed to registrants the day before Founders Day. For more information and to register go to www.chapman.edu/founders-day. We hope you will join us!

Kari Kempf, Coordinator
Office of Church Relations
Chapman University



3/20	Anne Aulenbach	3/24	Xin Li
3/07	Mahmoud Baghbani	3/10	Lauren Louie
3/10	Wayne Banwell	3/28	Trina Mangione
3/11	Daniel Blackburn	3/26	Barbara Moss
3/29	Steve Bullington	3/16	Jan Osborne
3/16	Erin Burke	3/24	Tom Ruiz
3/27	David Carruthers	3/01	Ruth Sandberg
3/10	Dylan Dobbert	3/26	Melissa Sokol
3/16	Anders Evensen	3/25	Jordan Willcox
3/11	Suzie Feick	3/29	Nicholas Willcox
3/11	Panee Hsiang		

Virtual Coffee Hour

Hello Congregation Family! Hospitality wants YOU to come join us every Sunday at 10:30 am and/or noon for IUCC virtual coffee hour!



Virtual Coffee Hour isn't an hour long, nor is it about coffee...guess the name is misleading but what in 2021 isn't? So what is Virtual Coffee Hour? Well, it is a space to congregate virtually. When service was in person, first service would socialize with second service on the patio and then second service would socialize again after service! This is exactly what Virtual Coffee Hour is: a time to just congregate safely.

When you join coffee hour, you may ask yourself what are the topics or rules? Simple: the topic is whatever you make it, and the rules are limited to just be polite and respectful. Nearly every coffee hour, we have talked about the service, but we also talk about what is going on in the moment. At a recent coffee hour, we talked about vaccination and discovered that some fellow congregants are having issues getting signed up! We were able to help provide the resources needed to support our church family. While we can't meet in person, meeting virtually is the next best thing.

So how do you go about joining a Virtual Coffee Hour? Simply copy the link at the end and save it to a word document or wherever you want. Every week, the same website link will work, which means you don't have to keep looking for a new link every week. If you lose the link, just ask for the link in service or check your Friday email from IUCC and the same link will be there! When you join us at coffee hour, you can stay 5 minutes or 5 hours (I rather you didn't stay for 5 hours but you could). Bring your friends and your pets. Those at coffee hour don't need to be members, just people who want to hold civil conversations with living people and smiling faces.

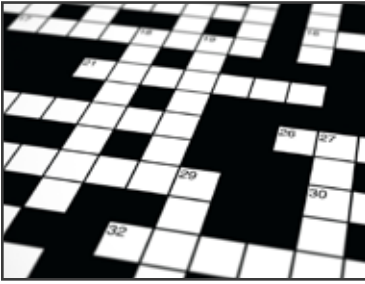
Give Virtual Coffee Hour a try! Do you really have something better to do on a Sunday than connect and provide fellowship with your fellow Christians?

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/77315117266>

J. Alex Ingal
IUCC Hospitality

12 Life Lessons from Crossword Puzzles

by Tricia Aynes



I love doing crossword puzzles. I do at least two every morning without fail. In the midst of this pandemic and its stay-at-home orders, the daily challenge keeps me engaged and starts my day off right. I've

learned a lot from doing crosswords, and it's not what you might think. Here's what I've learned:

1. Don't be too sure you're right

I've found it can really mess me up if I assume my first instinct is right and I fail to consider other alternatives. If I put in the wrong answer and hold fast to it, the whole puzzle becomes impossible to finish. Always bear in mind that you may be mistaken and be prepared to change your mind if new information presents itself. Humility is a wonderful thing!

2. Be open to other interpretations

The most obvious answer is not always the correct one. The puzzle creator may have dictionary definition #10 in mind, not definition #1 or #2. I might think the answer to the hint "close" is "near" when it's actually "shut." Always consider using unusual and seldom used solutions to life's many conundrums.

