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OPEN AND AFFIRMING · JUST PEACE · GLOBAL MISSION · CREATION JUSTICE/GREEN FAITH

Easter is a time of new beginnings, and the beauty of our IUCC campus is blooming all around us!

Steve Swope, our Administrative Pastor, writes: "As I walk around the campus, almost daily, I notice the variety of plants in our still-new landscaping. The rain has perked them up and brought out some new colors. I thought people might like to see them, since so few have been able to see them in person. I took all of these on March 11."



From the Pastor

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



April begins in the midst of Holy Week on one of the hardest days of all. We are days away from the culmination of our Lenten journey – one that seems to have lasted forever, this *Journey Inside* – and with it the hope of what will come, of “the Body resurrected” as we think about a time in the not-so-distant future when the body of Christ, the church, will be able to gather again!

For some of us that will be Easter Sunday, an embodiment of resurrection—the perfect metaphor for the return to “life outside the tomb.” We’re looking forward to that resurrection day and imagine that the Easter experience for us will be unfolding, perhaps as it was for the early Christians as they began to form churches and sought to live out the mission and vision that Jesus had left them.

There is mystery in resurrection – and so for those of you who are asking the question, when will we return to experience the resurrection of the physical body of Christ? Well, it’s a mystery! We are working to discern when it is fully safe to return to in-person services, but since our faith was never determined by a physical resurrection, we can rejoice in the spiritual resurrection! We gather in spirit faithfully online, but we are working on plans for a safe return, that will likely unfold in stages. The very first incarnation of that will be, of course, none other than Easter Sunday!

I so enjoyed the gathering of Caring Connections on Wednesday afternoons during Lent. Especially in a time where I preach to a camera, it was powerful to reflect together on the journey: this *Journey Inside*. These conversations end with Lent, but I want to invite you to reach out, to engage in reflection – and don’t let the Sunday experience end there; how else can we carry it into the week? I think there is no better way than in connection, than in community.

I’m looking forward to all that April will bring! Easter has deeper meaning for me this year of all years. I feel the renewal of my spirit and am caught up by its joy in a way that just bubbles up with hope and light! The season of spring bears out the spirit of resurrection as new life bursts forth around us. I can’t help but feel that the vaccine is a miraculous manifestation of science and ingenuity that comes just at the right time in our church calendar, coinciding with spring, as the sun extends its span on our days, flowers bloom, butterflies emerge from their cocoons, and soon we will too!

I know many of you have already received your vaccine, but if I can help you in any way, please reach out. I’ve found this is one of the best ways for me to say “I care.” I can’t quite give you a physical embrace yet, but if I can help you in scheduling your vaccine, I know we’re on the way.

We’re trying to track those in our congregation who have been vaccinated, in an unofficial kind of way, so that we can have a better idea of when and how to re-open to regular in-person services. So please, feel free to reach out and let us know if you need help or if you’ve already received the vaccine.

I’m looking forward to our special services this month as we celebrate Earth Day and lift up our Ministry with Young People in a Youth Sunday. And as always, I’m looking forward to more opportunities to connect with you.

In the Spirit of Easter renewal,
Your Pastor,
Sarah



From the Administrative Pastor

by the Rev. Steve Swope



Pastor Sarah noted, in worship a couple weeks ago, that worship has been online for a full year. The same is true of our education and fellowship programs, and we actually began using Zoom for some meetings before “the Big Shutdown” became official. I continue to be thankful for the folks who are willing to lead Adult Education, book studies, Comma

Groups, and various fellowship gatherings on Zoom – however tentatively they may approach the technology. I hope you’ll join me in this gratitude, for these leaders have kept our vital ministries alive during the past year-plus!

In April, the two sessions of Diversity & Inclusion’s book study (on *Waking Up White* by Debby Irving) will conclude their conversations. This is also the final scheduled month for Comma Groups (though some may choose to continue through the summer). And the Talking About Work group is taking a break for a while.

But Tuesday Bible Study and Wednesday Old Testament Study continue – as do the Men’s and Women’s weekly breakfast groups. Seekers will meet again on April 20, too – their 3rd month on Zoom! And Diversity & Inclusion Ministry’s discussions will stay on their twice-a-month schedule. You’ll find the Zoom links for these events in the Tuesday email update each week.