3. Find joy in the quirky mind of another person

It can be a delightful thing to match wits with a stranger who has taken the time and effort to create an intriguing puzzle for you. When you figure out the author's theme, there's pure joy in finding it throughout the entire puzzle! Enjoy the opportunity to connect with a fellow human's active and clever mind.

4. Take a break and clear your head

When you hit a snag with the puzzle, don't get frustrated. Put it down for an hour or two and revisit it later. Sometimes your brain needs a rest and a fresh perspective. When you come back to it later, the answer may jump right out at you!

5. One small thing can open a world of possibilities

I've found that the simple addition of even a single letter provided by another clue can unlock the whole quadrant of a puzzle. Keep your options open - a single bit of new information can open up new realms of thinking.

6. Be bold

I'm a naturally cautious person, yet I always do my puzzles in ink. Why? It teaches me to step out boldly and courageously - to own what I've written. I love to finish both puzzles in ink without corrections (it makes my day, in fact), but if I'm wrong, I'm woman enough to ink over the mistake and own that too!

7. Look at all the angles

Crossword puzzles force me to look at all the angles before I touch pen to paper. I have to consider all possible solutions (both across and down) before committing myself. It teaches me to carefully consider the consequences of my actions from different viewpoints.

8. Come at a problem from a different direction

A corollary of lesson #7 is that crosswords teach me to come at a problem from a different direction. If I'm struggling to complete the top left quadrant, for example, I keep filling in the rest of the crossword grid until some letters emerge from the lower left quadrant or the top right quadrant. With just a few letters added, I can usually fill in what's needed in the empty quadrant.

9. Expand your knowledge

While I hate to admit defeat and look something up, it can be necessary to finish the puzzle. I comfort myself in knowing that in looking up a new word and finding out its meaning, I have expanded my universe and learned something new. If you reach an impasse and have to do some research, you can emerge as a more educated person.

10. You know more than you think you do

I'm amazed at what's sitting around in the recesses of my brain that can be called forth in crossword puzzles. There's more information floating around up there in your gray matter than you think!

11. Have patience and think it through

There have been times when I'm missing a single letter and nothing pops to mind. That's when I will go through the entire alphabet A to Z trying each letter on for size. Sooner or later, one has to fit, right? And it does! Patience and persistence win out in the end.

12. We all make mistakes and we can learn from them

This one's from my husband Jim, a fellow crossword puzzle aficionado. Crosswords teach us that we're not infallible - we err all the time - and we need to admit our mistakes, learn from them, and move on to the next challenge with a more flexible and open mind.

Tricia

A Sense of Place

by Vivian Elaine Johnson



“Children,” the teacher said. “Sit down! Take your place.” As first-graders, we knew which desk was ours. It was our place. Pity anyone else who tried to sit there: “That’s my place! Go find your own.”

Ninth-grade teacher, Miss Dawson, small of stature but mighty of discipline, had a “place” rule. If the bell rang before your personal

bottom was on the seat of your desk, you knew by the pursed lips of Miss Dawson that you were tardy. If you were partly down, just about to graze the seat, it didn’t count. You were tardy, as *your* seat had to be firmly on *the* seat. Three tardy times and off you went to the principal’s office. Miss Dawson had a thing about place.

Yesterday, I sat on the couch and looked at the navy blue and cream stuffed chair with the comfy armrests. It was my husband’s chair, his place. Next I turned toward the kitchen table. There, his chair faced the window, looking out on the front yard with the magnificent Australian willow tree. At every meal, he looked out the window from that same chair. My eyes went to the patio. Though there are four chairs, George claimed the swivel chair as his patio chair -- always. In each of our homes, he slept on the side of the bed that was closest to the bathroom. It was his place.

The thing that is difficult to grasp is that my husband’s places are empty now because he died four months ago. When I returned from a walk yesterday, I closed the door quietly so as not to disturb him, and immediately glanced to the bedroom to check on him. He wasn’t in his place. Sometimes I look at his photo and say aloud, “Where are you?”