If you heard our guest speaker, Rabbi Rachel Mikva, last month you’ll know what a challenging message she brought – about the dangers in religious thought that build barriers and promote division – but also the hopeful message she offered of faith’s inherent potential to be self-aware and self-critical. Many thanks to Rabbi Arnold Rachlis and our friends at University Synagogue for co-sponsoring this event! I still have a few copies of Rabbi Mikva’s book, *Dangerous Religious Ideas*, that folks haven’t picked up yet. If one is yours, please get it soon!

As for a guest speaker in the fall – or next year’s Comma Group reading, or another book-study series, or you-name-it – planning conversations will start to take place sometime after Easter. Be watching for more information! Of course, we’ll all need to be flexible, ready to shift with changing situations (either tightening or loosening restrictions). We’ll keep following “best practices” here – feel free to let me know if you’ve had your Covid vaccines yet, so we can gauge our level of safety!



Second Harvest Food Bank April Collection

The Mission and Service April Collection is dedicated to the Second Harvest Food Bank OC. During this past year, in response to the Covid 19 Pandemic, Second Harvest Food Bank of OC has had to completely change the way they do the business of feeding those in need in Orange County. Their monthly need has grown from feeding approx. 250,000 people per month to nearly 600,000. They can no longer have “normal” food drives because they can no longer have the volunteers who sorted and distributed the much needed food. Food is distributed at their partner sites so it is closer to the need. As a result of these changes (and the drastic increase in need) we are collecting grocery gift cards for them during the month of April. Any amount will help. They will distribute the gift cards out into their community partners who will directly help those in their area. If you are able, please assist us by buying a gift card from one of the following markets: Ralphps, Stater Brothers, Albertsons, Vons, or Smart and Final.

Please put the gift card(s) in an envelope and either mail it to the church marked to the attention of Mission & Service or drop it in the office when they are open. Make sure you indicate the amount of the gift card.

The need is great for our OC family. Please give what you can. To read a little more about the Food Banks work, please see this article: <https://voiceofoc.org/2021/03/13/>

Thank you,

Mission and Service Ministry



4/01 Jim Carse	4/21 Kyle Lutz
4/29 Natasha Dahline	4/15 Connor McDonald
4/17 David Deshler	4/07 Jennifer Mirmak
4/19 Janice Gately	4/22 Steve O’Dell
4/29 Linda Hidy	4/18 Jim Raver
4/15 Janice Johnson	4/22 Cheryl Schou
4/07 Lee KeslerWest	4/30 Mark Willcox
4/21 Dale Lang	

From the Moderator

by Tricia Aynes



I grew up in Gardena, a suburb of Los Angeles. Many of my classmates were Japanese-Americans. We got along great and enjoyed competing with one another intellectually. We were in choir and band together, and we had parties in each others' homes. We talked about boys and movies and clothes - the usual high school stuff.

Then one day when I was sitting in Mrs. Krache's AP History class, I had an experience that is forever burned into my memory. She asked the class a question: "How many of you had relatives in the internment camps?" I looked around and saw nearly every hand go up. I had no idea what she was talking about, but clearly most of my classmates did. Mrs. Krache explained to the white kids (who were clueless) about the shameful time in U.S. history when we forced Japanese-Americans to evacuate their homes and put them in concentration camps where they were surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards. I was horrified: Why had none of my friends ever mentioned this terrible experience that had befallen their parents?

It wasn't that anyone had forgotten - it was something they weren't supposed to talk about. Now it's uppermost in all our minds as we see elements of this sad history repeating itself. My friend Kathy referenced it in a recent email exchange, writing "Thank you for showing up to protest the violence and hatred that has hurt so many...even more painful because of the historical roots preceding this dark time." She was alluding to the camps, of course.

Many years after high school, I met actor George Takei (Mr. Sulu of *Star Trek*), at a fundraiser. I'm a huge Trekkie, and I engaged him in conversation at every opportunity. He gave me his card and urged me to visit the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles. He thought I'd find it enlightening.

I visited the museum a few years later and got a small taste of what life must've been like in the Manzanar internment camp from 1942-1945. A special exhibit featured a tiny reconstructed hut that stood in mute testimony to how bitterly cold winds would whistle between wooden planks to chill the people inside. There were hundreds of photographs of gaunt people with sad eyes - moms and dads with little children - just trying to get through each day. These were the faces of my friends' moms, dads and grandparents. Our own government

locked up more than 120,000 people, a majority of them U.S. citizens from the west coast, simply because of their race. We did this because we feared the "other" - those who had the misfortune of looking like the enemy who had attacked us.

When they were finally released from the camps, most had to start over from scratch. Ironically, one odd legacy of the camps was that traumatized internees, struggling to rebuild their lives, put an enormous amount of pressure on their children, my classmates, to excel in school. They became a "model minority," expected to study hard and be a success. That's how they ended up disproportionately in the AP classes. It explained a lot.

I had thought those terrible times were a thing of the distant past. Surely our country had learned not to judge people by the color of their skin. Surely we were more enlightened now.

But no. Hate crimes and hate incidents against Asian Americans have been mounting nationwide over the past year, leaving members of the API community feeling angry, frightened and unwelcome. Advocacy groups have recorded large numbers of such crimes, ranging from vandalism to cruel epithets to assault to murder. A recent report from Stop AAPI Hate, a national nonprofit, found 3,795 hate incidents against the API community during the pandemic (with many more likely unreported). The report showed 44.6% of incidents occurred in California, and 68% targeted Asian women. These crimes are so atrocious on so many fronts that I really cannot find the words to unpack how truly awful they are.

Last month's terrible attack in Atlanta that killed eight people (six of them women of Asian descent) was the most extreme case yet. While authorities have yet to declare it a hate crime, it certainly seems to have grown out of the alleged shooter's toxic mental soup of misogyny, toxic masculinity, and racial stereotyping. In just the past week in New York City, a 65-year-old Filipino-American woman was knocked to the ground and kicked repeatedly in the head by a complete stranger. The list goes on.

I wanted to do something, so I looked for ways to express my concern and solidarity. As it turns out, the horrific attacks have prompted a mighty groundswell of support. Marches and rallies have been shining a light on what's been happening. Allies have been showing up, raising awareness, and encouraging government entities to take these crimes more seriously. Jim and I attended the *Rally for Unity - Stop Asian Hate* at Irvine City Hall on March 13 to show our love and solidarity with those working to stop

Moderator's column continued from Page 4

this terrible behavior. We ran into Pastor Sarah, who was also there to show solidarity and support. Most attendees were young Asian Americans. They carried signs that said "End racism," "We are not a virus," and "Stop Asian hate." This new generation is speaking out against the stereotype of the "model minority." They are tired of being silent and feeling invisible. They are working with other minority groups to condemn racism in all its ugly forms and to create a movement for change. It was a good rally with plenty of news coverage - more exposure was brought to bear on the recent hate crimes.

Ten days later, on March 23, Jim and I attended a very somber and meaningful candlelight vigil in Garden Grove to honor and mourn the lives lost in Atlanta. It was very different kind of event from the rally a week before, but also served to bring attention to the problem. Participants listened to music, visited a floral covered altar, and carried luminaries around a beautiful pond to reflect and remember. This event was also well covered by the media. We ran into fellow IUCCers Jen and Matt Mirmak there, and we saw Matt being interviewed by Channel 4 news.

All of these efforts make a difference, because they bring public attention to the issue. They give us an opportunity to listen, to connect, and to show support. Showing up means that we care and we stand in solidarity against anti-Asian violence. It matters that allies show up and are counted. Rallies and vigils show the power of numbers: the power of community action. We can also write letters and make phone calls to legislators. They pay attention!

We are in the midst of the holiest week of the Christian calendar, the week when we remember how Jesus met with a cruel and painful death after living a blameless life. At this time more than ever, it is our challenge to stand with the victims of hate crimes and show our solidarity against racism in all its forms. We are called to do nothing less.