Outside of our home, my husband had his special seats as well. The last ten years of his life he sat in the passenger seat while I drove. If I slammed on the brakes, my arm went out to protect him just as it had when a child sat there. In old age, the passenger seat was his. At church, he wanted to sit in a certain place, always on the left side, three rows back from the front, aisle seat. That was his place.

My current challenge is to learn to live without my husband’s physical presence. I believe that humans have an unexplored inner creativity that can be accessed in times of need. I decided to explore some creative ways to help me sense George though he is no longer in his usual places.



One way I feel his closeness is by sitting in one of his empty chairs. Another is to wear a favorite vest or shirt of his. He lost his wedding ring so I can’t wear it, but I have his watch on a chain around my neck, a thoughtful gift from my family. I find myself patting it throughout the day. I pick up his books and leaf through them, finding special pleasure in reading portions he underlined. It seems that since his body is no longer with me, it helps to have some concrete objects that remind me of him.

I made a shadow box that contains several of George’s special objects: his Bible, eye glasses, passport, wallet, the most recent book he wrote, a mug with his name on it, a goblet that says “happy fortieth birthday, George,” a plaque with his adorable five-year-old handprint imbedded in it, and his comb which he always carried in his back pocket. Next to the shadowbox, I placed a plant to remind me of living things, and a candle to remind me of our candlelight dinners. As I water the plant and light the candle, I gaze at the objects in the shadowbox and am reminded of him. Now when I ask *where are you*, I’m grateful that *I do know* where he is. He’s in his usual place – here, in my heart.

Powerful Parenting

THE "RIGHT TO" VS. THE "ABILITY TO"

by Dr. Lorraine Fox



We began our new series for the year taking advantage of the nationwide "laboratory" we have as we live through a change in national leadership. My goal is to clarify what a "leader" is (and is not) and to confirm that leaders may not only be political, business, military, but parental. In fact, successful parenting depends in large part

on parents developing the ability to provide competent leadership for their children.

Last month I mentioned that leaders cannot be "designated." This is true in business, politics, and anywhere else where a situation requires leadership. This fact causes much of the chaos that arises from what we often refer to as "failed leadership." The same is true for some families. For this reason I believe that it is very important for parents to learn the skills of competent leadership to prevent "failed child-rearing."

To give an example, one could "designate" someone to have a certain position in sports – designated hitter in baseball, guard or center in basketball, kicker in football, goalie in soccer. However, giving someone that "position" does not guarantee that they will be successful. The only thing that guarantees their success is their *skill* in the position. In my experience, it is hard for some parents to accept this reality. I'm sure most of you have heard a parent – your own or someone else's – tell a child "you have to obey me because I'm your mother." And then the child disobeys. The child often knows more than the parent, knowing they don't "have to" but have to be *convinced* to. If a child is forced to do something, that is not "obedience."

As I write today's "lesson in leadership," we will witness unfortunate confirmation of the lesson. Our country has a "designated" new leadership team: new President, new Vice-President, new Cabinet. Tonight, our former President, whose current designation is formally "private citizen" will address a large gathering of followers. The fact that he has "followers" proves he is a leader. The fact that many will follow ("obey") him rather than our new designated leader(s) proves the futility of believing that we

can tell free people who they have to obey. This is crucial for parents to grasp, and so I invite you all to pay close attention over the next months and years as we witness a competition for leadership in America. There will be some lessons you will be able to apply to your own household as you fulfill your role as designated leader there. The lessons will be the same that you can learn by watching an ineffective supervisor at work, and most of us have had the experience of being supervised by a person who was ineffective and incompetent as a supervisor. Supervisor, or Manager, is a "designated" position. As with the sports analogy, putting a person in a certain position does not guarantee the skills to be competent in that position.