Tricia

Reporting Hate Crimes & Hate Incidents

The City of Irvine Police Department encourages victims to contact them directly at #(949) 724-7200 or 911 (if it's an emergency). You can also contact them via the internet and fill out a report online: <https://records.cityofirvine.org/OnBaseWeb-ClientStdUF/UnityForm.aspx?key=UFKey> If the event does not meet the legal definition of a hate crime, a police report will still be taken to document the circumstances surrounding the hate incident. Per their website, "Individuals completing an online report may choose not to provide their name or other personal information. However, this may limit IPD's ability to thoroughly investigate what is being reported. It may also hinder the criminal prosecution of involved suspects."

Rally for Unity - Stop Asian Hate in Irvine 3/13/21



Candlelight Vigil in Garden Grove on 3/23/21



Matt Mirmak was interviewed by Channel 4.

UCC PAAM: Hate Has No Place Here!

In light of the shootings in Atlanta and the surge in hate crimes against members of the API community, the Pacific Islander & Asian American Ministries (PAAM) of the United Church of Christ has issued this statement:

Hate Has No Place Here!

by Dick Hom, Moderator

Pacific Islander & Asian American Ministries (PAAM)
United Church of Christ

Angry! Outraged! Upset! There are no words to reflect what is happening in our Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. Brutal attacks on the elderly and vulnerable are increasing. And these are not robberies. Just hate crimes and in broad daylight. The latest report from just one center monitoring AAPI crimes list over 3,700 incidents from March 2020 to February 2021.

Many bring up the fact that the previous administration encouraged this type of racial discrimination. This might be true, but it is individuals who continue to perpetrate these crimes. And we, not only as Christians but also as human beings, need to stand up and support our AAPI community. Many have asked how they can help. Here is what is shared by Stop AAPI Hate:

Five Ways to Help If You Are Witnessing Hate

- Take action. Approach the targeted person, introduce yourself and offer help.
- Actively listen. Ask before taking any action and respect the targeted person's wishes. Monitor the situation if needed.
- Ignore attacker. Using your discretion, attempt to calm the situation by using your voice, body language or distractions.
- Accompany. If the situation escalates, invite the targeted person to join you in leaving.
- Offer emotional support. Help the targeted person by asking how they are feeling. Assist them to figure out what they want to do next.

The Pacific Islander & Asian American Ministries (PAAM) of the United Church of Christ has always called out and condemned all types of racism and xenophobia against all communities of color since 1974 and will continue to do so if this virus is among us.

Contact your local legislative officials and demand support for the AAPI community in your area. Contact your local civil rights organizations to add your name to their list.

Hospitality News



Hello IUCC Family,

As more people are getting vaccinated, the end of this pandemic is on the horizon. This means it is time to practice your social skills for when we are eventually able to meet back in person. There is no better place to practice than attending a post-service virtual zoom coffee hour!

Coffee hour has something for nearly everybody! Do you hate talking? No problem! Drop in and say hi and then listen to the conversations. Enjoy random topics? Perfect! We have talked about various topics ranging from vaccines to unicorns to our pets. How about those who have commitment problems? Well, just drop in whenever you want! It doesn't have to be every week. Some people even drop by for just 5 minutes. Whatever your goal is in life, having a friendly conversation with your fellow Christians is always a winner. So stop by the next coffee hour and say hello. We may not have coffee, but we do have smiles!

If you are interested in doing more for the church than socializing and attending services, do I have an opportunity for you - Hospitality Co-Chair! I became a chair of hospitality within less than 6 months of attending IUCC, so this opportunity is open to nearly anyone! What would you do as a co-chair? Well right now, absolutely nothing! When we start to meet in person, you would help set up and maintain coffee hour. Coffee hour is very flexible on how it is run, so you will have the opportunity to suggest and make changes as you desire. As a co-chair, you will put on a friendly face as you connect with the congregation and look for those who also want to get involved in the church and start them out as snack hosts. If you enjoy smiling, don't mind talking to church members, and have unusually idle Sundays that you would love to fill up with meaningful excitement, then send me an email and I will gladly answer any questions: jalexingaliucc@gmail.com

Alex Ingal,
Hospitality Chair



In a Heartbeat

by Vivian Elaine Johnson



There it was, the heart labyrinth on the church floor in the nave where we normally worshipped. I started to walk the path from the outside to the inside. My attention first went to the places where the cord that shaped the labyrinth was messed up, off its rightful place, probably by a former walker. Since I'm a person who lets change distract me, I had to

convince my brain to ignore such an unimportant distraction and focus on my labyrinth journey.

I walked along the path until I reached the center of the labyrinth and focused on its shape - a heart. It felt appropriate and caused me to touch my neck to feel my heartbeat. The thumping of my heart against my fingertips carried me back to the throbbing of love that I felt within these walls each Sunday. Its steady beat reminded me of the people in my life who gave steady love and support. My mind was pulled to the day when I gently touched my husband's neck, felt diminished beats, and then his final heartbeat. Mystically, while on the labyrinth, the beat of my heart connected me to him and to others, those to whom I'd said a final farewell, and those who still graced me with their presence.

After walking the path of the labyrinth, I took a chair and sat in the middle of it, in the core of the heart. I ruminated on the meaning of the walk. Why was I drawn to do

it? Did I think I would hear the voice of God? Did I think I would become a better person because of the experience? I decided that I did the labyrinth walk because I wanted to be in a setting where I'd relax and be freed of distractions. I wanted to first look within, and to follow that by focusing beyond myself.

As I sat, my body complied and happily let go of tight places. My mind freed itself of duties and fears. I sense that I was in the twilight zone of just "being" rather than "doing." I liked the tranquility and the fact that I was incognizant of time. Theologian and mystic Howard Thurman said it well when he wrote, "*How good it is to*

center down! To sit quietly and see one's self pass by! The streets of our minds seethe with endless traffic; our spirits resound with clashing, with noisy silences, while something deep within hungers and thirsts for the still moment and the resting lull."



Some may question the need or desirability of quiet time since we've had a year of isolation. However, I would argue that the calmness of the labyrinth is different, especially if we allow our hearts to peel open, and our lungs to take long, deep breaths.

That hour spent in the heart gave me what Thurman described as still moments and a resting lull. The endless traffic in the streets of my mind slowed to a standstill. I was carried into the inner chambers of my pulsating heart and felt bathed in peace by a vital unifying force - perhaps the voice of God.

LESSONS IN LEADING: WATCH, LISTEN, LEARN

by Dr. Lorraine Fox



We've been taking advantage of our national change in leadership to examine the qualities of leadership that also make for powerful parenting. Last month we examined the difference between power (influence) and control (force), and authority (the right to do things) and power (the ability to do things).

This morning our new President held his first formal news conference, laid out his agenda and used questions and answers to clarify how he would attempt to accomplish his agenda. Parents can learn something right there. All parents have an "agenda" for their children. You will regularly be tested for your *ability* to get your kids to go along with it. As with the President, the agenda is always comprised of many goals. What I will invite you to learn from this morning is the skill of influencing cooperation by inviting and responding to questions. You might recall that our former President quickly abandoned the practice of taking questions, which compromised his ability to lead. We know that because he is no longer the nation's leader.

When having your sessions to lay out your agenda for your children - how you want them to behave; what you would like them to accomplish in school; what hobbies you are presenting for them to choose from - I strongly urge that you frequently sit down with them and "take questions from the audience." It may *seem* more powerful to just tell them what you want and expect from them, but in fact leading cooperatively, with massive amounts of give and take, always makes for a happier environment between those with and without authority.

Households have "morale" issues and problems very similar to schools and workplaces. One of the best ways to keep the morale high is to promote the experience of working *together* to accomplish goals. Polls tell us that even though the new President hasn't yet been in office for 100 days, his poll numbers are very high. They are high even though he hasn't yet accomplished much of his agenda. I suggest they are high because people appreciate his leadership "style." I can assure you that listening to

children and teens talk about their parents demonstrates the same results. *How* you parent is more important than whether you do things "right" or according to the book. Give and take, being open and honest about struggles and issues within the family, and being open to feedback, will get you a lot of gold parenting stars. Including your children in your parenting goals and dilemmas will never limit your authority!