Delivering a baby does not deliver competence as a parent at the same time. Effective parenting is a skill that must be learned. It does not, as some have implied, come "naturally." It may seem "natural" if someone had competent parents as they were growing up and they followed the example of their parents with their children. But that is the skill of applying lessons learned.

The only thing that can be *designated* is "authority." Authority is the "*right to*" do certain things. Unfortunately, having the right to do things does not necessarily come with the "*ability*" to do those things. People with authority have the right to hold people accountable, but that doesn't mean they can or will hold people accountable. Authority gives people the right to tell people what to do; it does not give them the ability to "make them" do it. If it did, they wouldn't need supervision! Making people do things is *control*, not authority. People often resort to control when they are ineffective at using their authority.

Effective "leaders" all have one thing in common: *Power*.

Power – that is not coercive or controlling – is the ability to *influence*. It is influence that gets people to follow. This influence can be used for good or for ill. A democracy is the perfect social climate to study "influence."

We will use this year to study what happens in leadership struggles, how and why it happens, and how watching the news can help us to be better parents.

Stay tuned.

Forgiveness and Social Justice - Forgiveness is the Antidote for Self-Righteousness

Reverend Dr. Jerry von Talge



Every Sunday morning in the worship service we join Pastor Sarah in the Lord's Prayer: *Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors* (Luke 11:4 and Matthew 6:12). We also pray *Lead us not into temptation*. We could add *Lead us not into self-righteousness*. Forgiveness is the antidote for self-righteousness.

Social justice is part of the core *raison d'être* of our congregation. Forgiveness and social justice go together. Without forgiveness we are likely to lose sight of the humanity of the "other," who is also a child of God and therefore our brother or sister.

In the pursuit of social justice, there is the ever-present and self-defeating risk of becoming rigidly dogmatic. How accepting are those of us on the "left" of those who are on the "right." I feel relatively comfortable with persons of different ethnicities and those in the LGBTQ community, but I am uncomfortable with many conservatives, including those who support the prior president. I find it very difficult to relate to good, honest, decent and intelligent people who follow him and to be accepting of their choice to support someone for whom I have so many negative thoughts and feelings.

First, we must forgive those who make us feel uncomfortable with their differing beliefs. We must forgive people who do not conform to our expectations and our points of view. In forgiving them we recognize their humanity, their dignity and human worth. We consider them to be brothers and sisters. In turn, we enhance our own humanity. We open our hearts, increasing our chance for abundant living and the empowering of our ability to create justice in the world.

This is the easier part. The next step is to forgive those whose behavior on January 6th is condemned by nearly everyone. They are the white supremacists who violently stormed the national capital and destroyed the John Lewis memorial. They were predominantly the Proud Boys and especially the Oathseekers. Many of us were in shock after the January 6th insurrection.

The self-righteousness trap mitigates our attempt for social justice. We become fixated on the idea of justice and lose the human factor. Our basic approach becomes hollow and loses its essence – a concern for real people. Forgiveness allows us to keep in touch with the human factor as we seek social justice.

How do we begin to forgive those who are different from us? How do we forgive the Proud Boys and the Oathseekers, enemies to our beliefs? How do we honor what we say every Sunday morning in the Lord's Prayer? There is a simple truth: we cannot retain our humanity if we deny the humanity of others.