You know from the workplace – ALL workplaces – that carrying on about supervisors and managers is a favorite pastime. This is also true when children are away from their parents. It's one of the prices of "leadership." Everything you say, everything you do, is closely scrutinized and evaluated. I suggest you relax into it. As you watch the various new leadership positions get filled in our government, you will be reassured about your ability to parent well. You don't have to be good looking to be a successful leader. You don't have to be particularly charismatic to be a successful leader. You don't have to be a good speaker. You can be on the loud side, or you can be soft-spoken. You don't have to be that bright.

What you have to be is convincing! I invite you to pay close attention over the next little while as you watch a large batch of new people practice or demonstrate their leadership skills and try to convince people to follow them. Silently watch their "moves" and ask yourself "Do I do that with my kids?"

Since you are reading this in a church newsletter, you can also pay close attention to the tactics leaders use to convince others to follow their values and beliefs. An effective leader can always be effective – even if you don't get your way. While you are trying to convince your children to behave certain ways and believe certain values, you may not be able to teach them to believe exactly what you believe, but you can teach them the importance of having personal ethics and convictions. You can teach the importance of standing up for what you believe, and you can teach how to share what you believe without being a bully or a brow beater. It's going to be on anyway, so make the news more interesting: watch – listen – learn, and bring it home.

Theodicy and the Leap of Faith

Reverend Dr. Jerry von Talge



Why do young children suffer and die, or become orphans? If God is all-powerful, why does s/he allow evil to exist? If God is all-loving, why does s/he allow evil to exist? Theodicy (the presence of evil in the world) is the greatest conundrum in Christian theology. A conundrum is a confusing and/or difficult problem or question. The most difficult problem in the Christian faith is reconciling the

presence of evil in a world where a loving God is in control.

Classic and Contemporary Responses to the Problem of Evil

There have been many attempts to justify the presence of evil in our world. None of the following responses is very satisfying:

1. **Free Will:** God gave humankind the ability to choose good or evil. Evil is the unfortunate result of human free will (Eve in the Garden of Eden).
2. **Soul Making:** We are incomplete souls in need of improvement and growth. This concept also assumes free will. Evil is a necessary condition for a world in which we overcome obstacles and struggles in order to grow and develop.
3. **The Great Design Argument:** God designed the world in such a way that it includes evil, but that if rightly perceived, we would understand that all of it works together for a greater good.
4. **Eschatological (end times) Hope:** God will bring everything to an end, and evil will be rightly answered by its destruction. God will judge, compensate and/or at least put into perspective this present world's evil.
5. **The Suffering of God Response:** This response assures us that God has not abstracted himself from the human situation, including evil. He suffers with us. For example, God weeps for Israel.
6. **A Theology of the Cross:** Contained in the view of the suffering of God in # 5 is a suggestion that in some fundamental way, the work of the cross is God's answer (or one of his answers) to the problem of evil. S/he participates in the impact of evil.

7. **Faith and Trust:** This response simply affirms that God is ultimately good and has everything under the divine control. God is to be trusted despite life's trials and difficulties.

The answer to theodicy is that there is no viable answer. For guidance we can look to Søren Kierkegaard's writing, which has been called a "leap of faith," an expression that he never used. His writings do involve a leap of faith, with passion winning out over intellectual assent to doctrines and creeds.

In the milieu in which Kierkegaard's lived (1813-1855), religion had become perfunctory and mundane. Religious faith had been reduced to intellectual assent to passionless old doctrines. Dr. Mark Tietjen, a Kierkegaard scholar, has stated, "*Kierkegaard does the very helpful work of challenging not simply our minds to contemplate the divine or some doctrine about the divine, but rather challenges our whole being to be faithful to Christian existence.*" Further, "*So yes, Kierkegaard affirms a leap, not because the would-be believer doesn't have sufficient evidence to leap, but simply because faith cannot be reduced to an intellectual test one passes via assent. No, faith is rooted in passion, in one's cares and concerns. In entrusting one's life to God, faith's movement forward requires a decision each individual must make for him or herself.*"

From our human perspective, we simply cannot wrap our minds around the mystery of the presence of evil in the world, neither intellectually nor viscerally. The answer to theodicy is both simple and yet profound. The answer to theodicy is a leap of faith.