Twelve Forgiveness Strategies

1. Recognize your mental, emotional and spiritual damage. What is the impact of the January 6th insurrection in terms of disappointment and discouragement? How upsetting and destructive has it been for you?
2. Be aware of your anger and moral indignation by recognizing and fully allowing yourself to feel your anger. It is not necessary that you express the anger. Get in touch with your discomfort in the presence of those who are conservative, those who support the prior president.
3. Let go of the anger, avoiding the risk of self-righteousness, avoiding being stuck in the past. Letting go frees you from the past and allows you to take action in the present and the future. Without letting go, you cannot be truly effective on a sustained basis. Let go of your prejudice towards those with different ideas and loyalties, including those who follow the prior president. See the person.
4. Make the initial decision to forgive the Proud Boys, the Oathseekers, as well as the other hate groups. Make these forgiveness decisions knowing that forgiving them is in no way condoning what they have done. Forgive his supporters for your sake.
5. Forgiveness is empowering. Turn the energy of your anger and discomfort into action.
6. Often forgiveness involves more than a one-time decision. Most people will need to reaffirm their forgiveness as additional anger and discomfort rise up inside of them.
7. Practice love of the enemies of our national security. Forgiving involves loving not only the other but especially oneself.
8. Forgiveness is the offering of grace, which brings us freedom and liberation.
9. Remember that forgiveness is an inside job. It benefits ourselves more than those we are

Understanding and Challenging the Rise of Christian Nationalism Through the Practice of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Concept of Religionless Christianity

by Dr. Eduardo Jesús Arismendi-Pardi

Adult Education Ministries, and Diversity and Inclusion Task Force



The rationale for writing this article is grounded in my challenge as an open and affirming (ONA) progressive Christian in terms of how I can best confront the rise, propagation, and fusion of Evangelical Christian fundamentalism in American civic life. The insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021 is but

one example of how Christian fundamentalist ideology has fused the constructs of patriotism with Christianity as being one in the same. The isomorphic relationship between patriotism and Christianity has given birth to a modern lexicon that has redefined what it means to be a Christian in the 21st Century. Sadly, this modern lexicon is antithetical to the teachings and ministry of the historical Jesus. Challenging Christian nationalism requires understanding of the basic tenets of this Evangelical fundamentalist ideology. The first step to challenge Christian nationalism is to be aware of its tenets which rest upon the following constructs:

1. Authoritarian strategies that demand its citizens to show respect for national symbols and traditions.
2. Political rhetoric that creates fear and distrust of religious minorities such as Muslims, Atheists, Jews, or any religious doctrine not aligned with an Evangelical fundamentalist Christian perspective.
3. Condone police violence toward African Americans as evidenced by the slaying of George Floyd (1973-2020), Ahmaud Arbery (1994-2020), and Breonna Taylor (1993-2020).
4. Distrust accounts of racial inequality in the criminal justice system.
5. Belief that racial inequality is a function of personal shortcomings of underrepresented groups.
6. Embracing meritocracy.
7. Extreme discomfort and disgust with interracial marriage and transracial adoption.
8. Anti-immigrant views.
9. Fear and criminalization of refugees.
10. Malecentrism: Belief that men are better suited for leadership while women are better suited to care for children and the home.

Christian nationalism is as dangerous today as it once was in Nazi Germany during World War II. In an effort to deconstruct Christian nationalism, I have found parallels between the birth of the German Evangelical Church and Adolf Hitler's rise to power. Though I am not a historian, I do believe that historical events, in general, have a cyclical nature. Hence, as such I believe that there are numerous lessons one can draw from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's concept of *Religionless Christianity*.

Bonhoeffer's idea on Religionless Christianity was grounded in his thinking that there would be a time when religion will prove to be irrelevant. I believe this time has arrived. The prophetic declaration that *religion will prove irrelevant*, I believe, is what has ushered the Christian Church to hypocrisy. Such hypocrisy is something that has bothered me and is likely to bother many ONA progressive Christians as it once bothered Bonhoeffer. In my view, the rise of Christian nationalism is a reminder of Bonhoeffer's experience when he witnessed the German Evangelical Church being led by Reich Bishop Johan Heinrich Ludwig Müller whom Hitler had appointed. Today many ONA progressive Christians have witnessed how Evangelical Christians in the United States have turned their heads and looked away while acts antithetical to the teachings of the historical Jesus are being committed. The issue that deeply concerned Bonhoeffer during his time was the state-controlled German Evangelical Church under Adolf Hitler. This issue is akin to the rise of Christian nationalism in the United States as evidenced by the appointment of Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett who fervently believes religion should be a force for legal discrimination against women, LGBTQIA+ people, religious minorities, the nonreligious and others. I see this issue as being one in the same but under a different historical period and circumstances. When those claiming to be Christians by virtue of confessing correct doctrinal beliefs, observing moral codes, and following accepted behaviors and practices of the Church simultaneously turn away from what Jesus Christ taught, then religion becomes irrelevant and perhaps obsolete. Religion also becomes irrelevant when we provide narratives and explanations to justify acts of evil as well as when the Church becomes subservient to the State. A similar argument can be made about the American South—the "Bible Belt"—where intimidation, persecution, and lynching of African Americans were the norm for White Christians. The question that comes to

forgiving.

10. Keep in mind that although you can't control events like January 6th, you can control your attention and focus. Dwelling on what has happened keeps us from fully focusing and taking action in the present.
11. Forgiveness involves a willingness to stop the narrative in our head for a particular injustice, to stop telling ourselves over and over again what happened. It also involves a willingness to take a fresh look at differences.
12. Forgiveness also suggests an openness to meeting the present moment with freshness and a new resolve for action. Continually look for the humanity in those with ideas that are different from ours.

Practice seeing the “other” first as a person and second as a conservative or supporter of the prior president. Affirm their humanity and existence as a child of God, our brother or sister.

Footnote 1 The twelve strategies are universal for all types of forgiveness.

Footnote 2 Forgiveness is one of the three conundrums of the Christian faith. A conundrum is a confusing and/or difficult problem or question. Forgiveness is a conundrum because it is difficult to achieve. The same is true for the admonition to love our enemies. The third conundrum is theodicy, the problem of the presence of evil in a world created and controlled by God. I will write an article on theodicy at a future time.



mind as I reflect on the concept of Christian nationalism is “How is it possible that the practice of Christianity can become divorced from loving our neighbor?”

The root of religionless Christianity is Jesus Christ himself. Religionless Christianity is a bivariate function of prayer and righteous action. The former is not about the kind of prayer that allows the petitioner to sit passively aside waiting for God to act but rather about not ignoring the hands, feet, and voice of God within us. God works through us in the world; God, according to Bonhoeffer, is about our Creator waiting for us to act. Passively waiting for God to intervene to do things independent of us is not aligned with how Jesus lived his religious life. This kind of prayer is about developing courage and conviction to practice Bonhoeffer's definition of *True Discipleship*, that is, political resistance against a criminal state. Our prayers should be to ask for empowerment and courage to take actions to create systems of justice that alleviate poverty, hatred, hunger and to reflect God's essence of life, love, and compassion. Righteous actions mean standing up for what is right and on behalf of those suffering from injustice and violence. The elements of religionless Christianity are, therefore, (a) identifying with those who suffer through intercessory prayer and (b) acting in solidarity with the oppressed and afflicted to achieve justice. The practice of religionless Christianity will require a new non-religious language that can us lead to challenge Evangelical Christian fundamentalism which in my view, is in opposition and resistance to (a) the Federal Government's declaration that the United States is a Christian nation, (b) that the success of the United States is part of God's plan, and (c) that the Federal Government should advocate Christian values.

Finally, in thinking about the life of Jesus it is evident that he exercised two dimensions of religionless Christianity—prayer and righteous action. The gospel accounts tell us that Jesus retreated to the wilderness to pray and meditate alone and then jumped back into the life of the world with healing action and a bold prophetic voice. Prayer and righteous action were the key features of the religious life of Jesus Christ. Jesus did not, in my view, intend to create a new religion. Christianity as we know it was not his objective. He set out to transform human life in the midst of a great empire and to challenge the forces that oppress and divide people in every society. The task before us as ONA progressive Christians is to challenge Christian nationalism by being committed to practice the Religion of Jesus, that is, religionless Christianity because loving our neighbor is more important than religion (cf. Mark 12:33).