Understanding the Concept and Meaning of Mysticism

by Dr. Eduardo Jesús Arismendi-Pardi

Adult Education Ministries, and Diversity and Inclusion Task Force



The purpose of this article is to understand mysticism within the Christian experience. One can argue that spirituality needs theology just as much as theology needs spirituality. Spirituality is a journey without a destination, whereas religion is a destination without a journey. Mysticism, from a Christian perspective, links

a person to experience union with God. In its simplest form, mysticism can be understood as an active and practical experience, rather than one that is passive and theoretical, and which is linked to one's transcendental and spiritual experiences. To be mystical is to be guided by the heart where the ultimate object is love—not exploration. Mysticism is developed by living in union with God. Such union is grounded, in my opinion, by psychological and spiritual processes that entail a complete remake of one's character. Mysticism is entirely spiritual and transcendental, having neither interest nor control over worldly events. The business of mysticism is love.

I believe that anyone, even ordinary people, can be mystics. This assertion is grounded on the argument that mysticism rests on one's sensing of the presence of God which can be thought of as a one-to-one relationship with God. This assertion, however, is further expanded in terms of not narrowing the concept of mysticism to only and exclusively personal experiences, but also to be inclusive of other significant variables. Some of these other significant variables that go beyond personal experience include the point made by the noteworthy Austrian Catholic theologian Friedrich Von Hügel, who asserts that mysticism in its relation to a healthy religious experience must be institutional (Apostle Peter), intellectual (Apostle Paul), and mystical (Apostle John). Furthermore, Von Hügel also indicates that a healthy and robust religion must be triangulated and rest upon institutionalism, intellectualism, and mysticism.

Mysticism can also be viewed as a shift or change from a belief system to an actual inner experience that leads one to contemplation. In terms of contemplation, and in light of the assertion that anyone can be a mystic, perhaps it is significant to contemplate the impact of the work Bill Wilson, founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, has had on the lives of countless alcoholics who have found a spiritual

solution to alleviate the disease of alcoholism. The work of Bill Wilson was so compelling that it led to a multiplicity of Twelve Step Programs to address all sorts of addictions. Some thoughts about the work of Bill Wilson are likely to lead one to ask whether or not Bill Wilson was a mystic? Perhaps within the contextual meaning of mysticism provided so far, one could think of mystics as people who may not at first be thought of as mystics, but who may actually be mystics in their own right. Therefore, it is entirely possible to think of Bill Wilson as a modern mystic. He may be considered equally to another modern mystic, the Rev. Dr. Frank C. Laubach, author of *Letters by a Modern Mystic* who wrote about his mystical experience in experiencing the presence of God while he was a missionary in the Philippines. Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection is another example of a mystic, whose book entitled *The Practice of the Presence of God*, written three hundred years ago, details his efforts and dedication to live in the continual presence of God.

A perusal of the work of Bill Wilson reveals a mystical sense in many of his writings, for instance, the statement that "the sole authority in A. A. is a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscious" (The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 1989, p. 132). This statement is in itself mystical because such statement goes beyond tangible and traceable evidence. When one thinks of mystics, images of heretics or persons with special spiritual truths beyond tangible non-traceable evidence come to mind. Some examples of mystics that come to mind for me include Saint Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and the Apostle John. Although mysticism is usually associated with the Roman Catholic tradition, it is also actually true that there are mystics in the Protestant tradition as well. One example that comes to mind is that of the Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman.

Finally, a reading of the writings of the first four chapters of the Gospel of John gives one a sense of mysticism in that there are references that defy logical explanations and are grounded on experience as well as scripture. A brief exploration of the Gnostic gospels, particularly the Gospel of Mary of Magdala, provides some evidence suggesting that perhaps Mary of Magdala was indeed a mystic in her own right as evidenced by the esoteric mystical conversation about the nature of sin when she was in a dialog with Jesus.